

New York Times (March 21, 2018)

America's Role in Yemen's Agony Can End on Capitol Hill

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD



A child walking on Sunday in the rubble of a building hit in an airstrike in Taiz, Yemen.

Saudi Arabia's powerful heir apparent, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is visiting Washington and other American cities this week promoting his image as an enlightened reformer out to modernize his conservative country and encourage foreign investment.

That image is stained by his chief foreign policy initiative, the humanitarian catastrophe that is the war in Yemen, in which at least 10,000 civilians have been killed, many as a result of indiscriminate airstrikes by the Saudis and their Persian Gulf partners. The United States has been Saudi Arabia's main enabler, supplying weapons and other military aid.

There was no immediate sign that President Trump used his meeting with the crown prince at the White House on Tuesday to try to persuade him to halt the war.

Some members of Congress, understanding their constitutional responsibilities over how and when the United States wages war, proposed **a bipartisan resolution to end American military involvement in Yemen within 30 days unless Congress formally authorizes it. Tragically, it was effectively defeated Tuesday when the Senate voted 55 to 44 to table the**

measure. Other legislative efforts yet to be considered would block military aid to Saudi Arabia, including millions of dollars in arms sales.

These are sensible ways to help end the attacks, as the need for a political solution in Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Arab world, grows more urgent by the day.

It has been wracked by civil war since 2014, when Houthi rebels allied with Iran, and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, took control of the capital, Sana, and much of the rest of the country.

In all, at least eight million people are on the brink of famine, one million are suspected of being infected with cholera and two million have been displaced from their homes. Legal and human rights experts say the killing of civilians and humanitarian aid deprivations could well be war crimes.

In 2015, the Saudi-led coalition, with President Barack Obama's backing, launched a military campaign, including thousands of airstrikes, against the Houthi-Saleh forces in support of President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The war is now stalemated.

While the Houthis have fired artillery indiscriminately into cities, launched rockets into Saudi Arabia and impeded the delivery of humanitarian aid, the Saudi-led coalition, a vastly more powerful force, is the main driver of the misery with its air bombardments against civilian areas, and a land, air and sea blockade that is keeping large quantities of food, fuel and medicine from reaching millions of people.

The Pentagon has argued its military aid is noncombat assistance, like advising the Saudi Air Force on how to drop bombs so they kill fewer civilians. But while the Saudis pledged in 2017 to reduce civilian deaths, Human Rights Watch said six attacks since then killed 55 civilians.

Meanwhile, Gen. Joseph Votel, head of Central Command, told Congress, "We're not parties to this conflict." That isn't credible. The Saudi-led coalition would have a hard time continuing the onslaught without American assistance, which has included air-to-air refueling, arms, intelligence assessments and other military advice.

Apart from the humanitarian disaster, members of Congress who have supported the resolution are concerned about the legal basis for American involvement. The United States initially deployed forces to combat Al Qaeda in Yemen under post-Sept. 11 congressional authorization measures. **But Congress never specifically approved military involvement in the Saudi-Houthi war even though the Constitution and the 1973 War Powers Act give lawmakers a role.**

Three senators, Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent; Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat; and Mike Lee, a Utah Republican, introduced the resolution to end America's involvement in Yemen and curtail what they **view as unchecked presidential war-making powers.** The administration and some lawmakers worked feverishly against the measure in

part because its 30-day deadline would force them to end a military operation they want to continue, and they fear it will ruin relations with Saudi Arabia, whose crown prince Mr. Trump is synchophantishly courting.

For too long, Congress has abdicated its role as America prolonged its stay in some wars and expanded into others, like Yemen. And presidents have been too reluctant to share these crucial decisions with lawmakers.

Resolutions like this can and must still be pursued to force serious debate and accountability.