

## **The Issue of Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia operates under a political system of absolute monarchy in compliance with Shariah law. It is an authoritarian state and considered by some to be totalitarian. In its 2012 Democracy Index, the Economist ranked the Saudi government as the fifth most authoritarian out of 167. Freedom House gave it its lowest "Not Free" rating of 7 in 2019.

On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of nine countries from West Asia and North Africa in launching an intervention into the Yemeni Civil War. The intervention initially consisted of a bombing campaign on Houthi rebels and later a naval blockade and deployment of ground forces into Yemen. Military aid was also provided from Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. Countries including Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia made their airspace, waters and military bases available for use by the coalition. The US was involved in providing intelligence and logistical support such as aerial refuelling.

The war has received widespread criticism and has dramatically worsened Yemen's humanitarian situation. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter states that:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

There has been much debate over whether the coalition's involvement in Yemen violates this article.

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022, the coalition announced that it would cease hostilities in order to facilitate political talks and peacekeeping efforts. Therefore, the debate over the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia is largely based around fears that military provisions provided are still being utilised in the ongoing conflict occurring in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia and the US are strategic allies. Since 2009, the US has sold \$110 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia. On 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017, President Trump and King Salman signed a series of letters of intent for Saudi Arabia to purchase arms from the US totalling \$110 billion immediately and \$350 billion over 10 years. Additionally, in December 2021, the US Senate voted against a proposal to block a \$650 million sale of advanced medium range air-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia to discourage it from its military intervention in Yemen.

The UK is also a large supplier of the weapons used by Saudi Arabia to facilitate attacks on Yemen. It is believed that an estimated 15,000 thousand civilians have been killed using weapons produced in the UK. The Saudi-led coalition has executed more than 22,000 airstrikes, 33% of which are believed to have struck nonmilitary sites according to the Yemen Data Project.

The UK has continued to support air strikes by Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners, providing both arms and ongoing support, in spite of overwhelming evidence of repeated breaches of international humanitarian law. The UK-produced equipment includes Typhoon and Tornado aircraft, Pave Way Bombs and Brimstone and Storm Shadow Missiles. The published value of UK arms licensed for export to the Saudi-led coalition since the bombing began in March 2015 is £8.6billion (including £7.1 billion to Saudi Arabia alone); however, CAAT estimates that the real value of arms to Saudi Arabia exceeds the value of £23billion, while the value of sales to the Coalition as a whole is nearly £25 billion.

The licence figures do not include the value of ongoing maintenance, training, and technical support that BAE Systems provides to the Royal Saudi Air Force in Saudi Arabia. The US military and arms

companies provide similar support. At least 80% of the Saudi pilots who executed these frequent strikes in Yemen received U.S. training. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the United States' top purchaser of weapons and has been so for the past 10 years. This support is absolutely essential to Saudi Arabia's ability to wage its war in Yemen.

Points to consider:

- To what extent is your member state involved in the conflict in Yemen? What is their view on military intervention and the Saudi-led coalition?
- Is your member state directly involved in the arms trade?
- What can be done about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen?
- Can sanctions or restrictions be placed on the global arms trade?
- Are countries morally responsible for actions carried out using weapons that they have produced and provided?

Useful links:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi\\_Arabian%E2%80%93led\\_intervention\\_in\\_Yemen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabian%E2%80%93led_intervention_in_Yemen)

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_United\\_States%E2%80%93Saudi\\_Arabia\\_arms\\_deal#:~:text=August%202022%20Biden's%20State%20Department,make%20Saudi%20Arabia%20a%20pariah.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_United_States%E2%80%93Saudi_Arabia_arms_deal#:~:text=August%202022%20Biden's%20State%20Department,make%20Saudi%20Arabia%20a%20pariah.)