

The House Resolution on Yemen is a Stinker

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Congress was given a chance to stand up for basic humanity and the Constitution, but instead chose to lay an egg, a rotten one at that. It rejected a chance to use the War Powers Act to halt U.S. collaboration with Saudi Arabia's ruthless war and siege tactics in Yemen. Instead it passed a resolution that could have been written by the Saudi kingdom's lawyers and publicists.

The effort started well. Reps. Ro Khanna, Thomas Massie, Mark Pocan, and Walter Jones introduced a privileged bipartisan bill invoking the War Powers Resolution to force a floor vote on ending U.S. participation in Saudi Arabia's two year old war. Eventually H.Con.Res. 81 had 45 cosponsors and support from a large number of organizations. They had been building on a number of efforts in Congress to stop US involvement, including one this June that narrowly failed to stop the sale of \$500 million in precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia.

Their key legal point was that Congress had never authorized participation in what plainly is a war. They tried to invoke the Constitution, through enforcement of the War Powers Act, legislation passed in the 1970's to hold back the tendency towards an imperial presidency and disasters like the Vietnam War.

The action in Congress came on the heels of a U.N. warning. The Saudis had just shut down all land, sea, and air entry to Yemen, supposedly to keep out Iranian weapons. For a country devastated by civil war and Saudi bombing and totally dependent on donations of food, medicine and chemicals to treat water, it was a death knell. The U.N.'s highest official on humanitarian aid, Mark Lawcock, told reporters outside the Security Council, "There will be a famine in Yemen. It will not be like the one in 2011 in Somalia that cost 250,000 people their lives. It will be the largest famine the world has seen in many decades, with millions of victims." Millions!

Yet the Khanna bill ran into opposition, not just from a Republican leadership eager to support a president who firmly thinks (or tweets) that the Saudi princes "know exactly what they're doing," but also from the Democratic Whip, Steny Hoyer, who urged fellow Democrats to refuse to sign onto the bill. In the end the "privileged" status was stripped from the bill and it was sent to oblivion in committee and another bill put in its place and guaranteed one hour of debate.

It was House Resolution 599, which did nothing to stop our warfare on Yemen. It had nothing in it about U.S. weapons being sold to the Saudis or U.S. mid-air refueling of Saudi bombers. Instead it provided a tendentious history of the bloodshed and our involvement, wrapped in a fig leaf of pious clauses urging the warring parties to obey humanitarian law.

When you inspect the resolution's "whereas" sections you see the entire situation framed with the Saudi kingdom's legal and factual assertions. It claims that "In 2014 after years of violence and insurgency, Iranian-supported Houthi rebels seized the Yemeni capital." The Iranian bugaboo is in there right at the start and all through the resolution. In fact this analysis is topsy-turvy. Whatever

Iranian military aid the Houthis received came *after* the Saudis started bombing in 2015. Elizabeth Kendall writing in October of this year says the Houthis were “only marginally connected to Iran” and in fact that Iran had advised the Houthis not to conquer Yemen’s capital city. Her paper is under the auspices of The Atlantic Council project “Pushback: Countering and Exposing Iran” whose purposes can hardly be seen as friendly to the Tehran regime.

U.S. House Resolution 599 further claims that the Hadi government is the “legitimate” and “internationally recognized” government (even though Hadi was the Vice President of Yemen’s last dictator for 17 years and was picked by the Gulf kingdoms to pacify and thwart Yemen’s democratic revolution). The resolution justifies Saudi intervention with this clause, “Whereas the Saudi-led Arab Coalition launched a military intervention in 2015 against the Houthi-Saleh alliance in response to the deposition of the legitimate Government of Yemen.” Nowhere does it mention that by law the United Nations Security Council must authorize military action by foreign or international forces, something that has never happened.

Then there’s this section: “Whereas the Saudi-led Arab Coalition has worked to improve their targeting processes and capabilities aimed at reducing unintended civilian casualties....” This is grotesque. The Saudis have bombed schools, markets, civilian airports, hospitals, and wedding parties. In October 2016 their air force bombed a funeral home during a funeral. Hundreds of mourners were decimated.

HR 599 mentions that Yemen is suffering 500,000 cases of cholera (the number is more like 900,000), but it emptily blames it on “the war.” There is no mention in the resolution that Saudi bombing has destroyed the clean water infrastructure.

The final sections of the resolution are the “Resolved” clauses. These clauses make not one demand on Saudi Arabia, call for no suspension in international arms sales to the kingdom, and put no pressure on the Trump Administration. Instead the resolution *salutes* the Saudi kingdom as it declares that the U.S. House of Representatives “supports the Saudi-led Arab Coalition’s 14 commitments to abide by their no-strike list and restricted target list and improve their targeting capabilities.” The only country criticized by name in the resolution is Iran. The resolution “condemns Iranian activities in Yemen in violation of UNSCR 2216” and blesses “the interdiction of Iranian weapons to the Houthis.”

To be sure the resolution has a few pious sentences about humanitarian concerns. It denounces activities “inconsistent with the laws of armed conflict, including the deliberate targeting of civilian populations.” Yet it does NOT call for an end to the closing of all access to Yemen by land, sea, and air, just for access to Yemen by humanitarian groups and reporters.

The resolution passed 366-30. Members of Congress can now go on to their Thanksgiving feasts with good consciences. They have used an hour of their valuable time for a #YemenDebate. No need to do more about the coming Yemen famine.

Yet a day later Connecticut’s Senator Chris Murphy persisted in talking about Yemen, persisted in denouncing the Saudi-U.S. war there. He started his remarks by doing the unthinkable. He described what cholera actually is, what it’s like to suffer through it. His language was medical as he talked about uncontrolled diarrhea and vomiting. He did it in less than a minute. If he had graphically related the symptoms of what hundreds of thousands of Yemenis were feeling and what measures brave medical personnel have to take, he would have left the Senate gagging in disgust. Come to think of it, that is what we all should be feeling after observing years of U.S. government support for the Saudi kingdom’s wretched attack on Yemen.

Efforts to fight the Saudi-U.S. aggression against Yemen must continue. Check out the Coalition to End the U.S.-Saudi Alliance: www.SaudiUS.org

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