

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

---

9-2022

### The Campaign to End U.S. War-Making in Yemen: Strategies of Congressional Advocacy, 2015–2020

Zachary Laub

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/5019](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/5019)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

THE CAMPAIGN TO END U.S. WAR-MAKING IN YEMEN:  
STRATEGIES OF CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY, 2015–2020

by

ZACHARY LAUB

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2022

© 2022 ZACHARY LAUB

All Rights Reserved

The Campaign to End U.S. War-Making in Yemen:  
Strategies of Congressional Advocacy, 2015–2020

by  
Zachary Laub

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in  
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Date

---

Susan L. Woodward  
Thesis Advisor

---

Date

---

Jack Jacobs  
Executive Officer

## ABSTRACT

The Campaign to End U.S. War-Making in Yemen:  
Strategies of Congressional Advocacy, 2015–2020

by  
Zachary Laub

Advisor: Susan L. Woodward

Civil society groups and a handful of lawmakers have pursued a robust campaign to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen in Congress. By framing the conflict as a war of Saudi aggression and pulling legislative levers that enabled them to force floor votes, advocates turned a niche issue into one that galvanized majorities in Congress and generated significant media coverage. Even when vetoes blocked their ability to enact binding war powers and arms transfer legislation, advocates nevertheless exerted political pressure that gave the president and the Saudi-led coalition alike impetus to moderate the war effort. This case suggests both the potential and limits of pursuing antiwar advocacy through Congress.

# Table of Contents

<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. The Yemen War and Congressional Resistance .....</b>	<b>8</b>
The Obama Administration’s Entry into War .....	8
Escalation Under the Trump Administration .....	16
<b>III. Congressional Advocacy Strategies .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Reframing the Conflict.....	27
Taking Advantage of Procedural Hooks .....	34
Indirect Influence and Its Limits .....	38
<b>IV. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Selected Bibliography .....</b>	<b>43</b>

## I. Introduction

In March 2015, President Barack Obama took the United States into war in Yemen without public debate, much less congressional authorization: the White House announced the matter quietly in a press release.<sup>1</sup> The administration insisted that it was not engaging in combat, but there is little doubt that the United States was intimately involved in the Saudi-led war: among other things, it provided Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners with targeting assistance and other intelligence, refueled jets as they were making bombing runs, and the precision-guided missiles they dropped.<sup>2</sup>

Saudi Arabia had promised that the intervention would be brief, but air power failed to dislodge Houthi insurgents and their allies, who had taken the capital, Sanaa, and were approaching the port city of Aden. It did, however, drastically ratchet up the civil war's destructiveness. The coalition's wanton disregard for civilian lives and infrastructure quickly became apparent: The coalition declared the entire northern city of Saada a military target in the war's early months, destroying residences and markets.<sup>3</sup> Intense bombardment resulted in at least 1,750 direct civilian casualties by the end of the intervention's first year; as the UN would document, deaths from coalition air strikes exceeded those from ground fighting among Yemeni factions. At least as consequential was the destruction of infrastructure vital to supplying Yemenis with food and fuel.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Yemen," March 25, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/25/statement-nsc-spokesperson-bernadette-meehan-situation-yemen>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Micah Zenko, "Make No Mistake — the United States Is at War in Yemen," *Foreign Policy*, March 30, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/30/make-no-mistake-the-united-states-is-at-war-in-yemen-saudi-arabia-iran/>.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Targeting Saada: Unlawful Coalition Airstrikes on Saada City in Yemen*, June 30, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/30/targeting-saada/unlawful-coalition-airstrikes-saada-city-yemen>

<sup>4</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, Including Violations and Abuses Since September 2014*, A/HRC/39/43, Annex 4 (August 17, 2018), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/252/79/PDF/G1825279.pdf?OpenElement>.

Amid the earliest reports of impending catastrophe, a small coterie of advocates from civil society and on Capitol Hill coalesced to challenge U.S. support.<sup>5</sup> Civil society groups played a variety of roles, both working within formal institutional channels and bringing pressure to bear from outside. They educated members of Congress and the media about the war and its humanitarian consequences; they advised sympathetic members of Congress on laws and legislative tools at their disposal to challenge U.S. participation in it; and they organized grassroots activists to raise the salience of the issue with fence-straddling members of Congress through calls and town hall appearances and demonstrations. Many of the groups were long-standing antiwar organizers or faith-based lobbies, such as the Quaker-affiliated Friends Committee on National Legislation; others were newer, digitally oriented networks, such as Win Without War. They forged connections with Yemeni civil society. Most notable among them, the human rights group Mwatana provided vital research to the media and to Congress.<sup>6</sup>

Within Congress, a handful of offices championed the issue and gave these civil society groups institutional access.<sup>7</sup> Progressives advocated for a more humane foreign policy, while libertarian-leaning conservatives asserted that unauthorized war-making represented an imperial

---

<sup>5</sup> On advocacy coalitions, see Jonathan Pierce and Katherine Hicks, “Advocacy Coalitions in Foreign Policy,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Cameron G. Thies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). On the related concept of issue clusters, see Rebecca K. C. Hersman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy*. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 47–50.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Danny Postel, “Progressive Surge Propels Turning Point in US Policy on Yemen,” *MERIP* 289 (Winter 2018), <https://merip.org/2019/03/progressive-surge-propels-turning-point-in-us-policy-on-yemen/>.

<sup>7</sup> Hersman observes that individual members and their staffs routinely exercise outside influence on foreign policy matters of personal interest. These “issue leaders” are often influential not because of their seniority or committee memberships but simply because they have sought-after expertise. Hersman, *Friends and Foes*, 29–32. Carter and Scott term these members “foreign policy entrepreneurs,” emphasizing their ability to influence policy, through channels both formal and informal, due to both their expertise and their persistence in building legislative coalitions. Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott, *Choosing to Lead Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). One of the conditions that has enabled individual members to freelance on foreign policy issues is the decline in activity of the foreign affairs oversight committees, which Fowler dates to the end of the Cold War. Since then, she argues, membership on these committees has become less prestigious and politically advantageous for most members. Linda L. Fowler, *Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), ch. 3. See also Hersman, *Friends and Foes*, 14–18.



president trampling on the legislature’s constitutional prerogatives — namely, the sole right to declare war. These members came to the issue from diverse backgrounds: Representative Ted Lieu, for example, had been a judge advocate general in the air force; Representative. Ro Khanna cites his family’s experience of the West Bengal famine; and the late Representative Walter Jones came to regret the wreckage of the Iraq War and became an outspoken opponent of U.S. militarism.<sup>8</sup> They challenged a foreign policy mainstream prevalent in both parties that saw Saudi Arabia and its primary coalition partner, the United Arab Emirates, as guarantors of U.S. interests in the Middle East.

