

## Oppose New U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.

Action Corps · Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain  
Center for International Policy · CIVICUS · The Clearinghouse on Women's Issues · CODEPINK  
Demand Progress · Feminist Majority Foundation · The Feminist Foreign Policy Project  
Freedom Forward · The Freedom Initiative · Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program  
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) · Just Foreign Policy  
Libyan American Alliance Peace Action · RootsAction.org · United for Peace and Justice ·  
World BEYOND War · Yemeni Alliance Committee  
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation

---

June 18, 2020

Dear Senators and Representatives,

We urge you to oppose all new arms sales to the brutal monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), as well as co-production licenses for weapons manufacturing within Saudi Arabia or the U.A.E. Both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. pose significant threats to U.S. interests, and the U.S. should take immediate steps to downgrade its relationship with both monarchies.

We are deeply disturbed by recent reports that the Trump administration is moving forward with a \$478 million arms sale to Saudi Arabia's monarchy, which would provide 7,500 precision-guided missiles to a government that has already bombed thousands of civilians in Yemen, often with U.S. weapons. The sale would reportedly also approve a new co-production license to permit Raytheon to expand its manufacturing of sophisticated missile technology in Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> We are also troubled by the Trump Administration's prior announcement of a \$556 million arms sale of 4,569 MRAP vehicles to the U.A.E., a government that has also brought misery to both Yemen and Libya.<sup>2</sup>

**We call on Congress to block all new arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. and enact a full moratorium on all U.S. arms sales to both countries.** The monarchies that rule Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are dangerous governments that should be barred from receiving U.S. weapons or military support. Both governments are seeking to keep the U.S. militarily enmeshed in the region, including by pushing for a U.S.-Iran war that the American people reject.

---

<sup>1</sup> "[Trump Officials Consider Defying Congress to Sell More Weapons to Saudi Arabia](#)," The New York Times, May 28, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "[United Arab Emirates \(UAE\) – Mine Resistant Ambush Protected \(MRAP\)](#)," Defense Security Cooperation Agency News Release, May 7, 2020.

**Both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. pose a significant threat to U.S. interests, regional democracy, and global security:**

- **Using U.S. Weapons to Drive War and Coronavirus:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have used U.S. weapons in their devastating wars in Yemen and Libya, wars that have contributed to the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic across the Middle East and North Africa by decimating local healthcare systems and diverting scarce health care resources.
- **Supporting Terrorist Networks, Including with U.S. Weapons:** Saudi Arabian and U.A.E. officials have supported Al Qaeda-affiliated individuals, networks, and militias in Yemen and in the U.S. Both governments have permitted weapons purchased from the U.S. to be given, sold to, or captured by local militias, as well as extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. And Saudi Arabia has promoted ideologies associated with terrorist activity, leading to Saudi textbooks even being adopted by ISIS.
- **Jailing and Killing Human Rights and Democracy Advocates:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have both jailed reformers and advocates for democracy within their borders. Saudi Arabia has also assassinated and executed nonviolent reformers and dissidents, of whom Jamal Khashoggi is only the most famous example.
- **Exporting Dictatorship:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. both intervene across the Middle East and North Africa to stop democracy and promote dictatorship, including in Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan, and Libya.
- **Violating Women's Rights:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. both violate women's rights through systems of discrimination and repression, as well as through imprisonment and torture of women activists.
- **Modern-Day Slavery:** Both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. maintain the kafala system, an abusive labor system that robs foreign workers of their human rights. Under kafala, workers are often trapped, unable to leave abusive employers without their permission, in circumstances that can amount to forced labor.
- **Global Kidnapping, Espionage, and Murder:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have both worked globally to silence critics and forcibly stop those attempting to escape state repression, including through espionage, armed kidnappings, and assassination.
- **Driving the Climate Crisis:** Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. are major contributors to the global climate crisis through their massive fossil fuel export economies, which are responsible for a significant share of the world's fossil fuel emissions. In addition, Saudi Arabia has repeatedly undermined global climate negotiations.

## Details:

### **Using U.S. Weapons to Drive War and Coronavirus:**

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have used U.S. weapons in their devastating wars in Yemen and Libya, wars that have expanded the Coronavirus pandemic across the Middle East and North Africa. Saudi Arabia has also increased the risk of the pandemic through its internal suppression of independent sources of information.

