

Trump boasts of arms deals, backs Saudi slaughter in Yemen

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22 March 2018

US President Donald Trump welcomed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Oval Office Tuesday, hailing the de facto autocratic ruler of Saudi Arabia as the number one purchaser of US arms and a key ally in Washington's drive to war with Iran.

The meeting delivered to the Saudi regime what amounted to a carte blanche from the White House to continue its near-genocidal war against the people of Yemen, which has left over 13,000 dead and brought over 8.5 million to the brink of starvation.

The White House meeting marks the first stop in what is programmed as a two-and-a-half-week US tour by the Saudi prince. He went on to New York City on Wednesday for meetings aimed at reassuring the banks and finance houses, which were rattled by the purge initiated by bin Salman last November.

In what was dubbed an anti-corruption campaign, hundreds of princes, former ministers and prominent businessmen were rounded up, detained at Riyadh's Ritz Carlton hotel and, in many cases, subjected to beatings and torture until they agreed to turn over substantial assets to the Saudi regime. The shakedown reportedly netted the ruling faction over \$105 billion.

Bin Salman is also set to meet CEOs in Silicon Valley and the oil industry executives in Houston and to visit Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

In the White House meeting, Trump welcomed the Saudi ruler as a prized cash cow, bizarrely holding up cardboard posters in front of the prince bearing photographs and price tags for US weapons systems purchased by Riyadh. Pointing to one contract worth \$525 million, the US president turned to the prince and declared, "that's peanuts for you."

"The relationship [with Riyadh] is probably as good as it's really ever been, and I think will probably only get better," Trump told reporters before the meeting.

"We understand each other. Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation and they're going to give the United States some of that wealth, hopefully, in the form of jobs, in the form of the purchase of the finest military equipment anywhere in the world, there's nobody even close."

Trump pointed to states where the weapons systems contracted by the Saudi regime are to be produced, clearly seeking to exploit the deals for political gain.

Bin Salman delivered perfunctory remarks about the 80-year-old US-Saudi alliance, in which the House of Saud has stood as the principal pillar of imperialist domination and political reaction in the Arab world. He played to Trump's money-grubbing approach, however, stating that while he and the US president had discussed some \$200 billion in investments and arms sales when he was last in Washington, the Saudi monarchy was now contemplating \$400 billion.

Whether any such sums materialize is an open question. The Saudi regime is wracked by crises, brought on by the collapse in oil prices and the outflow of foreign investment after last November's crackdown, as well as the costs incurred by its war in Yemen and the billions it has poured into the bloody war for regime change in Syria.

During the public remarks in the Oval Office, Trump was asked about Iran. He pointed to the May 12 deadline for the waiver of US sanctions required by the 2015 nuclear deal signed by Tehran and the major powers. "The Iran deal is coming up and you're going to see what I do," he said. The reimposition of US nuclear sanctions would effectively upend the agreement and set Washington on a direct path to war with Iran.

Asked whether he believed Trump should abrogate the Iran agreement, bin Salman replied, "Well, we'll

talk about that today.”

A White House readout of the closed-door meeting between Trump and bin Salman reported that the Saudi prince had “thanked the President for American leadership in defeating ISIS and countering Iran’s destructive actions across the Middle East.” It added that “On Yemen, the President and the Crown Prince discussed the threat the Houthis pose to the region, assisted by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.”

The claim that Yemen’s Houthi rebels pose some kind of regional threat is preposterous and meant only as a justification for the continuation of the indispensable American support for Saudi Arabia’s savage bombing campaign against Yemen, which will enter its fourth year next week.

Washington has provided the bombs and missiles that have been used to attack Yemeni schools, hospitals and residential areas, as well as vital infrastructure ranging from power plants to water and sewage facilities and even agricultural production. The result is mass hunger, the worst cholera epidemic in human history and a deadly outbreak of diphtheria, creating what the United Nations has called the most severe humanitarian crisis on the planet.

In addition to providing weapons of mass destruction, the Pentagon has stationed intelligence officers at the headquarters of the Saudi air war in Riyadh to supply information used in selecting targets in Yemen. US Air Force refueling planes fly continuous missions to keep Saudi and allied bombers in the air over the battered country. And the US Navy provides forces to maintain the de facto blockade that has cut off critical supplies of food and medicine.

All of this US support for the one-sided war by the Arab world’s richest nations against the poorest one was initiated under the Democratic administration of President Barack Obama, in part to assuage Saudi displeasure over the Iran nuclear deal.

On the same day as bin Salman’s visit, the US Senate voted to kill a resolution demanding the withdrawal of all US military personnel participating in the Saudi-led war against Yemen. Invoking the US Constitution’s granting to Congress the sole power to declare war as well as the 1973 War Powers Resolution, the resolution was introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders as well as the right-wing Republican senator from Utah, Mike

Lee.

In a 55-to-44 vote, the Senate tabled the resolution, preventing a vote on the measure. Democrats provided 10 votes to assure a comfortable margin for killing the bill.

Before the vote, the Pentagon had waged a public campaign against the resolution, with the US defense secretary, retired Gen. James Mattis, claiming in a letter to senators that a cutoff of US arms and aid, without which Riyadh could not continue the war, “could increase civilian casualties, jeopardize cooperation with our partners on counter-terrorism, and reduce our influence with the Saudis—all of which would further exacerbate the situation and humanitarian crisis.”

Bin Salman’s visit and Washington’s commitment to both continue supporting the criminal assault on Yemen and escalate the confrontation with Iran received relatively short shrift from the US corporate media.

Instead, focus was placed on the furor whipped up over Trump’s call to congratulate President Vladimir Putin on his re-election. Politicians from both major parties criticized Trump for failing to use the call to condemn alleged fraud in the Russian vote or mention domestic repression in Russia, the allegations of Russian “meddling” in the 2016 US presidential election and the unsubstantiated claims that Moscow was responsible for the poisoning of the former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter earlier this month in the UK.

The same media and politicians, however, voiced no objections to Trump’s welcoming to the White House the autocratic ruler of Saudi Arabia, where there are no elections, and critics of the regime are subject to execution by beheading.



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