

# **US sells battle tanks to Saudi Arabia as it renews assault on Yemen**

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In a clear signal of American imperialism's unrelenting commitment to the Saudi monarchy and its ongoing war against Yemen, the United States' State Department approved the sale of one hundred and fifty Abrams main battle tanks to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

The tanks, designed for large-scale ground warfare, are part of a larger package of American weaponry, valued at \$1.15 billion, that includes a bevy of additional military hardware.

The US-Saudi deal, which also includes \$155 million worth of Gatling guns and \$200 million worth of training to the Saudi military, is geared to strengthen the US-Saudi alliance and deepen Washington's already intimate military partnership with the regime.

The deal is designed, according to the State Department, to "contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a strategic regional partner which has been and continues to be a leading contributor of political stability and economic progress in the Middle East."

The sale includes various forms of military aid by American personnel and contractors for the Saudi military, including equipment maintenance, training and logistical support, which are intended to "increase the Royal Saudi Land Force's (RSLF) interoperability with U.S. forces" and "conveys U.S. commitment to Saudi Arabia's security and armed forces modernization," the top US diplomatic agency said.

The further lavishing by Washington of instruments of death and destruction upon the government in Riyadh, which already purchases advanced weaponry, almost entirely from American suppliers, at a rate of some \$20 billion annually, highlights the central role of American imperialism in organizing and facilitating the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

The murderous war against Yemen has been enabled, from the start, by comprehensive support from Washington, which, from the very beginning of the war last March, has deployed US military advisors and intelligence officers to coordinate the air war with Saudi counterparts, while working from a joint planning cell in the Saudi capital.

The contents of the latest sale, above all its inclusion of the fleet of tanks originally designed for massive land battles against the militaries of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc during the Cold War, strongly suggest that the monarchy has secured support from its American patrons for a major expansion of its ground operations.

Sixteen months of war in Yemen have already made clear the savage purposes to which the equipment included in the latest weapons deal will be put. The Saudi-led war against Yemen, launched in March of 2015 in response to the seizure of the capital at Sana'a by Houthi Shi'ite militias, has killed at least 6,500 civilians, destroyed most of Yemen's social infrastructure, turned 2.5 million into internal refugees, and pushed more than 80 percent of the Yemeni population to the brink of starvation.

The Saudi war coalition has regularly and indiscriminately attacked civilian areas, including dense residential neighborhoods and markets, and has employed illegal cluster bombs against villages in northern areas, where the Houthi insurgency is based.

Yemeni society, already impoverished by decades of imperialist-backed civil war and dictatorship, has been completely shattered since the launching of "Operation Decisive Storm" last April, as Saudi forces have pummeled the poorest country in the Arab world with untold quantities of advanced military hardware, ruthlessly destroying the country's social

infrastructure, including some 250 medical centers, 800 schools and hundreds of electricity plants and fuel storehouses.

Amid the chaos produced by the war, Islamist militias, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), succeeded in overrunning much of southern Yemen, all while enjoying near complete immunity from Saudi air strikes.

The port city of Mukallah, a main port city and transit hub for resource flows traversing the southern coastline of the Arabian peninsula, was left fully at the mercy of AQAP, touted by American media as the “most dangerous terror group in the world,” for nearly a year after the war began, even as the US provided target selection and aerial refueling for the Saudi coalition’s relentless bombardment of civilian targets throughout the rest of the country.

It is already clear that the breakdown of peace talks between the Saudi-backed government-in-exile of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Houthi government, announced over the weekend by a sharp escalation of Saudi airstrikes and on Tuesday by the resumption of direct Saudi attacks against Sana’a, will mark the resumption of Riyadh’s murderous assault against Yemen’s civilian population and working class.

On Sunday, Saudi war planes bombed civilian targets in Yemen, including the Al Mawdeed market in Nehm district and residential areas in the northern Sada’a province, killing at least 18. Saudi bombing runs on Tuesday killed at least 21, including 10 workers at a potato chip factory in Sana’a’s al-Nahda district.

Responsibility for the ever-growing civilian death toll in Yemen lies squarely at the feet of the masters of imperialist war in Washington. While wary, amid the catastrophic debacles produced by its wars in Syria and Iraq, of launching a full military intervention in yet another Middle Eastern quagmire, the American ruling class has effectively sponsored and outsourced the Yemen war, from its planning stages up to the present.

The Pentagon has relied on the Saudis and their Gulf allies to provide the bulk of the frontline forces, while backing their combat-support functions to the hilt. In May, the US announced the deployment of small teams of Special Forces in support of Saudi and UAE operations around Mukallah, officially reengaging the covert war waged by US commandos inside Yemen continuously during the decade following the

September 11th attacks.

The vast bloodshed and suffering imposed upon Yemen by Washington and its regional allies has been carried out with the aim of reimposing the government of President Hadi, a neocolonial stooge “elected” in February 2012 in a “democratic transition” process, in which Hadi was the only candidate on the ballot.

Hadi, who was forced to flee the capital after central government compounds in Sana’a were captured by Houthi fighters in January 2015, was anointed to become president by the US- and Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), after the 2011 mass struggles in Egypt and Tunisia triggered a protest movement in Yemen that threatened to completely destabilize the US-backed state apparatus controlled by longtime dictator and American puppet Ali Abdullah Saleh.

With Saleh’s credibility shattered, Washington and Riyadh sought to promote Hadi as a means to preserve the core network of the regime and maintain their grip over the military and security services. They have responded to Hadi’s humiliating ouster with a military policy that can only be characterized as sociocide, the destruction of an entire society.



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