In Yemen, the U.S.-armed, Saudi-led, and U.A.E.-backed war with Houthi rebels has decimated the impoverished country's healthcare system. Through its blockade of Yemen, Saudi Arabia has impeded access to goods needed to respond to the pandemic. The lethal spread of the Coronavirus is now underway across a Yemeni population that has already suffered extraordinary death and destruction. Prior to the pandemic, reports already indicated that 85,000 children had died of starvation, and two million children under five and 1.1 million pregnant women and new mothers are now acutely malnourished.<sup>3</sup>

In Libya, the U.A.E. has backed warlord Khalifa Haftar in his violent campaign against the Libyan Government of National Accord, based in the capital Tripoli, in violation of a UN arms embargo. The U.A.E. sent U.S. planes to Libya's civil war, and although the U.A.E. denied having done so, satellite images confirmed the planes, further undermining the U.A.E.'s credibility as a trustworthy recipient of U.S.-made military hardware.<sup>4</sup> Haftar launched attacks and indiscriminately bombed civilians, including strikes on or near health care facilities.<sup>5</sup> This resulted in the diversion and disruption of scarce medical resources away from addressing the pandemic.

Meanwhile, inside Saudi Arabia, Saudi authorities have effectively criminalized whistleblowers and blocked transparency of data regarding the Coronavirus outbreak. The Saudi monarchy is now prosecuting those who share "COVID-19 rumors and news from unknown sources." The penalty for sharing information that is not government approved is up to five years in prison and \$800,000 USD in fines.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> "[4 ways the war in Yemen has impacted women and girls](#)," International Rescue Committee, March 25, 2019, last updated December 20, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "[U.S.-Made Airplanes Deployed in Libya's Civil War, in Defiance of U.N.](#)," Time, May 9, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> "[Despite Covid-19, Libya War Rages, with Civilians at Risk](#)," Human Rights Watch, June 7, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> "[Saudi public prosecution bureau arrests and prosecutes coronavirus rumor monger](#)," Arab News, March 18, 2020.

## **Supporting Terrorist Networks, Including with U.S. Weapons:**

Both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have embraced, funded, and employed Al Qaeda terrorists abroad while imprisoning nonviolent critics and reformers at home. Both governments have permitted weapons purchased from the U.S. to be given to, sold to, or captured by local militias, as well as extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia has also promoted ideologies embraced by terrorist groups, including the adoption of Saudi textbooks by ISIS.<sup>7</sup>

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have repeatedly failed to secure weapons they have purchased from the U.S. In Yemen, U.S.-made weapons and military equipment have been given or sold to local militias, some of which have ties to terrorist groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia have paid, protected, and even recruited Al Qaeda fighters in Yemen.<sup>9</sup>

The Saudi and Emirati governments have flouted U.S. end-use monitoring agreements that prevent the transfer of weapons to third parties without U.S. approval. Their disregard undermines the safety of both civilians and U.S. service members. The U.S. Departments of Defense and State are also to blame for the lack of sufficient monitoring.

Saudi officials have also been linked to terrorist networks in other ways that have been devastating for the U.S. Saudi air force cadet Second Lt. Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani murdered U.S. Navy Ensign Joshua Watson, Airman Mohammed Haitham, and Airman Cameron Walters, and wounded eight others in a terrorist attack at Naval Air Station Pensacola on December 6, 2019.<sup>10</sup> The Saudi cadet had been vetted by the Saudi military for training in the U.S., and as the FBI would later determine, Alshamrani had regular contact with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>11</sup> And just one week earlier, the FBI had revealed the name of a Saudi foreign ministry official, Mussaed Ahmed al-Jarrah, who is suspected of directing support for the September 11 terrorists in the U.S. and is believed to have continued in Saudi diplomatic roles in Malaysia and Morocco as recently as last year.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> "[Saudis and Extremism: 'Both the Arsonists and the Firefighters'](#)", The New York Times, August 26, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> "[Sold to an Ally, Lost to an Enemy](#)" CNN Exclusive Report, February 2019.

