

PM: The Saudi Arabia Coalition at War in Yemen: Who Are the Terrorists?

By Polly Mann

If Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky have their way, the United States will no longer export arms to Saudi Arabia unless it is provided evidence that the Saudis and their war partners are “taking all feasible precautions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure” and are only targeting foreign terrorist organizations.

According to UNICEF, 21.2 million Yemeni—82 percent of the population—now require some form of humanitarian assistance to survive since the war began in March 2015: “An estimated 1.2 million people are internally displaced; 14.1 million people need access to basic health care and 19.3 million lack safe, clean water.”

Over a dozen U.S. lawmakers wrote to President Barack Obama expressing “dismay” over the Saudi-led war in Yemen, backed not just by U.S. arms but also U.S. military advisors. They urged him to ensure that Saudi attacks “correspond to the standards that would apply to any U.S. military operation for limiting civilian casualties.” Less than two weeks later, the Saudi-led coalition repeatedly struck a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Yemen.

Senators Murphy and Paul can be thanked for taking a stand on this issue. But if the U.S. stopped working with ruthless partnerships in geopolitical and resource wars, and stopped selling arms to Saudi Arabia, would there be so many foreign terrorist organizations in the first place? Who are the foreign terrorist groups anyway? There is an official foreign terrorist organization list that only the U.S. Secretary of State can place groups on. Which countries’ militaries are not on it?

The United Nations has its own designation of blacklisted groups. According to Reuters, the Houthis, Yemen government forces, and pro-government militia have been on the U.N. blacklist for at least five years, along with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

But on May 31, 2016, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon added the Saudi Arabia-led coalition fighting in Yemen to its blacklist of states and armed groups for killing and maiming children, violating children's rights during conflict: “The coalition was responsible for 60 percent of child deaths and injuries last year, killing 510 and wounding 667, according to Ban's report released on Thursday, which also said the coalition carried out half the attacks on schools and hospitals.”

However, Ban Ki-moon removed Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners from the list soon thereafter. National Public Radio reported that he made it clear U.N. funding was at stake:

He made clear that U.N. funding was at stake. "I also had to consider the very real prospect that millions of other children would suffer grievously if, as was suggested to me, countries would de-fund many U.N. programs," he said. He didn't name the countries that threatened to cut off funding to the U.N., but it was clear he came under pressure from Saudi Arabia and other coalition members.

We know Saudi Arabia's role but we need to ask who else pressured Ban Ki-moon. Our friends may have gotten themselves off the UN blacklist, but it sounds like was achieved through blackmailing the UN Secretary, adding something sinister to the crimes already perpetrated.

UPDATE: On June 16, A ban to transfer cluster bombs from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia was defeated by 12 votes (204 to 216) in the House of Representatives. However, according to The Intercept, human rights activists celebrate the closeness of the vote as more and more members of Congress are getting tired of selling Saudi Arabia bombs when it is dropping them on civilians in Yemen.

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