

Testimony

Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

U.S. Policy in Yemen

Statement of

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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. The Administration shares your belief that ending the conflict in Yemen is in our national security interests.

As you all have heard, as a response to the heinous and unlawful use of chemical weapons, on April 13, the militaries of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom executed strikes on three chemical weapons facilities involved in the development, production, and storage of chemical weapons in Syria. These strikes were focused on degrading Syria's chemical weapons capabilities, setting back its chemical weapons research and production program, and deterring the further use of chemical weapons, consistent with U.S. and our allies' policy on Syria, and were taken after considerable deliberation and international consultations and coordination.

The United States has tried repeatedly to use all diplomatic, economic, and political tools to stop the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons as Assad's supporters turn a blind eye and has chosen to use force as a last resort. Russia has stood in the way of every effort, vetoed key accountability efforts, blocked the Joint Investigative Mechanism, and has failed to live up to its guarantee in regard to the 2013 Framework Agreement that Syria would cease all use of chemical weapons and fully declare its entire stockpile for verifiable destruction. And, Iran acts malignly in Syria - pouring resources and militias to support Assad and advance its regional ambitions. Against this backdrop, the targeted military action by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom against military targets connected to the Syrian chemical weapons program was justified and legitimate as a measure to deter and prevent Syria's illegal and unacceptable use of chemical

weapons. This targeted military action sends a powerful message to the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran, and international community that chemical weapons will never be tolerated and there will be consequences for their use.

Defeating ISIS-Yemen and AQAP, countering Iran's nefarious activities in the region, and reducing the suffering of the Yemeni people, all hinge on the resolution of this conflict. AQAP, ISIS-Yemen, and the IRGC are manipulating the security vacuum created by the conflict to expand their influence in Yemen. While the international community must do all it can to mitigate humanitarian suffering, the only way to truly end the humanitarian crisis is by ending the conflict. To that end, the United States firmly believes that the only possible solution to the conflict in Yemen is a negotiated political settlement under UN auspices.

I wish to be clear; our military support to the Saudi-led Coalition supports important U.S. national security and diplomatic objectives. Further, Iran's provision of sophisticated weaponry to the Houthis both exacerbates this conflict and advances Iran's regional ambitions. The Houthis have repeatedly used Iranian ballistic missile and cruise missile technology and, as we saw as recently as April 11, have targeted Riyadh's international airport, Aramco facilities, and Red Sea shipping lanes. Moreover, the Houthis launch rockets along and into Saudi Arabia's southern border on an almost daily basis. Over 80,000 U.S. citizens live in Saudi Arabia. In this context, U.S. military support serves a clear purpose: to reinforce Saudi and Emirati self-defense in the face of intensifying Houthi threats and to expand the capability of our Gulf partners to push back against Iran's regionally destabilizing actions. This support, in turn, provides us access and influence to push for a political solution to the conflict.

Curtailling U.S. military support would not persuade the Saudi-led coalition to abandon its air campaign. If we curtail U.S. military support, the Saudis could well pursue defense relationships with countries that do not have an interest in ending the humanitarian crisis, minimizing civilian casualties, or making progress towards a political solution. Critical U.S. access to support for our own campaign against violent extremists could be placed in jeopardy. We are serious about working to reduce collateral casualties. U.S. advisors have provided training to senior Saudi military personnel, including on the importance of adhering to the law of armed conflict (LOAC). Through diplomatic and military-to-military engagements, we regularly emphasize the strategic importance and legal obligations to comply with the LOAC, including the obligation to take all feasible precautions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians. We assess that progress has been made over the past six months.

The Saudis accept that a political solution to the conflict in Yemen must be attempted and have asked for U.S. support in renewing a political process. During his meeting with President Trump, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman agreed that a political resolution to the conflict is ultimately necessary to bring greater stability to the region and meet the needs of the Yemeni people. New UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, just completed initial consultations with the key parties to the conflict, including the Republic of Yemen Government and the Houthis. The goal is to create a framework for success before entering into comprehensive negotiations, which the UN would convene. Saudi leadership has engaged with Griffiths.

Martin Griffiths will be in in Washington tomorrow. I will chair an interagency meeting with him in which we get his views on the way forward and then work

with the Coalition to push ahead on a political process. We will be consulting closely with the UK, the Saudis, and the Emiratis in coming weeks.

When formal negotiations do begin, it is important to note that Saudi Arabia has vital national security concerns that must be addressed by the Houthis. The Saudis have consistently articulated an end-state for Yemen as a complete cessation to cross-border ballistic missile attacks; a secure, stable Saudi-Yemeni border; blunting Iran's influence in the country; and a stable Yemeni government able to provide for its people. We support these ends as well. The Houthis, to date and during several months of negotiations in 2016, have been unwilling to provide meaningful assurances regarding Saudi Arabia's legitimate security concerns.

The Saudis, of course, have to make compromises of their own, and we will continue encouraging them to do so. The Houthis will likely retain a political role in Yemen. However, it is important to note that this is not a one-sided process. The Houthis will have to make clear commitments to respect Saudi security. A durable commitment will have to involve the buy-in of key Yemeni parties, including the Republic of Yemen Government, the Houthis, and other local Yemeni actors.

We all agree the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is unacceptable. However, the U.S. and its allies have persuaded the Coalition to take incremental, but positive steps. Last month, the Saudis and Emiratis provided nearly \$1 billion to Yemen's humanitarian response. This complements the U.S. government announcement of an additional \$87 million (more than \$854 million since the beginning of fiscal year 2017) and an additional \$1 billion in pledges from other donors. We also worked with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Saudi-led Coalition's

Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Cell (EHOC), authorities in Dubai, and others to facilitate delivery of the four U.S.-funded WFP mobile cranes, which arrived in Hudaydah port on January 15. The cranes began offloading supplies at the port on February 9. These four 60-ton cranes have the potential to improve throughput capacity at the port by as much as 40%, and may cut vessel discharge time in half from approximately one week to 3-4 days. We also welcomed the announcement on February 6 from the Saudi-led Coalition that it had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Republic of Yemen Government to fund and install cranes at the ports of Aden, Mukalla, and Al-Mokha. Beyond humanitarian assistance, we are also providing economic and development assistance to help restore critical health services, and access to education repair community infrastructure, and provide help for the revival of production and commercial activities, the collapse of which is a major factor contributing to the wide-scale humanitarian disaster.

On January 22, the Coalition announced elements of its Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations (YCHO) plan. Part of the YCHO plan envisions expanding the use of other ports and overland points of entry to broaden options for importing humanitarian assistance and commercial goods to Yemen. Building the capacity of Yemen to import more goods is a worthy long-term endeavor and we welcome the Coalition's efforts on that front; meanwhile, we continue to stress that increasing capacity through other ports or via land routes cannot replace key Houthi-controlled ports such as Hudaydah and Saleef, given immediate humanitarian needs. Of course, we agree that more must be done and are pushing the Saudis to take additional steps to increase access – not nearly enough ships are dropping off supplies at Hudaydah port. This is due primarily to uncertainty regarding the port's status and long clearance processes. We continue to urge the

Coalition to make a clear statement to shippers that Hudaydah port will remain open. However, even here, progress is being made: The Saudis have increased their engagement with the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) and are working to improve internal clearance times and procedural hurdles in coordination with the UN and WFP. The head of YCHO plan's implementation affirmed to us a continued commitment to improve access.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about ongoing efforts to end the conflict and mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. I look forward to answering your questions.