<sup>9</sup> "[AP Investigation: US allies, al-Qaida battle rebels in Yemen](#)," Associated Press, , August 6, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> "[Naval Air Station Pensacola Investigation Update](#)," U.S. Department of Defense, May 18, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> "[F.B.I. Finds Links Between Pensacola Gunman and Al Qaeda](#)," The New York Times, May 18, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> "[In court filing, FBI accidentally reveals name of Saudi official suspected of directing support for 9/11 hijackers](#)," Yahoo News, May 12, 2020.

## **Jailing and Killing Human Rights and Democracy Advocates:**

The Saudi and the U.A.E. monarchies have imprisoned and even killed many nonviolent advocates for human rights, political reform and democracy.

The U.A.E. monarchy has jailed or imprisoned dozens of prisoners of conscience, people who have engaged in the peaceful and nonviolent expression of their views. Imprisoned voices of reform include human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor, academic Nasser bin Ghaith, and human rights lawyer Mohammed al-Roken.

Under Saudi Arabia's de-facto ruler, Mohamad bin Salman, the monarchy has expanded upon its already repressive record and imprisoned many peaceful advocates for human rights and political reform. Prominent human rights advocate and reformer Dr. Abdullah al-Hamid died in April of this year following a stroke and medical neglect in a Saudi prison.<sup>13</sup> Salman Alodah, a Islamic scholar who used to work for the Saudi monarchy, is now facing the death penalty for calling on Saudi Arabia to end its diplomatic standoff with Qatar.<sup>14</sup> 36-year-old aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, the son of an American mother, was disappeared by the Saudi monarchy two years ago and may have endured brutal torture behind bars. In a horrifying 2016 case, the Saudi monarchy executed government critic Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr for a list of vague charges that included "disobeying the ruler."<sup>15</sup> And of course, there is the globally known case of Saudi dissident and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi, who the Saudi monarchy assassinated in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in October of 2018.

## **Exporting Dictatorship:**

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have exported dictatorship across the region by backing a warlord's drive for power in Libya, sending troops into Bahrain to crush the country's pro-democracy movement, promoting military rule for Sudan, and backing Egypt's brutal autocrat Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

In Libya, the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia have provided extensive financial, military, and diplomatic support to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar, who has caused hundreds of deaths in his bid to seize power from Libya's UN-recognized government and reinstate military dictatorship. Since last April alone, the U.A.E. has conducted more than 850 indiscriminate drone and jet strikes on Haftar's behalf, striking homes and civilian institutions. This year, the U.A.E. has sent over 100 airlifters suspected of carrying weaponry to Haftar's forces.<sup>16</sup> Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, has provided financial assistance to the Wagner Group, a U.S.-sanctioned Russian paramilitary

---

<sup>13</sup> "[Abdullah al-Hamid, Saudi Dissident, Dies in Detention at 69](#)," The New York Times, May 21, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> "[My father called for reform in Saudi Arabia. Now he faces death.](#)" Abdullah Alaoudh, The Guardian, August 13, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> "[Saudi Arabia: Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr executed](#)," Amnesty International, January 20, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> "[Russia Isn't the Only One Getting Its Hands Dirty in Libya](#)," Foreign Policy, April 21, 2020.

organization that deploys mercenaries and equipment to support Haftar's anti-democratic forces.<sup>17</sup>

In Bahrain, Saudi and U.A.E. forces worked with Manama to crush the country's 2011 pro-democracy movement. Following the democracy protests that began on February 14th, 2011, Saudi and U.A.E. military forces led Gulf Cooperation Council troops (GCC) to march into Bahrain, attack peaceful protesters, and help crush the democracy movement.<sup>18</sup>

In Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. attempted to undermine the nation's pro-democracy movement by supporting the "transitional military council" that sought to maintain military rule after the country's dictator Omar al-Bashir was driven from power.<sup>19</sup> And in Egypt, both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have repeatedly backed Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. His dictatorship has imprisoned thousands of Egyptians following mass protests.

### **Violating Women's Rights:**

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. violate women's rights through systemic discrimination and subjugation, as well as repression and imprisonment of women who advocate for or attempt to exercise their rights.