This coalition of civil society groups and their allies on Capitol Hill managed to transform the intervention in Yemen from a niche issue to one that demanded the full Congress’s attention. The arc of advocacy shows a build-up from mild oversight — a handful of members sending letters querying the administration about its policy and issuing statements of concern — to majorities of the House and Senate supporting legislative measures with teeth.

When Trump succeeded Obama, he dispensed with any U.S. ambivalence about the worthiness of the Saudi intervention, as well as with his predecessor’s half-measures to rein in the Gulf states’ worst abuses. As circumstances deteriorated in Yemen and evidence of atrocities mounted, the campaign reached its zenith. By late 2018 and continuing into 2019, bipartisan majorities coalesced around major legislation on arms sales and war powers. The two chambers jointly voted to compel an end to U.S. participation in hostilities for the first time since the War Powers Resolution of 1973 made possible such a measure. And a trio of joint resolutions sought to

---

<sup>8</sup> John Nichols, “It Took Losing an Election to Really Crystalize Ro Khanna’s Vision,” *The Nation*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/podcast/politics/ro-khanna-next-left/>; George Zornick, “Why Is the United States Risking Involvement in Possible War Crimes? This Congressman Wants to Know,” *The Nation*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/why-is-the-united-states-risking-involvement-in-possible-war-crimes-this-congressman-wants-to-know/>; and Barry Yeoman, “Walter Jones Jr. Is a Voice of Dissent in the GOP,” *The Nation*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/walter-jones-jr-is-a-voice-of-dissent-in-the-gop/>.

block arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Congress had not passed such a measure concerning arms sales to any country since 1989.<sup>9</sup>

Trump vetoed these bills, and Congress failed to muster the supermajorities necessary to override. As a matter of lawmaking, then, the advocacy coalition would seem to have relatively meager results for all the efforts it had invested in working through Congress. And yet advocates can reasonably claim that the intense activity they fomented on Capitol Hill mitigated the war's humanitarian toll and lessened U.S. complicity in potential war crimes. The Trump administration reversed course, pressing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to pursue a UN-mediated truce, when congressional momentum was at its most intense. The Gulf monarchies, savvy participants in Washington politics, were no less aware of the tenor on Capitol Hill, and they too moderated their conduct of the war under congressional pressure. The UAE went so far as to back out of the coalition. A long stalemate gave both countries strategic reason to seek to wind down the war, but contemporaneous reporting corroborates that a desire to head off congressional ire was part of their calculus.

It was hardly inevitable that Congress would take up the war in Yemen in a forceful manner. It has delegated significant national security authorities to the executive branch and is often deferential to the president on matters involving the use of force. Its oversight is intermittent and sometimes perfunctory.<sup>10</sup> The war in Yemen, moreover, did not entail the conditions that would make robust congressional involvement most likely. There was never a question, for example, that

---

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Fact Sheet: Joint Resolutions of Disapproval Under the Arms Export Control Act*, May 6, 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/weapons/R47094.pdf>. The measure ultimately failed to overcome a veto.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Linda L. Fowler, "Congressional War Powers," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

the U.S. military would be bogged down in a quagmire and U.S. servicemembers exposed to mortal risk, as in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup>

Nor do the dynamics of partisanship satisfyingly explain why Congress challenged successive presidents on this issue.<sup>12</sup> The majorities that coalesced against the war were predominantly Democratic, they did so only well into Trump's term, when the Democratic base was eager for "resistance" to a host of Trump policies cast as cruel. But not only did some stalwart Republicans cross the aisle to champion this issue; much of this legislative bloc has stuck together well into President Biden's term. More than 100 House Democrats are cosponsoring a new war powers resolution on Yemen, undoubtedly to the administration's irritation. They include not just members of the Progressive Caucus but also party leaders and self-styled national security pragmatists who are otherwise closely aligned with Biden.<sup>13</sup>

The question, then, is how did advocates enlist Congress to influence the course of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen? The answer should be of interest to both scholars and advocates.

Observers of Congress have long noted that the body influences policy not only through formal lawmaking and oversight functions but also in indirect ways. When an administration is

---

<sup>11</sup> William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> Howell and Pevehouse, for example, offer this hypothesis regarding the composition of Congress: "As his party's numbers grow, the president ought to enjoy greater discretion to exercise military force when and as he pleases; as they dwindle the president should proceed with considerably more caution. Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, 36. Kriner corroborates this hypothesis and extends it from the initiation of war to its conduct. Douglas L. Kriner, *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 139. In comparative perspective, Baum and Potter emphasize the importance of a robust opposition to publicizing foreign policy actions the executive would rather keep quiet. Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, *War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 21–28.

<sup>13</sup> H.J.Res. 87, 117th Congress (2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-joint-resolution/87/cosponsors>. The Biden administration, consistent with both the Trump and Obama administrations, maintains that U.S. support to the Gulf coalition does not amount to "hostilities" as defined in WPR, and thus that the bill is moot. White House, "Letter to the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of the Senate regarding the War Powers Report," June 8, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/08/letter-to-the-speaker-of-the-house-and-president-pro-tempore-of-the-senate-regarding-the-war-powers-report-3/>.

sympathetic to Congress's position on an issue, or when it has yet to form an opinion on it, this influence often takes place quietly, as members carry on back-channel conversations with executive branch officials out of the public eye.<sup>14</sup> When, on the other hand, Congress is at odds with the president, members engage in public posturing, pressing their views in the media.<sup>15</sup> Member's positions shape the tenor of that coverage, and the domestic political drama of congressional challenges to the president may drive editors to give more, and more prominent, coverage of international issues that they may have previously neglected.<sup>16</sup>

The case of Yemen suggests a specific way in which this public posturing functions. Advocates worked assiduously to reframe the conflict, so that members and the public came to understand the war as one of Saudi aggression — one that was aided and abetted by the United States. Once that framing took hold, it became difficult for members to defend U.S. policy. And then advocates exploited special procedures that inhere to arms export control and war powers measures to force floor votes. Members who had little interest in the issue could no longer shrink from it: they had to take a position on the record, one that they could defend to their constituents. In this way, advocates cultivated majorities in opposition to the war by 2018–19. Even when these majorities could not bind the executive branch, the White House nonetheless sought to mollify Congress rather than court further political costs. So too, it seems, did Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which depend on Congress's goodwill to satisfy a variety of core national interests, many of which have little to do with their objectives in Yemen. The turnabout in Congress is remarkable. Not only

---

<sup>14</sup> Hersman, *Friends and Foes*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, 29–32; Kriner, *After the Rubicon*, 61–69.

<sup>16</sup> On the media “indexing” their stories to fit the contours of official opinion, see John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, “Government’s Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1991,” *Political Communication* 13, no. 4 (October 1996): 385–405.

was the war a niche issue at its outset, but most members who did take a stand supported it.<sup>17</sup> Within four years, majorities in both chambers cast votes effectively condemning it.

The next chapter tracks the arc of congressional advocacy as it developed in tandem with the war itself. The following one delves into advocates' successful reframing of the conflict and canny use of legislative procedures to achieve political advantage. The conclusion then asks whether lessons from this advocacy campaign might be fruitfully applied to other contemporary cases of U.S. war-making.

---

<sup>17</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Congress and the War in Yemen: Oversight and Legislation 2015–2021*, updated February 10, 2022, 6, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R45046.pdf>; and International Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire: Lessons for Washington from Four Years of War*, April 15, 2019, 8, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/united-states/003-ending-yemen-quagmire-lessons-washington-four-years-war>.

## II. The Yemen War and Congressional Resistance

The Houthi takeover over Sanaa unfolded over late 2014 and early 2015, creating a situation that was intolerable for Saudi Arabia's newly crowned king, Salman, and his son, Minister of Defense Mohammed bin Salman. Yemen's transitional president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, had resigned his office and been kept under house arrest in the capital. Only after fleeing the city did he reassert his authority, however unpersuasively, from Aden, a port city that was itself threatened by the insurgents. The takeover meant that Yemen, which Saudi Arabia had long treated as a subservient country in its sphere of influence, was in the hands of a hostile insurgent group that would potentially give its archrival, Iran, a beachhead on its southern border. Saudi Arabia assembled a military coalition to restore Hadi and presented the United States with an ultimatum: either back the coalition or be sidelined.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Obama Administration's Entry into War*

The Obama administration was caught flat-footed by the turn of events. Its primary interest in Yemen since al-Qaeda bombed the USS *Cole* in 2000 was counterterrorism, and it did not appreciate the ways in which U.S. policy had helped create the conditions in which the Houthi coup could succeed. Its hyperfocus on counterterrorism left it ambivalent about aspects of Yemen's post-Arab Spring transition to democracy. Popular protests, part of the wave of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, had instigated the transition, but the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising the region's monarchies and headquartered in Riyadh, steered it, brokering a compromise among elites that promised President Ali Abdullah Saleh and others

---

<sup>1</sup> Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State* (London: Saqi, 2022), ch. 1; and Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*.

immunity from prosecution. The GCC accord made security sector reform a priority (no other Arab Spring country had adopted such a plan), but incumbents of the old regime stymied its implementation. After the 9/11 attacks, Saleh aligned with the United States, and U.S. forces began to train and equip elite Yemeni military units, essentially making them subcontractors in the “war on terror.” During the transition, the United States took the lead among international donors on the envisioned security sector reform, and it appears to have been content leaving in place Yemeni officers with whom the U.S. military had long worked. Many of those Yemeni officers remained loyal to Saleh after his ouster in 2011. Starting in 2014, they collaborated with the Houthis, joined by mutual opposition to the transitional government.<sup>2</sup>

A dismal economy, meanwhile, left the broader population with little loyalty to the transitional government. Deteriorating post-transition economic circumstances were exacerbated by international policies. Donors had pledged \$7.9 billion to support the transition in September 2012 but delivered only a fraction of it, and only after a delay of some 18 months — the time it took the Yemeni government to set up a body to disburse the funds that would allay donors’ concerns about corruption and state incapacity.<sup>3</sup> To meet the International Monetary Fund’s demands for reform, moreover, the government cut oil subsidies in July 2014. The move heightened economic hardship, which the Houthis exploited, organizing mass antigovernment protests.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, ch. 1; and Yezid Sayigh, *Crumbling States: Security Sector Reform in Libya and Yemen*, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, June 2015, 15–23, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Paper\\_Yezid-Sayigh\\_crumbling\\_states.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Paper_Yezid-Sayigh_crumbling_states.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Unlike some other donors, the United States did disburse 100 percent of its pledged amount. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, ch. 1, 9; and Susan L. Woodward, *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 244–249.

<sup>4</sup> Mohammed Ghobari, “Tens of Thousands of Yemeni Houthis Protest Against Govt in Capital,” Reuters, August 22, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-protests/tens-of-thousands-of-yemeni-houthis-protest-against-govt-in-capital-idUSKBN0GM12C20140822>; and “Yemen Fuel Subsidy Cuts Hit Poor Hardest,” IRIN, August 25, 2014, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2014/08/25/yemen-fuel-subsidy-cuts-hit-poor-hardest>.

When Saudi Arabia presented the United States with its ultimatum, the Obama administration had various reasons for assenting. One was its attachment to Hadi, who was the face of the transitional government. The GCC compromise had elevated Hadi, Saleh's longtime vice president, to the presidency. The United States saw him as not only the legitimate ruler but also a useful one: he allowed the United States to conduct drone strikes on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, thought to be the terrorist group's most dangerous franchise.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, however, U.S. interests regarding Yemen were secondary to regional considerations. Saudi Arabia had come to doubt U.S. commitments to its security because of the lukewarm U.S. reception of the Arab Spring, which toppled regional dictators, and, more recently, the nuclear negotiations with Iran, which were nearing their culmination with the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. The agreement would release the monarchies' regional archrival from some economic sanctions in exchange for limits on its nuclear development. U.S. officials did not want to further alienate the kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

The White House also believed that the Saudi intervention was inevitable, and that U.S. participation could at least make it more humane. The Saudi military had performed poorly in a previous war against the Houthis, in 2009. Its air force was inexperienced and lacked tactical controllers. U.S. support, American officials believed, could potentially professionalize it and mitigate civilian harm.<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2201, passed in February 2015, gave international legal cover to the intervention by demanding that the Houthis withdraw from

---

<sup>5</sup> On the various rationales the administration gave, see Zenko, "Make No Mistake"; and Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 6. For an administration perspective, see Robert Malley and Stephen Pomper, "How America Enables War in Yemen," *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 2 (April 2021): 73–89.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 6–7.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Malley and Pomper, "How America Enables War in Yemen." On Saudi military capabilities, see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016*, 314–316.



governmental institutions and free Hadi and members of his cabinet from detention.<sup>8</sup> And the campaign, the Saudis assured Washington, would be over in a matter of weeks; they originally named it *Decisive Storm*.<sup>9</sup>

Obama administration officials expressed reservations about the wisdom of the war and Saudi military capabilities.<sup>10</sup> “We knew we might be getting into a car with a drunk driver,” one official reportedly said.<sup>11</sup> Even so, the administration lent its backing. It shared intelligence with the Saudi air force, establishing a joint planning cell for U.S. military attachés to coordinate with their Gulf counterparts. It provided midair refueling for coalition war jets. And it facilitated the sale of massive amounts of U.S.-manufactured equipment and munitions, as well as the training and servicing the coalition militaries would need to use them. It is doubtful that the Saudi air force could have sustained the war for long without the United States’ support. “If either Washington or London halts the flow of logistics, the [Royal Saudi Air Force] will be grounded,” former intelligence analyst Bruce Riedel later wrote.<sup>12</sup> Between the two, the United States was far and away Saudi Arabia’s predominant supplier.<sup>13</sup>

Members of Congress, to the extent they weighed in at the outset, were generally supportive of Saudi Arabia. As the JCPOA negotiations neared completion, Republican and Democratic

---

<sup>8</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2201 (February 15, 2015), <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2201>.

