

January 13, 2017

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

You have been an amazing, transformational President. In foreign policy, you showed the power of U.S. diplomacy. There is, however, one disturbing issue that stands out as being inconsistent with who you are and who we are as a country: the continued U.S. military support for Saudi-led Coalition airstrikes that have killed mass numbers of civilians in Yemen. These airstrikes—which have killed children, women, doctors, newlyweds and funeral mourners—are likely war crimes. We respectfully ask you to do the right thing before you leave office and stop the U.S. refueling of Coalition aircraft that strike civilian targets in Yemen.

After an internal review of what the U.S. is doing in Yemen, your Administration on December 13th blocked a \$350 million sale of 16,000 guided munitions kits to Saudi Arabia. By blocking the sale of these weapons, the Administration acknowledged the unacceptable behavior of the Coalition in striking multiple civilian targets for the last year and a half—including hospitals, schools, wedding parties, markets and funerals. But we are extremely puzzled that the Administration decided to continue the U.S. military operation of refueling the very same aircraft that strike civilian targets in Yemen. This approach sends a mixed signal to Saudi Arabia and is logically and internally inconsistent.

More troubling, the direct U.S. military operations of refueling Coalition aircraft that have repeatedly struck civilians may put U.S. personnel at legal risk of aiding and abetting war crimes. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented over 70 unlawful airstrikes by Coalition aircraft. Aircraft obviously need fuel to complete their mission and the use of American planes and American pilots to refuel Coalition aircraft that bomb civilians in Yemen makes the U.S. complicit in possible war crimes.

A report released by the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner in August 2016 shows the staggering effect this war has wrought upon an already fragile country. The report reveals that of all the deaths, nearly half were civilians. It is particularly dangerous to be a child in the conflict and 560,000 can no longer attend school. Airstrikes and other fighting have forced over 3.1 million people to flee their homes since March 2015. A startling 82 percent of the population – over 20 million people – are in need of humanitarian assistance, while 14.1 million people cannot afford adequate food for their families, causing 3 million women and children to suffer from malnutrition.

Denunciation of the deadly Saudi-led bombing campaign has been widespread. Respected publications such as the *New York Times* have been scathing in their opposition to American support for the bombing campaign. In August 2016, the *Times* wrote, in the first of two highly critical editorials, “The United States is complicit in [Yemen’s] carnage. It has enabled the coalition in many ways, including selling arms to the Saudis.” The *Times* also stated that, “Given the civilian casualties, further American support for this war is indefensible.”

Congress has repeatedly indicated substantial opposition to U.S. support for the Saudi-led bombings. In June 2016, 204 Members of the House on a bipartisan basis voted to block the transfer of cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia after reports of their use in Yemen. In September, 64 Members of Congress wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry, urging a delay in weapons sale to Saudi Arabia over concerns about civilian casualties and 27 Senators voted to halt a \$1.15 billion weapons sale to Saudi Arabia. These Congressional votes to block foreign weapons sales were the first in decades, demonstrating that the level of opposition to U.S. participation has risen to extraordinary levels.

We understand Iran is providing assistance to the Houthis and that Saudi Arabia views this threat as critical to their security. But that does not justify the commission of apparent war crimes by the Coalition. International law and the Law of Armed Conflict apply in all armed conflicts—there is no Saudi Arabia exception that allows the slaughter of civilians in Yemen.

The efforts by your Administration to work with the Saudis to reduce civilian casualties have apparently failed to achieve their goals. Another school in Yemen was struck just a few days ago, on January 10, 2017 by Coalition aircraft, killing children.

U.S. operational support for the Coalition also undermines U.S. national security by strengthening extremist groups like al-Qaida and ISIS. Every Coalition airstrike enabled by the U.S. military that kills children and women becomes a powerful recruiting tool for terrorists. The Coalition's immoral operational conduct in Yemen has put U.S. national security, humanitarian leadership and our collective moral conscience at risk.

We urge you to heed the calls of civil society and Congress to end U.S. military support for this bloodshed. This includes ending the refueling of Coalition aircraft. As former Pentagon official Pierre Sprey has noted, "If the Saudis had to do it without our tankers, the level of bombing would be enormously reduced, probably by a factor of three." We also urge you to place conditions on future arms sales to the Saudis and their Coalition partners that will limit their use in this and other deadly and destructive regional conflicts.

When you addressed the bicameral Democratic Caucus earlier this month, you stated "Doing the right thing is a virtue unto itself." We believe in you. We know you would not want your legacy to have the stain of direct U.S. support for the unnecessary slaughter of civilians in Yemen. We respectfully urge you to counter this troubling legacy by taking the steps outlined above, in addition to any other appropriate action to end U.S. support for this indiscriminate bombing campaign and bring the conflict to a peaceful, negotiated resolution. We respectfully urge you to do the right thing in your final days as our Commander-in-Chief.

Sincerely,

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

John Conyers
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

David Cicilline
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Rick Nolan
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress