
Obama Warned That US Weapons Would Be Used to Target Civilians

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Documents reveal that diplomats warned Obama that Saudi Arabia would commit war crimes in Yemen, but the sale proceeded anyway.

Despite stern and repeated warnings from their own diplomatic staff that U.S. weaponry would almost certainly be used to commit war crimes against Yemeni citizens, the Obama Administration nevertheless approved US\$1.3 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia, according to documents published Monday by the Reuters news agency.

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During the period in 2015, when the Pentagon was considering weapons sales to its longtime ally, Saudi Arabia, the State Department warned the Obama administration that the U.S. could be implicated in war crimes committed by the Saudi kingdom. The Saudis launched a coalition effort in support of embattled Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi's loyalists in their ongoing conflict against the country's Houthi tribe.

According to documents obtained by Reuters following a Freedom of Information Act request, Pentagon officials informed the White House of their doubts that Saudi forces would be able to target rebels without also killing civilians or destroying "critical infrastructure." By 2015, it was already apparent to U.S. diplomats that Saudi air strikes were killing thousands of Yemeni civilians.

"The strikes are not intentionally indiscriminate but rather result from a lack of Saudi experience with dropping munitions and firing missiles," said a specialist from the State Department while meeting with human rights groups, according to the documents obtained by Reuters under a freedom of information request.

"The lack of Saudi experience is compounded by the asymmetric situation on the ground where enemy militants are not wearing uniforms and are mixed with civilian populations ... Weak intelligence likely further compounds the problem," said the specialist.

Government lawyers "had their hair on fire" as civilian casualties continued to grow, after previously not concluding

that support for the Saudi regime would not make the country a “co-belligerent” under international law. Human rights groups at the time warned that the administration could be complicit in war crimes.

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The Obama administration said it would “review” its support for the Saudi kingdom following [Sunday’s U.S.-backed, Saudi-led airstrike](#) that killed more than 140 people and injured over 500 who were attending a funeral.

In addition, intelligence publication The Intercept said that an important U.S. ally, the United Kingdom, was also aware that the Saudis were targeting civilians in Yemen. Military personnel for both the U.S. and the U.K. sit in the command center for Saudi airstrikes, the report added.

“The atrocities committed by the Saudis would have been impossible without their steadfast, aggressive support,” wrote the Intercept, who also cited statements from Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister who said that the U.K. and the U.S. “have access to lists of targets.”

The Obama administration continues to support Saudi Arabia. Since 2009, Obama has made 42 separate weapons deals with the kingdom totaling US\$115 billion, [according to a report](#) from the Center for International Policy in September. The U.S. has also confirmed that it had previously [sold white phosphorus](#), a napalm-like chemical, to the Saudis.

Over 10,000 people have been killed in the bitter conflict pitting wealthy Gulf states against the Houthis resistance, including around 4,000 civilians – the majority from Saudi airstrikes, [according to U.N. estimates](#).