<sup>9</sup> Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, ch. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*; and Nicholas Niarchos, “How the U.S. Is Making the War in Yemen Worse,” *New Yorker*, January 15, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/22/how-the-us-is-making-the-war-in-yemen-worse>.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Riedel, “After Khashoggi, U.S. Arms Sales to the Saudis Are Essential Leverage,” Brookings, October 10, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/10/after-khashoggi-us-arms-sales-to-the-saudis-are-essential-leverage/>.

<sup>13</sup> During the period 2016–20, the United States accounted for 79 percent of Saudi arms imports, and the United Kingdom 9 percent. Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020*, Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute, March 2021, [https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs\\_2103\\_at\\_2020\\_v2.pdf](https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf).

members alike took a hardline stance against Iran, threatening to derail the multilateral accord. In a bill introduced just two weeks prior to the start of the intervention, overwhelming, bipartisan majorities — 98 senators and 400 representatives — voted to curtail the president’s powers to enter into international agreements by subjecting any final accord to a 60-day congressional review period. During this time, the administration would be prohibited from delivering sanctions relief — that is, the key U.S. commitment under the nuclear negotiations. The review period would effectively provide Congress with an opportunity to veto the JCPOA.<sup>14</sup> Members’ objections to the agreement included the agreement’s failure to rein in Iran’s regional adventurism. They saw Yemen through this lens, judging the Houthis to be Iranian proxies. If they were inclined to say anything about the war, it was most likely to urge the Obama administration to offer the Gulf coalition even stronger backing.<sup>15</sup>

But reports of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure from errant air strikes — or perhaps even deliberate ones — arrived quickly. In August 2015, coalition war planes destroyed the cranes that offloaded goods at the port of Hodeidah, an act that augured famine: Yemen relied on imports for up to 90 percent of its food and fuel, and nearly 80 percent of imports and humanitarian aid came through Hodeidah.<sup>16</sup> The following month, an air strike on a wedding party killed 131.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Pub. L. No. 114–17 (2015), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/1191>.

<sup>15</sup> CRS, *Congress and the War in Yemen*, 6; and Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ensuring Yemen’s Lifeline: The Criticality of All Yemeni Ports,” November 13, 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/map/yemen/ensuring-yemen-s-lifeline-criticality-all-yemeni-ports-13-nov-2017-enar>.

<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Ghobari, “Death Toll from Air Strike on Wedding Party Rises Above 130: Medics,” Reuters, September 29, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/death-toll-from-air-strike-on-yemen-wedding-party-rises-above-130-medics-idUSKCN0RT0XT20150929>.

Members of congress began to express concerns. In October 2015, 13 Democratic representatives wrote to Obama urging the administration to “work with our Saudi partners to limit civilian casualties to the fullest extent possible.”<sup>18</sup> Such letters are routine, if mild, forms of congressional oversight; they are ways for members to both gather information and announce their positions. At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing with the U.S. ambassador to Yemen that month, the chair, Republican Bob Corker, and ranking member, Democrat Ben Cardin, both offered strong reassurances to the Gulf coalition and expressed dismay that the Obama administration had not offered it stronger support, yet even they felt compelled to acknowledge “an intolerable level of civilian casualties.” Senator Edward Markey went further, pointedly asking whether Saudi conduct might constitute such “gross violations of human rights” that they would trigger the Leahy Law — that is, compel a cutoff of U.S. military assistance.<sup>19</sup>

Also in October 2015, Corker and Cardin put a hold on planned sales of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) to Saudi Arabia worth \$1.3 billion,<sup>20</sup> exercising a procedural privilege afforded the committees’ leaders. The sale would replenish stocks depleted by the bombing campaign. The following month, the pair took a novel step: requiring the administration to provide 30 days’ notice prior to the shipment’s delivery, which would give Congress a second opportunity to block the transfer. The sale ultimately went through. Nevertheless, the move was a novel step; Congress had not previously attempted this maneuver, which was made possible by a 2013 amendment to the

---

<sup>18</sup> Rep. Debbie Dingell et al. to President Barack Obama, October 14, 2015, [https://debbiedingell.house.gov/sites/debbiedingell.house.gov/files/documents/151014\\_yemen%20airstrike%20letter.pdf](https://debbiedingell.house.gov/sites/debbiedingell.house.gov/files/documents/151014_yemen%20airstrike%20letter.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> *The U.S. Role and Strategy in the Middle East: Yemen and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 114th Congress (October 6, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Julian Pecquet, “Senate Democrats Hold Up Arms Sales for Saudi War in Yemen,” *Al-Monitor*, October 7, 2015, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/10/saudi-war-yemen-senate-arms-sale.html#ixzz7dHLa64pN>.

Arms Export Control Act. It signaled that committee leaders would begin applying greater scrutiny to arms deals that in the past they likely would have rubberstamped.<sup>21</sup>

News of civilian casualties piled up in the months that followed. Particularly egregious ones made headlines: coalition war jets struck Doctors Without Borders hospitals and other health infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> In March 2016, they struck a northern market, killing at least 97 civilians.<sup>23</sup> Amid reports that Saudi Arabia had dropped cluster bombs — deadly and indiscriminate — on Sanaa and increasing agitation in Congress, the Obama administration put a hold on future transfers of such weapons to Saudi Arabia. It was the White House’s first tangible signal of discontent with the coalition; until then, it had only issued statements of concern with civilian casualties.<sup>24</sup> The House subsequently tried to codify a prohibition on the transfer of cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia; the measure nearly succeeded on a 204–216 vote.<sup>25</sup>

In August 2016, Saudi Arabia escalated its air strikes, and civilian casualties mounted. A strike on a school killed 10 children. Another, on a Doctors Without Borders hospital, killed 11. An uneasy Obama administration began withdrawing U.S. personnel from the joint planning cell, whose ostensible purpose was to help professionalize the Saudi air force and help it mitigate civilian

---

<sup>21</sup> CRS, *Congress and the War in Yemen*, 4; and interview with Scott Paul, Oxfam America.

<sup>22</sup> Mwatana for Human Rights and Physicians for Human Rights, “*I Ripped the IV Out of My Arm and Started Running*”: *Attacks on Health Care in Yemen*, March 18, 2020, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/i-ripped-the-iv-out-of-my-arm-and-started-running-attacks-on-health-care-in-yemen/>.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: US Bombs Used in Deadliest Market Strike,” April 7, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/08/yemen-us-bombs-used-deadliest-market-strike>.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: Coalition Drops Cluster Bombs in Capital,” January 7, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/07/yemen-coalition-drops-cluster-bombs-capital>; and John Hudson, “Exclusive: White House Blocks Transfer of Cluster Bombs to Saudi Arabia,” *Foreign Policy*, May 27, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/27/exclusive-white-house-blocks-transfer-of-cluster-bombs-to-saudi-arabia/>.

<sup>25</sup> H.R. 5293 (2016), <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2016327>.

casualties.<sup>26</sup> UN human rights commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein reinforced the finding that the coalition had possibly committed war crimes.<sup>27</sup>

That same month, members sought to block an arms sale to Saudi Arabia worth \$1.15 billion primarily involving tanks. Sixty-four members of Congress wrote to the White House not only opposing the deal but intimating that the White House notified them of it during the August recess to evade congressional scrutiny.<sup>28</sup> The bill to block the sale ultimately garnered only 27 votes in the Senate.<sup>29</sup> But it was extraordinary that the bill had been put forward at all. This first legislative attempt to block an arms sale picked a hard target: the tanks were presumptively for Saudi Arabia to defend itself from cross-border attacks, and they would not have advanced the air war, the source of most civilian casualties. Even so, the measure demonstrated one way forward for advocates. It was also a marker that a seismic turn against Saudi Arabia was underway.<sup>30</sup>

It took a particularly grisly air strike for the Obama administration to further walk back its support for the coalition. After the coalition bombed a Sanaa funeral in October 2016, killing 140 attendees, the administration finally said it had not issued a “blank check,” and it ordered a policy review. “The ‘policy review,’ ” two administration veterans wrote at the time, “is an old and established Washington technique for avoiding tough decisions. . . . The hope is that by the time the

---

<sup>26</sup> Phil Stewart, “U.S. Withdraws Staff from Saudi Arabia Dedicated to Yemen Planning,” Reuters, August 19, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-usa-saudi-arabia/exclusive-u-s-withdraws-staff-from-saudi-arabia-dedicated-to-yemen-planning-idUSKCN10U1TL>; and Malley and Pomper, “Accomplice to Carnage,” 78.

<sup>27</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Situation of Human Rights in Yemen*, A/HRC/33/38 (August 4, 2016), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/172/38/PDF/G1617238.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Rep. Ted Lieu et al. to President Barack Obama, August 29, 2016, <https://lieu.house.gov/sites/lieu.house.gov/files/2016-08-29%20Letter%20to%20President%20Obama%20-%20Saudi%20Arms%20Sale%20SIGN-ON.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> S.J.Res. 39 (2016), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/39>.

<sup>30</sup> Karoun Demirjian, “Saudi Arabia Is Facing Unprecedented Scrutiny from Congress,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/09/21/saudi-arabia-is-facing-unprecedented-scrutiny-from-congress/>.

review is finished, the political pressure to take action will have passed.”<sup>31</sup> Only in December, as a lame duck, did the administration pause a planned PGM sale; still, it maintained in-flight refueling and other forms of support.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, then, the review did little to constrain the U.S. role in the war before the Obama handed it off to Trump.

### *Escalation Under the Trump Administration*

If Obama was a reluctant participant in the war, Trump entered office an enthusiastic one. The new president pledged close relations with Saudi Arabia and Mohammed bin Salman, the war’s architect. He had campaigned on a platform hostile to Iran and staffed his administration with like-minded national security officials, who wanted to withdraw from the JCPOA and believed that its relaxation of economic sanctions enabled Iranian regional aggression, including in Yemen. And Trump reveled in brokering arms deals on behalf of U.S. defense firms. The administration neglected the UN-mediated peace process and provided the Gulf coalition with targeting support.<sup>33</sup> In May 2017, the administration notified Congress that it would move forward with the PGM sale Obama had put on hold. A week later, Trump made Riyadh the first stop of his first trip overseas as president and boasted of signing arms deals with the kingdom worth \$110 billion.<sup>34</sup>

The coalition had been preparing to escalate the war with a campaign to wrest the port city of Hodeidah from insurgent control. The battle itself promised to be catastrophic, and its

---

<sup>31</sup> Richard Sokolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, “What a Real Review of U.S. Military Assistance to Saudi Arabia Would Say,” *War on the Rocks*, October 26, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/what-a-real-review-of-u-s-military-assistance-to-saudi-arabia-would-say/>.

<sup>32</sup> Helene Cooper, “U.S. Blocks Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia Amid Concerns Over Yemen War,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/politics/saudi-arabia-arms-sale-yemen-war.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Philip Rucker and Karen DeYoung, “Trump Signs ‘Tremendous’ Deals with Saudi Arabia on His First Day Overseas,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-gets-elaborate-welcome-in-saudi-arabia-embarking-on-first-foreign-trip/2017/05/20/679f2766-3d1d-11e7-a058-dbb23c75d82\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-gets-elaborate-welcome-in-saudi-arabia-embarking-on-first-foreign-trip/2017/05/20/679f2766-3d1d-11e7-a058-dbb23c75d82_story.html).

ramifications even more so: port operations had already been slowed by Saudi Arabia's destruction of cranes (and refusal to facilitate replacements) and fighting at the port had the potential to cut off food and fuel to the country's north.<sup>35</sup> Against this backdrop, members of Congress challenged the PGM sale. A joint resolution of disapproval, sponsored by Senators Rand Paul, Chris Murphy, and Al Franken, narrowly failed to advance on a 47–53 floor vote.<sup>36</sup> In just nine months since the previous vote on an arms sale, 20 more senators had joined on.

Congress also made its first attempt to leverage the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (WPR) to compel the administration to end its support for the Saudi-led military campaign. Representative Ro Khanna introduced the bill in the House in September 2017, joined by Progressive Caucus chair Mark Pocan and Republicans Thomas Massie and Walter Jones in asserting that U.S. assistance to the coalition amounted to unauthorized and unconstitutional participation by U.S. armed forces in hostilities.<sup>37</sup> However, House leadership — reportedly, the Democratic whip among them — balked at the measure and engineered a tepid alternative: a nonbinding statement of the “sense of the House of Representatives” that included a reminder that Congress had not authorized the use of military force.<sup>38</sup> This compromise passed the House in November by a 366–30 vote.<sup>39</sup> The vote came just after Saudi Arabia had tightened its blockade of ports in Houthi-controlled territory in

---

<sup>35</sup> Reuters, “U.N. Urges Yemen Parties to Keep Hodeidah Port Safe,” April 5, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-ports/u-n-urges-yemen-parties-to-keep-hodeidah-port-safe-idUSKBN17719O>.

<sup>36</sup> S.J.Res. 42 (2017), [https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_votes/vote1151/vote\\_115\\_1\\_00143.htm](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_votes/vote1151/vote_115_1_00143.htm). See also Ann Gearan, “Symbolic Effort to Block Part of Saudi Arms Sale Falls Short in the Senate,” *Washington Post*, June 13, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/symbolic-effort-to-block-part-of-saudi-arms-sale-falls-short-in-the-senate/2017/06/13/d68944f8-506a-11e7-b064-828ba60fbb98\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/symbolic-effort-to-block-part-of-saudi-arms-sale-falls-short-in-the-senate/2017/06/13/d68944f8-506a-11e7-b064-828ba60fbb98_story.html).

<sup>37</sup> H.Con.Res. 81 (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/81/text?r=1&s=7>.

<sup>38</sup> Lee Fang, “House Democratic Whip Resists Effort to End U.S. Involvement in Yemen War,” *The Intercept*, October 31, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/10/31/yemen-war-us-military-house-resolution/>.

<sup>39</sup> H.Res. 599 (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-resolution/599/text?r=2&s=9>.

retaliation for Houthi cross-border attacks, spurring ever-more dire warnings of famine. In a phone call with King Salman, Trump insisted that humanitarian aid be let in.<sup>40</sup> Within weeks, Saudi Arabia not only loosened the blockade but permitted the delivery of U.S.-financed replacement cranes to Hodeidah, which it had obstructed for the past year.<sup>41</sup> The events showed that when the administration applied pressure to the coalition, it could be effective. But it would not do so consistently without outside pressure.

Amid this swelling opposition in Congress, 2018 proved to be a watershed year. Advocates built on previous years' initiatives, crafting new ones with more teeth and getting majorities to sign on to them. By the end of the year, it was clear that the issue animated many more members than just the progressive wing of the Democratic caucus and libertarian-minded Republicans.

At the end of February 2018, Senators Bernie Sanders, Mike Lee, and Chris Murphy introduced a war powers resolution similar to the one Khanna had put forward the year prior.<sup>42</sup> The administration aggressively fought it. Officials held closed-door briefings on the Hill.<sup>43</sup> Secretary of Defense James Mattis warned members that its passage could exacerbate humanitarian harm, and the Pentagon produced a legal analysis refuting the claim that U.S. armed forces were, in fact, involved in hostilities — in other words, that the WPR applied.<sup>44</sup> But the same day that Trump

---

<sup>40</sup> Max Bearak, "Trump Calls on Saudi Arabia to Allow Food, Other Aid to Reach Yemen," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/trump-calls-on-saudia-arabia-to-allow-food-other-aid-to-reach-yemen/2017/12/06/146ac174-da9b-11e7-a241-0848315642d0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/trump-calls-on-saudia-arabia-to-allow-food-other-aid-to-reach-yemen/2017/12/06/146ac174-da9b-11e7-a241-0848315642d0_story.html).

<sup>41</sup> Reuters, "Cranes Arrive in Hodeidah to Boost Yemen Food Aid Flow: UN," January 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cranes/cranes-arrive-in-hodeidah-to-boost-yemen-food-aid-flow-u-n-idUSKBN1F4213>.

<sup>42</sup> S.J.Res. 54 (2018), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/54>.

<sup>43</sup> Karoun Demirjian, "Mattis Asks Congress Not to Restrict U.S. Support for Saudi Bombings in Yemen," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/mattis-appeals-to-congress-not-to-pass-yemen-resolution-vote-expected-next-week/2018/03/14/b3c2c6b6-27d7-11e8-874b-d517e912f125\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/mattis-appeals-to-congress-not-to-pass-yemen-resolution-vote-expected-next-week/2018/03/14/b3c2c6b6-27d7-11e8-874b-d517e912f125_story.html).

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Secretary of Defense James Mattis to Sen. Mitch McConnell, Senate majority leader, March 14, 2018, [http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/defense-secretary-jim-mattis-letter-to-congressional-leaders/2837/?itid=lk\\_inline\\_manual\\_3](http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/defense-secretary-jim-mattis-letter-to-congressional-leaders/2837/?itid=lk_inline_manual_3); and letter from William S. Castle, acting general counsel, Department of



greeted Mohammed bin Salman at the White House — touting their warm relationship and arms deals — senators brought the resolution to the floor. It was tabled by a vote of 55–44 after intense lobbying by Saudi representatives and a lunchtime appearance on the Hill that very day by Mattis.<sup>45</sup> The effect was to put the resolution on hold. But the vote also showed how far support for the WPR had come.

Meanwhile, even senators who had been stalwart supporters of U.S.–Gulf ties — and who had voted to shelve the WPR — grew agitated. Bob Menendez, an Iran hawk, had assumed the top Democratic position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On June 12, 2018, the day that the coalition began its long-planned attack on Hodeidah, he and Corker led colleagues in a bipartisan letter warning that the coalition’s planned offensive augured “unacceptable consequences for any responsible member of the community of nations.” They urged the administration to support the UN special envoy’s diplomacy.<sup>46</sup> Menendez went on to hold up subsequent arms sales to the kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

Senators Todd Young and Jeanne Shaheen pursued a separate track to restrict U.S. support for the coalition. They introduced a bill to make continued U.S. refueling of coalition jets contingent on the secretary of state certifying that the Saudi and Emirati governments were pursuing diplomacy

---

Defense, to Sen. Mitch McConnell, Senate majority leader, February 27, 2018, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/4390794/Acting-GC-Letter-to-Majority-Leader-Re-Sanders.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Tom Hamburger, Beth Reinhard, and Justin Wm. Moyer, “Inside the Saudis’ Washington Influence Machine,” *Washington Post*, October 21, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-the-saudis-washington-influence-machine-how-the-kingdom-gained-power-through-fierce-lobbying-and-charm-offensives/2018/10/21/8a0a3320-d3c3-11e8-a275-81c671a50422\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-the-saudis-washington-influence-machine-how-the-kingdom-gained-power-through-fierce-lobbying-and-charm-offensives/2018/10/21/8a0a3320-d3c3-11e8-a275-81c671a50422_story.html).

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Sen. Bob Corker et al. to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, June 12, 2018, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Yemen%20Letter.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Zengerle, “U.S. Lawmaker Holds Back Support for Munitions Sale to Gulf Allies Due to Yemen,” Reuters, June 28, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-arms-yemen-idUKKBN1JO2HI>; and Aaron Gregg and Christian Davenport, “Defense Contractors Stand With White House on Saudi Arms Sales,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/10/25/defense-contractors-stand-with-white-house-saudi-arms-sales/>.

to end the war, facilitating humanitarian aid, and taking steps to minimize civilian casualties. An amendment ultimately diluted their measure with a carveout: by citing “national security interests,” the administration could waive the certification requirements. But to do so, the secretary would still need to explain his position publicly. That amendment in place, the measure was incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2019.<sup>48</sup> As a part of this “must-pass legislation,” it was guaranteed to be made into law. In mid-August, Trump signed the bill. In a signing statement, he took issue with the measure’s requirements as a trespass on his constitutional prerogatives.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, his administration complied.