Women in Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. are still treated as subordinate to men under the law, in education, in the household, in governance, and in the workforce. State-enforced segregation of women in Saudi Arabia renders women as second-class citizens, and aspects of the Saudi male guardianship system remain in place. In several cases in Saudi courts, mothers have lost their parental rights in Saudi Arabia because of their U.S. citizenship. American children have been kidnapped from their mothers to Saudi Arabia,<sup>20</sup> where they have remained, without recourse for their U.S. parents, because the Saudi state does not recognize or enforce foreign custody orders.<sup>21</sup>

In both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., women are required by law to obey their husbands, and require their permission to work or leave the house. Marital rape is not a crime in either country.<sup>22</sup> Under U.A.E. laws, "a husband's discipline of his wife" is "considered an exercise of

---

<sup>17</sup> "[Saudi Arabia steps up role in Libya](#)," Al-Monitor, February 24, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> "[Three Years after the Invasion, Saudi Forces Must Leave Bahrain](#)," Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, March 14, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> "[Saudi Arabia, UAE to send \\$3 billion in aid to Sudan](#)," Reuters, April 21, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> "[Investigation Into Abductions of American Children to Saudi Arabia](#)," Hearings before the Committee on Government Reform, House Of Representatives, June 12, October 2-3, December 4-11, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> "[Guidance: Saudi Arabia - Child Abduction, Information on legal issues relating to parental child abduction](#)," March 20, 2013, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, GOV.UK.

<sup>22</sup> "[Police officer who raped woman claims she was his wife and wins appeal](#)," The National, May 10, 2018.

rights,” which can be read as official sanction of spousal abuse. “Debasement of honour with consent” is punishable by one year or more in prison.<sup>23</sup>

The rulers of the U.A.E. have wrongfully detained, tortured, and allowed women to die in their prisons. In 2019, Alia Abdulnoor died in a prison in the U.A.E., just two months after the UN had specifically called for her release.<sup>24</sup> Another detainee mentioned in UN communications, Maryam AlBalushi, had leaked accounts of torture in prison and reported being held in solitary confinement on charges of “damaging the U.A.E.’s reputation”. AlBalushi reportedly attempted suicide in March of this year.<sup>25</sup>

Saudi Arabia’s monarchy continues its two-year imprisonment of women activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Naseema al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya al-Zahrani, several of whom have been reportedly tortured while imprisoned. Several other women’s rights activists are facing ongoing persecution. The imprisonment and persecution of women activists in Saudi Arabia continues despite the U.S. House of Representatives’ passage of House Resolution 129 in July of 2019, which demanded that the Saudi monarchy “immediately and unconditionally release the imprisoned women’s rights advocates and other political prisoners, and hold accountable those involved in perpetrating abuses.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Modern-Day Slavery:**

In Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., foreign employees in the country remained tied to their employers as their sponsors in the country.<sup>27 28</sup> Foreign residents require the permission of their sponsors to exit the country, change jobs, and keep their status in the country legal. This puts foreign workers at significant risk of abuse and even creates conditions amounting to forced labor and modern-day slavery.

The wages for household workers in Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. are extremely low relative to the cost of living. As a result, migrant workers are often unable to afford medical care and suffer from inadequate standards of living. Migrant workers are routinely overworked, refused days off, forbidden from exiting the household, routinely refused or delayed payments, and often abused.<sup>29</sup> Migrant workers who work in households are often women and face significant risk of sexual violence.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> "[United Arab Emirates 2019](#)," Amnesty International, accessed June 8, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> "[Woman with cancer dies in UAE jail after rights groups., U.N. call for release](#)," Reuters, May 5, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> "[UAE: Woman Prisoner Reportedly Attempts Suicide](#)," Human Rights Watch, March 13, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> "[H.Res.129 — Condemning the Government of Saudi Arabia's continued detention and alleged abuse of women's rights activists](#)," U.S. House of Representatives, accessed June 3, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> "[Saudi Arabia Events of 2019](#)," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 9, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> "[United Arab Emirates 2019](#)," Amnesty International, accessed June 8, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> "[United Arab Emirates, Events of 2019](#)," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 9, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> "[UAE Migrant and Domestic Workers Abuse](#)," Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, May 31, 2019.

This system of sponsorship also applies to foreign spouses in Saudi Arabia, and has trapped U.S. citizens in Saudi Arabia against their will.<sup>31</sup> These countries must implement reforms which recognize the right of all foreign residents to live in dignity and to freely leave their employers and leave the country where they work.

### **Global Kidnapping, Espionage, and Murder:**

Both Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. deploy espionage and state violence internationally to silence peaceful critics in the global diaspora and interfere with the democratic norms of other countries.

