

US administration signals unconditional backing for Saudi regime as Senate votes on Yemen war

Bill Van Auken
29 November 2018

The US Senate voted 63–37 Wednesday to advance a resolution calling for an end to US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The vote came within hours of closed-door testimony to the Senate from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who strongly opposed the measure and voiced unconditional support for Saudi Arabia’s monarchical dictatorship.

The procedural vote, which moved the bill out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, will not shift US policy toward the near-genocidal war that has been waged for nearly four years against the people of Yemen, creating the worst humanitarian catastrophe on the face of the planet. A second vote is needed to even initiate a Senate floor debate on the measure, and it has no chance of passing the full Congress during the current session. The White House issued a statement Wednesday afternoon indicating that President Donald Trump would veto the bill if it were approved by Congress.

However symbolic, the shift in the Senate—which last March tabled the same measure by a vote of 55 to 44—is bound up with the naked exposure of the criminality of the Saudi regime—Washington’s principal ally in the Arab world—by the savage assassination of journalist and former regime insider Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

The Senate vote reflects the views of sections of the American ruling establishment that are opposed to the Trump administration’s unconditional support for the Saudi regime—based on calculations of its role in the US-led anti-Iranian axis in the Middle East and the profit interests of US arms manufacturers and other banks and corporations dependent upon Saudi oil money. They see the Khashoggi murder as a means of pressuring the regime in Riyadh into greater subservience to US policy, and the war in Yemen as a distraction from the preparations for far greater military confrontations with Russia and China.

In their testimony on Wednesday, both Pompeo and Mattis

insisted that there existed no conclusive evidence or “smoking gun” establishing that Saudi Arabia’s crown prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing and dismemberment of Khashoggi in Istanbul.

These claims fly in the face of the conclusions of the CIA, which has declared its “high confidence” that bin Salman orchestrated the assassination, whose perpetrators included his close security aides.

Absent from the hearing was CIA Director Gina Haspel, who traveled to Turkey to review evidence, including an audiotape recording the brutal murder. Her failure to testify was the result of an order from the White House, given that she would be compelled to either lie under oath or contradict the narrative advanced by Pompeo and Mattis.

On the eve of his testimony, Pompeo wrote a fascistic op-ed piece for the *Wall Street Journal* condemning criticism of the wholesale crimes against humanity committed by the Saudi regime, and the murder of Khashoggi in particular, as “Capitol Hill caterwauling and media pile on,” while accusing politicians of both political parties in the “salons of Washington” of undermining US national security and being “soft” on Iran.

This same basic line was repeated in the testimony Wednesday. Defense Secretary Mattis told the US senators that “security interests cannot be dismissed as [the US] seeks accountability for Khashoggi’s murder,” adding that “we are seldom free to work with unblemished partners.”

In other words, in the interest of “national security,” Washington must aid and abet the cover-up of bin Salman’s direction of the savage assassination of Khashoggi. As for “unblemished partners,” the defense of bin Salman is entirely in line with US imperialism’s historic reliance on police state monarchies and fascist-military dictatorships from the Middle East to Latin America and beyond to pursue its interests.

Both US secretaries stressed that the support for the Saudi-

led war was necessary to counter Iran, which Washington has claimed, without providing a shred of evidence, is arming and directing the Houthi rebels who overthrew the US and Saudi puppet regime of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2014.

They opposed any challenge to US support to the war in Yemen on the grounds that it would strengthen Iran, against which Washington has imposed punishing sanctions and is preparing for war. Both attempted to deny the obvious; that the Yemeni population is being murdered to achieve US imperialist aims in the Middle East.

In his testimony, Pompeo claimed that the humanitarian situation “would be a hell of a lot worse” if the US were to withdraw its aid, without which it would be impossible for the Saudi regime to continue its war on the Yemeni people. He pointedly stressed that the US support for the criminal war in Yemen had been initiated under the previous Democratic administration of Barack Obama.

In a remarkable piece of Washington double-talk, Mattis declared, “We must maintain our twin requirements of holding those responsible for the [Khashoggi] murder to account, while recognizing the reality of Saudi Arabia as a necessary strategic partner. We cannot be deflected from using all our influence to end this war for the good of innocent people in trouble, and ultimately the safety of our own people, and this includes our military engagement.”

The claim that US “military engagement” is “for the good of innocent people” in Yemen is obscene. The Saudi bombs and missiles that have claimed the lives of nearly 60,000 Yemenis are supplied by Washington, which has refueled the planes dropping them and provided military intelligence to select their targets, which have included hospitals, schools, essential electrical, water and sewage infrastructure and civilian neighborhoods.

The attempts by Mattis and Pompeo to portray the Pentagon’s strategic support for the Saudi-led massacre in Yemen as a humanitarian venture was belied by a statement issued this week by five of the main aid agencies attempting to stave off mass starvation in the impoverished countries.

They warned that “14 million people are at risk of starving to death in Yemen” and that “countless Yemenis are unlikely to live through the winter unless the parties to the conflict immediately cease hostilities.”

It added: “If the Government of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ansar Allah, and other parties to the conflict fail to take these steps, and if the United States does not use all levers of pressure to compel them to do so, responsibility for the deaths of many more Yemeni civilians will lie not only with the parties to the conflict, but with the United States as well.”

The organizations stated that the effect of US humanitarian

contributions to aid agencies in Yemen “pale in comparison to the harm caused by US military support and diplomatic cover to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While the Administration has said that reaching a political settlement and relieving the humanitarian crisis in Yemen are top national security objectives, US policies tell a different story. By providing such extensive military and diplomatic support for one side of the conflict, the United States is deepening and prolonging a crisis that has immediate and severe consequences for Yemen, and civilians are paying the price.”

In other words, Washington over the course of two administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, is guilty of massive war crimes.

The statement came after the release of a report by the aid agency Save the Children that 85,000 children have died of hunger in Yemen since Saudi Arabia’s US-backed bombings of the country began in 2015.

The United Nations reported on Tuesday that operations at Yemen’s Red Sea port of Hodeidah have fallen by nearly 50 percent over the past two weeks as a result of a siege by forces of Saudi Arabia and the UAE that has encircled the city and cut off all but one access road. Seventy percent of all imports to the country flow through Hodeidah, including most of the food supplies upon which Yemen’s starving population depends.

Meanwhile, the US has intervened in the United Nations Security Council to block a resolution drafted by the UK calling for a ceasefire in Hodeidah, but not in the rest of the country. Aid and human rights groups had criticized the resolution for its limited scope and its failure to level any criticism against Saudi Arabia and its allies, while denouncing the Houthi rebels.

Washington does not want to throw any impediment in the way of the US-backed Saudi war, even if it claims the lives of millions of Yemeni men, women and children.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact