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United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing: “U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula
February 6, 2019

Good morning.

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished members of the committee: Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss U.S. policy in the Arabian Peninsula, and especially the conflict in Yemen. I am pleased to join a panel with David Harden, Mara Karlin, and Michael Singh. Their wisdom and experience on these difficult issues runs deep, and it’s a privilege to share a table with them. Likewise, I have the utmost respect for this committee’s oversight and policy roles, holding the administration accountable while working to shape a bipartisan strategy for the region that serves America’s interests and lives up to our values.

The subject of today’s hearing is a broad one — U.S. policy in the Arabian peninsula. Through the course of our testimony and your questions, I expect we will touch on a significant number of pressing issues, from the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen, to the U.S.-Saudi relationship, to the continuing breach between Qatar and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to Iran’s negative influence on regional security and stability.

I look forward to engaging in detail on each of these issues, and others. At the outset, I want to make three broad points.

First, Congress can and must take action to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen, and help pave the way for a diplomatic solution.

I served in the Obama administration when the initial intelligence, refueling, and logistical assistance to the Saudi-led coalition began. The logic behind that assistance was at least in part that it would give the United States influence in pushing the coalition to (a) abide by international humanitarian law and (b) conduct its military action in a way to maximize the possibility of a diplomatic solution and minimize non-combatant casualties. As the years have gone by, it is clear that this approach did not work, a point that I, along with dozens of former colleagues from the Obama administration, made last year in a public letter. Our initial approach ultimately turned into a blank check under the current administration, and the moral and human cost has been staggering. U.S. assistance is contributing to the continuation of a conflict that has created and perpetuated what today is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

This has had devastating direct and indirect impacts on the Yemeni people. The Director of National Intelligence testified to the Congress last week that the “humanitarian impacts of the conflict in Yemen—including, famine, disease, and internal displacement—will be acute in 2019”

and could easily worsen if the coalition cuts key supply lines to Sanaa.” The DNI underscored this point with astonishing figures, stating that there are, “more than 22 million people, or approximately 75 percent of the population, in need of assistance, with millions of people at severe risk of famine by the UN definition—numbers that are likely to rise quickly if disruptions to aid access continue.” Late last year, the UN’s humanitarian coordinator said that nearly a quarter of Yemen’s population was on the brink of starvation, with food insecurity affecting two-thirds of the population. Meanwhile, civilian casualties from coalition strikes rose 164 percent between June and September of last year alone, and blockades have prevented food and humanitarian supplies from reaching the people who need them the most. The Stockholm Agreement has been a welcome step, but a tentative and fragile one.

To be clear, the coalition does not bear all of the responsibility for the violence and suffering in Yemen. The Huthis have chosen war over diplomacy, too, and there is an immense amount of blood on their hands. And while the Huthis are not Hizballah, it is clearly the case that Iran continues provide them material support and cheerleading.

Part of the reason this conflict is so intractable is that it has become internationalized, with Iran as well as the Saudi-led coalition — as well as us — fueling it. The longer this conflict continues, the more the participants will destabilize the region — including by unleashing more potent extremist and terrorist forces. Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, has continued to take advantage of the governance vacuum in parts of the country.

The right approach for the United States is to put pressure on the coalition to curtail its military activities, including by withdrawing U.S. military assistance, while increasing constructive efforts—in tandem with our allies and partners—to disrupt and reduce Iran’s support for the Huthis. When it comes to countering the Iranian threat, our current approach has done nothing but make things worse: it has strengthened the Huthis and aided Iran.

At the end of the day, this is a human-made crisis requiring a human-made solution. Fortunately, Congress has already made clear that it wants to be part of that solution. Indeed, recent Congressional pressure has helped to rein in some of the worst instincts of our partners, opening up more space for diplomatic negotiations, building on the Stockholm agreement. But Congress should not stop here. I believe the War Powers Resolution that passed the Senate last year is worthy of support, and that Congress should send that message to the President’s desk—along with a signal to the international community that the time to end the conflict has come. I also commend legislative proposals to prohibit logistical support and the sale or transfer of offensive weapons. The goal should be to end U.S. support for this campaign, while encouraging the administration to take a more active role in diplomacy to reach a political solution to the conflict.

Second, the Congress should reinforce its commitment to defending the territorial integrity of regional partners in the face of continuing threats from state and non-state actors.

As Congress sends a powerful signal that it is time to end the war and takes tangible steps to end American support, it can also show that our commitment to the territorial integrity of our regional partners is rock solid. Here too it is worth quoting the DNI, who testified: “Iran continues to

provide support that enables Huthi attacks against shipping near the Bab el Mandeb Strait and land-based targets deep inside Saudi Arabia and the UAE, using ballistic missiles and UAVs.” In response, Congress should support increased maritime patrols on the Saudi Red Sea coast and a renewed push to install more sophisticated missile defense systems in the Gulf.

The bottom line is that an end to offensive support for the war in Yemen should be accompanied by an increase in defensive support for our partners, especially in light of the malign role that Iran continues to play. This security assistance need not, and should not, always take the form of big-ticket items with flashy price tags. It should be shaped to the real threats and real needs confronting each state. For example, the provision of and training on cyber defenses and ensuring inter-operability among Gulf defensive systems can help thwart threats our partners actually face, while also limiting the provision of further offensive capabilities that can find their way on to Yemen’s battlefield. Congress should proceed with a review of security assistance to the Gulf with these parameters in mind.

More broadly, Congress should hold the administration accountable for failing to produce a coherent Iran strategy that ties available means to realistic objectives. The intelligence community continues to believe that Iran is complying with the JCPOA, and in exiting the agreement, this administration has decreased our leverage in holding Iran responsible for its malign behavior. We should not mistake a tool — sanctions — for a strategy. The administration has failed to articulate with any clarity what it hopes to achieve through these sanctions, as well as how those sanctions relate to other aspects of administration policy. The president himself has been all over the map on this issue, from issuing threats to saying the Iranians “can do what they want in Syria.” Congress should demand a clearer approach that holds Iran accountable without putting us on a path to war. And security cooperation with our partners should proceed on the understanding that the United States opposes unnecessary escalation that could trigger a military conflict with Iran.

Third, this hearing should mark the start of a bipartisan strategic review of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

Too often in Washington, talk of the U.S.-Saudi relationship centers around a cartoonish binary: unconditional support or throwing the relationship away. This is both a silly and counterproductive way to approach a complex partnership in a complex time. If any good can come in the aftermath of the shocking murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it should be a serious conversation about how we establish a mature, stable relationship between our two countries (and not just our two leaders) that advances shared interests, while accounting for rather than wishing away actions that undermine those interests and run contrary to our values.

A core pillar of our relationship with Saudi Arabia has been its potential, at least, to be a stabilizing regional force. But friends have to speak honestly: Riyadh has engaged in a number of destabilizing actions over the past two years, including escalating the conflict in Yemen, leading the blockade of Qatar -- home to the regional headquarters of U.S. Central Command and 10,000 U.S. troops -- and clumsily intervening in the domestic politics of Lebanon. There is little evidence that a necessary course correction, toward a more sober, effective regional strategy, has

begun. Consequently, the United States has to think about the types of measures we can take, including on Yemen and arms sales, to push our partner in the right direction.

The United States must also insist on genuine accountability for Khashoggi's murder. Impunity in the death of a U.S. resident is unacceptable — and everyone involved should face appropriate consequences. Until there is a transparent and complete accounting for this heinous act, it cannot be business as usual.

None of this is about punishing Saudi Arabia — it's about putting this relationship, and American strategy in the region, on more durable footing. For example, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia do still share an interest in countering the threat that Iran poses in the region and beyond. The U.S. should help regional states address that threat, in addition to steps we take on our own. But that does not mean blind deference to the judgment of regional actors; so far, this approach has only empowered the leaders in Tehran. The DNI testified that Iran continues to find ways to advance its regional agenda. He said in his written testimony: "Iran's regional ambitions and improved military capabilities almost certainly will threaten US interests in the coming year, driven by Tehran's perception of increasing US, Saudi, and Israeli hostility, as well as continuing border insecurity, and the influence of hardliners."

There is a better way than outsourcing our regional Iran policy to others. Instead of continuing to support a strategically-disastrous war in Yemen, the United States should be prioritizing healing the GCC rift, considering how to turn up pressure on Iranian maritime shipments, pushing for theater missile defense arrangements, and competing for influence with Iran in Iraq, Lebanon, and Qatar, where there are natural constituencies for U.S. support. Bottom line: America's Iran policy should be shaped in Washington rather than Riyadh.

At the same time, the United States should elevate the priority of reform and human rights in the relationship with Saudi Arabia. The arrest and torture of women activists and other voices of protest and dissent within Saudi Arabia have made the Crown Prince's ballyhooed claims of reform ring hollow. Washington needs to offer a more consistent voice for human dignity and human rights—both in public and in private. Since this administration has proven that it will not be that voice, the responsibility will fall to Congress. A first step would be for Congress to call for the release of those imprisoned for dissenting views, including clerics and activists. Managing the tension between values and interests in the context of the U.S.-Saudi relationship requires a recognition that these are not mutually-exclusive notions. And we must never be afraid to hold Saudi Arabia to a higher standard than we have historically been prepared to do.

Of course, when our partners take positive steps, we should lift them up and give them the credit they deserve. For example, the UAE's invitation to Pope Francis to visit the Arabian Peninsula is a very big deal, and a very good thing.

I am clear-eyed about the fact that President Trump is in the unconditional support camp when it comes to Saudi Arabia and the Crown Prince, and that such support dates back to his longstanding business interests in the region. He seems to think that Saudi Arabia has all the leverage, thanks at least in part to its arms purchases, and we have none. He also seems to have a particular affinity for autocrats. This only increases the urgency for hearings like this one, and for an

ongoing Congressional effort to define the terms of a relationship with Saudi Arabia that works for all. I am one of many who are eager to contribute to that effort.

Thank you again for inviting me here today, and I look forward to answering your questions.