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# US may be complicit in war crimes in Yemen

*Providing weapons and logistical and intelligence support to Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies taints Washington's hands*

November 2, 2015 2:00AM ET

by [Lauren Carasik](#) @LCarasik

The conflict in Yemen has been overshadowed by the crisis in Syria, though the former accounted for [more deaths by explosions](#) than any other conflict during the first seven months of this year.

Eight months after Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies began an aerial campaign against the Houthi rebels, the civilian death toll continues to mount. More than 5,600 people, including 2,615 civilians and 500 children, have been killed since March. The vast majority of civilian deaths [are attributable](#) to coalition airstrikes.

Human rights groups have [warned about war crimes](#) and the continued humanitarian calamity in Yemen. “[Yemen in five months is like Syria after five years](#),” Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said in August. “The humanitarian situation is nothing short of catastrophic. Every family in Yemen has been affected by this conflict.”

Complicit in the growing humanitarian disaster is the United States and its unchecked arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf allies. The Barack Obama administration [agreed to transfer more than \\$64 billion](#) in weapons and services to members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) during its first five years. On Oct. 20, the U.S. government approved an [\\$11.25 billion deal](#) to sell warships to Saudi Arabia, ignoring calls from human rights activists to refrain from selling certain military equipment in light of the civilian toll it is inflicting. In continuing to provide weapons, intelligence and logistical support to Riyadh, including

precision rockets and internationally banned [cluster munitions](#), the U.S. is contributing to Yemen's suffering.

## **Damning evidence**

Take the Sept. 28 coalition airstrike that hit a [wedding party](#), killing dozens and wounding many more. Among the dead were women and children. The White House [expressed concern](#) about the incident, but its words ring hollow, given that the U.S. supplied the planes used in the attack.

In a report on Oct. 6, London-based advocacy group Amnesty International [investigated 13 coalition airstrikes](#) from May to July that killed an estimated 100 people, including 59 children. The group found that some of the strikes hit civilian objects such as "homes, public buildings, schools, markets, shops, factories, bridges, roads and other civilian infrastructure," as well as civilians fleeing in vehicles and those delivering humanitarian assistance.

Amnesty said the strikes violate international law and found "damning evidence of war crimes," which warrant an international investigation and the suspension of certain arms transfers. A United Nations panel has accused all sides of human rights abuses, but singled out coalition forces for committing "[grave violations](#)." But international condemnation has done little to ease the devastation wrought by the strikes.

The simmering conflict escalated after Houthi rebels ousted Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi in January. Saudi Arabia, who views the Shiite Houthis as Iran's proxies, led aggressive aerial bombardments to push back the rebels.

On Oct. 26, the U.N. announced a [new round of discussions](#) between Yemen's warring parties. Despite its verbal commitments to a negotiated settlement, Riyadh has been pursuing an outright military victory at any cost in part to limit Iran's influence in the region, but that resolve may [finally be crumbling](#) in the wake of the escalating humanitarian crisis.

## **Washington should support growing calls for an international investigation and accountability for violations of international law in Yemen, including its own role.**

The Saudi-led intervention continues to compound untold human misery in an already impoverished country. The Saudi naval blockade of ports in [Aden and al-Hudaydah](#), ostensibly meant to block weapons imports, is hampering the delivery of food and fuel, 90 percent of which come from abroad. More than two million Yemenis have been displaced, [80 percent](#) are in need of humanitarian assistance, and nearly 13 million Yemenis are without adequate food.

On Oct. 27, [coalition airstrikes destroyed](#) a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) medical clinic, one of the few still functioning in the northern Yemeni province of Saada. Inflicting widespread civilian hardship amounts to collective punishment, fueling the devastation that the MSF says has claimed as many lives as the bombings.

Despite the carnage, Washington has been reluctant to criticize Saudi Arabia, or make any move that would alienate its key regional ally, who is already jittery over the Iran nuclear deal and its potential to alter the balance of power in the Middle East. Washington has long been muted about Riyadh's dismal human rights record.

### **Enabled by the US**

Its callousness about its role in Yemen is not new either. "Providing direct support to military operations, such as information on targets, would make the US and the UK parties to the armed conflict," Human Rights Watch, said in a [July report](#). [Two days later](#), Washington approved two separate sales to Saudi Arabia amounting to [\\$500 million](#) and [\\$5.4 billion](#). The U.S. has sold [weapons and military equipment worth more than \\$90 billion to Saudi Arabia](#) from 2010 to 2014.

To make matters worse, the U.S. supports Riyadh's efforts to block transparency and accountability for the conflict in Yemen. On Sept. 30, the U.S.

reportedly [helped defeat](#) a Dutch proposal for an independent U.N. inquiry through its belated and tepid support. Instead, the U.N. [capitulated](#) to demands from the Saudi-led Arab group for a domestic process, though Yemen and coalition forces have shown little willingness to investigate and prosecute abuses.

Fortunately, U.S. domestic political support for the coalition strikes in Yemen is starting to crack, however slightly. There are reports of [divisions](#) within the Obama administration, and rising unease in Congress. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., has [raised concerns](#) that U.S. support for Saudi airstrikes may violate the law he authored, which bars military assistance to foreign forces that commit human rights violations. And on Oct. 14, 13 members of congress [sent a letter](#) to President Obama expressing dismay over the civilian toll of the airstrikes.

Washington should heed these concerns; stop sending weapons that are causing incalculable civilian suffering; and support [growing calls](#) for an international investigation and accountability for violations of international law in Yemen, including its own role.

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*The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera America's editorial policy.*