Saudi Arabia has abused its diplomatic immunity and violated international law on multiple occasions. In 2018, the Saudi government murdered and dismembered Jamal Khashoggi within a Saudi consulate in Istanbul and attempted to cover it up. Pro-democracy activist and Saudi critic Iyad el-Baghdadi has stated that Norwegian officials told him on April 25, 2019 that he was in danger and removed him to safety, following a CIA warning to Norway that Saudi Arabia may be targeting him.<sup>32</sup> Saudi Arabia's government has been implicated in spying on thousands of Twitter users by a Saudi employee of the social media company.<sup>33</sup> And the FBI has declared that the Saudi government almost certainly helps their citizens flee prosecution for the murder and rape of U.S. citizens on U.S. soil.<sup>34</sup>

U.A.E. royals have been involved in several cases of wrongful imprisonment, torture and international kidnapping of even their adult daughters.<sup>35</sup> A high court judge in the United Kingdom ruled in March of 2020 to expose the "international crimes and hypocrisy" of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai, in order to "prevent the public from being misled."<sup>36</sup>

### **Driving the Climate Crisis:**

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. are major drivers of the global climate crisis. The U.A.E. is a top exporter of climate-destroying crude oil, and Climate Action Tracker has classified Saudi Arabia as one of the world's worst contributors to the destruction of our climate. If every nation were to

---

<sup>31</sup> "[American Woman, Divorced From Saudi Husband, Is Trapped in Saudi Arabia](#)," The New York Times, March 5, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> "[Activist in Norway says CIA passed on warning that Saudi Arabia might be targeting him](#)," CBS News, May 7, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> "[Former Twitter employees charged with spying for Saudi Arabia by digging into the accounts of kingdom critics](#)," Washington Post, November 6, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> "[Declassified FBI bulletin says Saudi officials help their citizens flee US legal issues](#)," CNN, January 18, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> "[Dubai ruler abducted daughters and threatened ex-wife, UK court finds](#)," CNN, March 6, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> "[Approved Judgment](#)," High Court of Justice Family Division, Royal Court of Justice, U.K, January 27, 2020.

behave as hazardously as Saudi Arabia in their climate change commitments, global warming would exceed 4 degrees Celsius, in stark violation of the Paris Agreement's 1.5-degree limit.<sup>37</sup>

Saudi Arabia has been named the worst-performing country on several climate change indicators in the annual Climate Change Performance Index.<sup>38</sup> And state-owned Saudi ARAMCO is the world's largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions among corporate fossil fuel producers.<sup>39</sup> Saudi Arabia also has an extensive record of working to undermine and delay global climate negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

It is time for the U.S. to fundamentally downgrade its relationship with the ruling monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Both the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia pursue domestic and foreign policies that undermine U.S. interests, drive instability across the Middle East and North Africa, and are a threat to global health and the environment.

The Saudi and the U.A.E. monarchies are responsible for vast levels of suffering across the Middle East and North Africa. Both monarchies are driving wars that have spread the Coronavirus pandemic across the region. Their entanglements with Al Qaeda terrorist networks pose a threat to U.S. citizens and people in the Middle East. Finally, they are threatening global prosperity by driving massive fossil fuels exports that are accelerating the climate crisis.

Against this backdrop, it is astonishing that either the Saudi or the U.A.E. governments would be considered suitable allies for the United States. Congress should move quickly to block all pending and future arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Sincerely,

Action Corps  
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain  
Center for International Policy  
CIVICUS  
The Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
CODEPINK  
Demand Progress  
Feminist Majority Foundation

---

<sup>37</sup> "[Saudi Arabia country summary](#)," Climate Action Tracker, December 2, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> "[Saudi Arabia: The worst-performing country on battling climate change](#)," Middle East Eye, January 10, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> "[Revealed: the 20 firms behind a third of all carbon emissions](#)," The Guardian, October 9, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> "[Saudi Arabia Denies Its Key Role in Climate Change Even as It Prepares for the Worst](#)," The Intercept, September 18, 2019.

The Feminist Foreign Policy Project  
Freedom Forward  
The Freedom Initiative  
Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program  
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)  
Just Foreign Policy  
Libyan American Alliance  
Peace Action  
RootsAction.org  
United for Peace and Justice  
World BEYOND War  
Yemeni Alliance Committee  
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation