
Saudis Using Petrodollars to Mute UN Criticism of Conduct in Yemen: Int'l Lawyer

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A senior Canadian human rights attorney described the situation of the Yemeni people as the “worst man-made humanitarian disaster on the planet” and said the Saudi regime is using its petrodollars to mute the United Nations’ criticism of its conduct in the war in Yemen.

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“Saudi Arabia also has used its financial influence to prevent serious criticism of its conduct in the War in Yemen (and its’ role in the Syrian crisis) and used that clout to blackmail the United Nations to mute its criticism of the Saudis,” Edward Corrigan from Ontario said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

“The current situation is a military stalemate. Neither side can defeat the other. A bombing campaign is not going to work in a mountainous country like Yemen. Innocent civilians, largely women and children, bear the brunt of the suffering,” the human rights lawyer added.

Following is the full text of the interview:

Tasnim: As you know, Monday marked the anniversary of the start of an ongoing devastating war on Yemen mounted by the Saudi-led coalition that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and driven the country to the brink of famine. The Saudi onslaught on Yemen has also led to a cholera epidemic in the Arabian Peninsula country, which is one of the worst ever recorded in the world. What do you think about the heinous crimes committed by the Riyadh regime and its backers, mainly the US? In a recent vote, the US Senate rejected an effort to end support for the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, according to media reports. The vote coincided with a White House meeting between Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, at which Trump lauded US arms sales to Saudi Arabia. What is your assessment of the Senate vote and the meeting?

Corrigan: The vote in the United States Senate was 44 in support of ending American arms deals with Saudi Arabia and 54 voting to table or defeat the motion. The attempt to ban arms sales to the Saudis was defeated but this (was) really a strong expression of opposition to the American role in the war in Yemen. The ban was opposed by the Military Industrial Complex, which profits greatly from the arms sales. It is also interesting to note that the head of the Pentagon US Defense Secretary James Mattis called on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to “accelerate” a peaceful end to the war in Yemen.” Secretary Mattis, however, also lobbied Congress not to terminate US support for Riyadh’s air campaign against the Houthis.

So clearly the voices advocating for an end to “the worst man-made humanitarian crisis” have captured the attention of many US politicians but not enough to force a termination to the arms sales to Saudi Arabia or US Military assistance to the Saudis in their war on Yemen. There is simply too much money to be made and too many US politicians dependent on political campaign donations from the groups that profit from the War on Yemen. Even well-known progressives like Senator Elizabeth Warren (Dem. Mass.) and Cory Booker (Dem. NJ) voted to kill the bill.

Tasnim: The Islamic Republic of Iran has always expressed deep concern over the ongoing tragedy in Yemen and reiterated the need for implementing the four-point peace plan that Tehran submitted to the United Nations in 2015, which urges an end to conflicts, sending humanitarian aid, lifting the unjust blockade of Yemen, and launch of political dialogue with the aim of formation of a national unity government. What do you think about the peace plan and the role that the UN can play in this regard?

Corrigan: Iran’s initiative was a good one. Unfortunately, the role the United States and Great Britain have in supporting the War in Yemen, and their veto power at the United Nations Security Council means that the UN has little power to bring about a resolution to the conflict. Saudi Arabia also has used its financial influence to prevent serious criticism of its conduct in the War in Yemen (and its role in the Syrian crisis) and used that clout to blackmail the United Nations to mute its criticism of the Saudis.

Tasnim: How do you assess the political situation in Yemen? What is your prediction about the future of the country's crisis? In your opinion, how can Yemeni groups end the power crisis through dialogue and negotiation?

Corrigan: The current situation is a military stalemate. Neither side can defeat the other. A bombing campaign is not going to work in a mountainous country like Yemen. Innocent civilians, largely women and children, bear the brunt of the suffering. The first step is to end the embargo of food supplies, fuel, and medical supplies. This would do much to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people and build goodwill. (The Saudis and UAE have now temporarily lifted the embargo to allow humanitarian aid into Yemen.) Second, an Independent Arbitrator, probably the United Nations, should convene a Peace Conference in a neutral territory, possibly Oman that has remained neutral through this war, and bring all of the warring parties to the negotiating table.

The war is extremely volatile. The pro-Hadi faction backed by the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates has split into two separate groups. One backed by Saudi Arabia and the other backed by the UAE has seized the City of Aden. The side opposed to Hadi has also divided into two parts. The Ansarullah Movement, supported primarily by the Houthis, has split from the supporters of former President Saleh who was killed in fighting between the Houthis and the troops loyal to Saleh. Both of these schisms have to be resolved and all relevant Yemeni parties to the dispute be brought together in a concerted attempt to end this senseless bloodshed.

It is in the interest of all state parties to resolve this conflict to prevent the creation of a failed state and an area where Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) or Al-Qaeda can establish a strong presence. They have already made significant inroads in the area. Since the conflict is largely an intra-Yemeni war, other regional actors should step back and let the Yemenis work towards a peaceful resolution. It is up to the United Nations and regional states who are backing their “proxies” to help resolve this senseless war and end the “worst man-made humanitarian disaster on the planet.”