Secretary of State Pompeo issued the first of the certifications mandated by the Young-Shaheen measure in mid-September 2018, amid a worsening situation in Yemen that made his attestations seem implausible. Emirati ground forces were leading the campaign to take Hodeidah, spurring a surge in casualties.<sup>50</sup> The UN’s warnings of likely famine became increasingly dire.<sup>51</sup> In August, a coalition air strike struck a school bus, killing 51, including 40 children.<sup>52</sup>

U.S. officials had long testified that they did not track whether strikes resulting in civilian casualties had used U.S.-supplied munitions. CNN, however, tied the school bus trike to U.S. arms based on shrapnel recovered at the scene: the bomb dropped on the school bus was identified as

---

<sup>48</sup> Pub. L. No. 115-232 § 1290 (2018), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5515/text/>.

<sup>49</sup> President Donald J. Trump, “Statement on Signing the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019,” August 13, 2018, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201800533/pdf/DCPD-201800533.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, “Yemen Snapshots: 2015–2019,” <https://acleddata.com/2019/06/18/yemen-snapshots-2015-2019/>.

<sup>51</sup> World Food Programme, “WFP Chief Urges All Sides in Yemen to End Conflict and Support Peace,” September 19, 2018, <https://www.wfp.org/news/statement-david-beasley-wfp-executive-director-wfp-chief-urges-all-sides-yemen-end>.

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Yemen: Coalition Bus Bombing Apparent War Crime,” September 2, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/02/yemen-coalition-bus-bombing-apparent-war-crime>.

having been manufactured by Lockheed Martin and sold in a deal blessed by the U.S. government.<sup>53</sup>

In subsequent coverage, the network, drawing on field work conducted by the Yemeni human rights group Mwatana, similarly tied civilian casualties from air strikes going back to 2015 to munitions made by various U.S. arms makers and all sold in deals signed off on by the State Department.<sup>54</sup>

In issuing the certification, Pompeo reportedly overruled regional specialists at the State Department who warned that such a determination would “provide no incentive for Saudi leadership to take our diplomatic messaging seriously” and “damage the Department’s credibility with Congress.” Pompeo sided instead with officials who said that a failure to certify would jeopardize pending arms sales.<sup>55</sup> Senators called the certification implausible.<sup>56</sup> Members who had not previously been vocal on Yemen were incensed.<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after Pompeo’s certification, Representative Ro Khanna introduced a companion bill to the Senate’s war powers resolution. It garnered 101 co-sponsors.<sup>58</sup> The Senate, meanwhile, resumed debate over the bill, which had been on hold since the spring. Deteriorating circumstances in Yemen and outrage over Pompeo’s certification meant that momentum for the measure was

---

<sup>53</sup> Nima Elbagir et al., “Bomb That Killed 40 Children in Yemen Was Supplied by the U.S.,” CNN, August 17, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/17/middleeast/us-saudi-yemen-bus-strike-intl/index.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Nima Elbagir, Salma Abdelaziz, and Laura Smith-Spark, “Made in America: Shrapnel Found in Yemen Ties U.S. Bombs to String of Civilian Deaths Over Course of Bloody Civil War,” CNN, September 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/09/world/yemen-airstrikes-intl/>.

<sup>55</sup> Dion Nissenbaum, “Top U.S. Diplomat Backed Continuing Support for Saudi War in Yemen Over Objections of Staff,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/top-u-s-diplomat-backed-continuing-support-for-saudi-war-in-yemen-over-objections-of-staff-1537441200>.

<sup>56</sup> Sen. Todd Young et al. to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, October 10, 2018, [https://www.young.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018.10.10%20Letter%20to%20Secretary%20Pompeo%20\(Yemen%20Certification\).pdf](https://www.young.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018.10.10%20Letter%20to%20Secretary%20Pompeo%20(Yemen%20Certification).pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Hassan El-Tayyab, Friends Committee on National Legislation.

<sup>58</sup> H.Con.Res. 138 (2018) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/138/cosponsors?r=1&s=3>.

already building when Saudi Arabia assassinated the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, provoking outrage even among the kingdom's previously staunch supporters in Congress.<sup>59</sup>

The Trump administration found its strong support for the Gulf coalition no longer tenable. Previously, Washington had “signal[ed] its acquiescence” to the Hodeidah campaign,<sup>60</sup> now, Pompeo and Mattis publicly threw their support behind the UN-led peace process mediated by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, and Mattis reportedly made private overtures to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to secure their buy-in for a cease-fire.<sup>61</sup> At Mattis's urging, Saudi Arabia announced that it would no longer rely on U.S. aerial refueling for its war jets. The move seemed designed not only to render the WPR bill moot but also to get out of the NDAA's certification requirements — a source of unwanted, embarrassing publicity.<sup>62</sup> These measures did not mollify Congress, however: the Senate passed the WPR on December 13 by a 56–41 vote. The WPR likely would have passed the House as well had not Paul Ryan, in the final days of his speakership, maneuvered to block the chamber from taking up the companion bill.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Senator Lindsey Graham's reversal is a case in point. He had been a vigorous opponent of measures to rein in the war, but after the assassination, he sponsored legislation that would have blocked arms sales to the kingdom and sanctioned its perpetrators. In a separate resolution, he condemned Mohammed bin Salman for the act. Patricia Zengerle, “U.S. Lawmakers Renew Push for Penalties Against Saudi Arabia,” February 7, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-congress/u-s-lawmakers-renew-push-for-penalties-against-saudi-arabia-idUSKCN1PW2IJ>. He went on to support the bans on arms sales discussed below as well.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 20–21.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Salisbury, “Making Yemen's Hodeida Deal Stick,” International Crisis Group, December 19, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/making-yemens-hodeida-deal-stick>.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Paul.

<sup>63</sup> Rebecca Kheel, “House Republicans Move to Block Yemen War-Powers Votes for Rest of Congress,” December 11, 2018, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/420935-house-republicans-move-to-block-yemen-war-powers-votes-for-rest-of-congress/>.

As the Senate voted, Griffiths announced that negotiators in Stockholm representing Hadi's government in exile and the Houthis had agreed to a cease-fire. Under its terms, the UAE committed to pull back the anti-Houthi Yemeni forces it allied with from Hodeidah.<sup>64</sup>

The new year, 2019, ushered in a flurry of activity. With Democrats now in charge of the House, a new WPR passed the chamber 248–177, and the Senate voted 54–46 for it in March 2019. Trump vetoed it, and the Senate failed to override.<sup>65</sup> In May, the Trump administration notified lawmakers that it intended to proceed with an \$8 billion sale of precision-guided missiles and other arms. Congress attempted to block the sales by passing three joint resolutions of disapproval; these bills were vetoed by Trump in July.<sup>66</sup>

Also in July 2019, the UAE announced its withdrawal from the coalition. The WPR vote, combined with anticipation of a Democrat winning the White House in the 2020 elections, led the monarchy to judge that the diplomatic costs of tethering itself to Saudi Arabia had exceeded any strategic benefit. (The UAE would, however, continue to back armed separatist groups in the south.) Saudi Arabia's loss of its primary coalition partner was a blow to its war effort; the UAE had done most of the ground fighting, as Saudi Arabia's capabilities were mostly limited to prosecuting the war via the air.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the new NDAA provided another venue for Congress to rein in the president and, by extension, Saudi Arabia. The spending bill for FY 2020 codified a two-year prohibition on

---

<sup>64</sup> Salisbury, "Making Yemen's Hodeida Deal Stick."

<sup>65</sup> S.J.Res. 7 (2019), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7>.

<sup>66</sup> CRS, *Congress and the War in Yemen*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Juneau, "The UAE and the War in Yemen: From Surge to Recalibration," *Survival* 62, no. 4 (July 2020): 198–199; and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016*, 314–316.

in-flight refueling for coalition aircraft.<sup>68</sup> In a signing statement, Trump objected to the measure.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, he effectively abided by it. When the next certification deadline mandated by the FY 2019 NDAA came up, the administration declined to issue it, not wanting a reprise of the blowback Pompeo had earlier encountered. The administration claimed that, since the United States was no longer refueling Saudi jets, the provision was moot.<sup>70</sup>

By the end of 2019, the politics of Yemen had been transformed. A chastened Trump administration had been forced to dial back its support for the Saudi-led coalition and press it to pursue a negotiated settlement. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, lost its most militarily capable member. Meanwhile, the Democratic presidential primaries would soon enter full swing. Candidates could no longer treat the war in Yemen as a marginal issue, as they might have in 2016; rather, they uniformly condemned that Saudi-led war there and pledged an end to U.S. support for it — a far cry from the muted response that accompanied Obama’s entry into the war five years prior.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Pub. L. No. 116-92 § 1273 (2019).

<sup>69</sup> President Donald J. Trump, “Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020,” December 20, 2019, available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-signing-the-national-defense-authorization-act-for-fiscal-year-2020>.

<sup>70</sup> Government Accountability Office, *Yemen: State and DOD Need Better Information on Civilian Impacts of U.S. Military Support to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, June 2022, 39, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105988.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with senior legislative staffer; and “Do you support ending military and intelligence assistance for Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen?,” *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/policy-2020/foreign-policy/saudi-arabia-yemen/>.

### III. Congressional Advocacy Strategies

On the basis of roll-call votes won or bills enacted into law, members of Congress who championed antiwar measures and their civil society partners arguably have meager results to show for their dogged efforts. It took them several years to cultivate majorities for the bills that would have been most consequential: those that would have blocked arms sales or compelled an end to U.S. participation in the war. Predictably, those bills were vetoed, and the supermajority requirements for an override proved insurmountable. Even when advocates did get measures signed into law, as they did with reporting and certification requirements in successive NDAA's, Trump asserted in signing statements that he did not consider himself bound by them. They were, in his view, trespasses on the president's constitutional prerogatives as commander in chief. It is likely that any of his predecessors would have asserted a similar position.<sup>1</sup>

All of this speaks to the exceptionally high barriers to pursuing an antiwar campaign through Congress. Activists may find that the legislature is the political institution most accessible to them, but there they face multiple veto points, all difficult to overcome. Pursuing antiwar aims through Congress can look like a fool's errand.

By other measures, though, advocates can claim notable successes. Even if they failed to achieve the overarching goal of legally compelling the United States to withdraw its support for the coalition — support on which Saudi Arabia relied — they can persuasively claim credit for mitigating civilian harm and reducing U.S. complicity in the conflict.

These successes can be seen most clearly during Trump's presidency. The administration's foreign policy aligned closely with the Gulf countries' priorities, and so moments in which it pressed

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Scott R. Anderson, "What to Make of Trump's NDAA Signing Statement," *Lawfare*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/what-make-trumps-ndaa-signing-statement>.

Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners for restraint can reasonably be attributed to domestic pressure rather than strategic considerations. The administration's most significant moves to rein in the coalition and advance a negotiated settlement coincided with the zenith of congressional activity. By October 2018, Secretary of Defense Mattis and Secretary of State Pompeo were urging the coalition to pursue a UN-brokered cease-fire rather than pursue the assault on Hodeidah, a turnabout from the more permissive stance the administration had previously signaled.<sup>2</sup> The resulting cease-fire, known as the Stockholm Agreement, was signed the very day that the Senate passed the war powers resolution.<sup>3</sup>

Advocates' influence is reflected as well in the actions of coalition members. In August 2018, as congressional opprobrium following the school bus strike was mounting, the coalition's investigative body announced it would begin issuing condolence payments to families of civilian victims, a necessary, if hardly sufficient, gesture of accountability for harm.<sup>4</sup> By November 2018, Mattis announced that the Saudi air force would forgo U.S. aerial refueling — the subject of the WPR then wending its way through Congress, as well as the NDAA-mandated certification that had generated so much blowback for Pompeo weeks earlier.<sup>5</sup> The UAE's withdrawal from the coalition the following year likewise reflected a reevaluation of the costs of being yoked to Saudi Arabia.<sup>6</sup> More generally, analysts attribute the reduction in coalition air strikes that caused mass civilian

---

<sup>2</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 20–21.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Kristine Beckerle, Yale Law School. See also Mwatana for Human Rights and Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, "Returned to Zero": *The Case for Reparations to Civilians in Yemen*, June 2022, [https://mwatana.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Returned-To-Zero-Report-2022-En\\_2.pdf](https://mwatana.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Returned-To-Zero-Report-2022-En_2.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Phil Stewart, "U.S. Halting Refueling of Saudi-Led Coalition Aircraft in Yemen's War," Reuters, November 9, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-yemen-refueling/u-s-halting-refueling-of-saudi-led-coalition-aircraft-in-yemens-war-idUSKCN1NE2LJ>.

<sup>6</sup> Juneau, "The UAE and the War in Yemen," 198–199.



casualties to growing pressure from the United States.<sup>7</sup> The Yemen Data Project's air strike database bears out the contention that air strikes became significantly less deadly for civilians over time.<sup>8</sup>

Much of this momentum toward mitigating civilian harm and reducing U.S. complicity could plausibly be attributed not to congressional pressure per se, but rather to the broader climate of public and elite opinion in the United States turning against the war and the Gulf coalition as reports of atrocities mounted, thus raising the political costs of continued involvement. Certainly, congressional activity does not wholly explain the administration's or the coalition's changes of policy or behavior. But these explanations are not mutually exclusive. In many ways, Congress is a driver of public and elite opinion, which in turn bears on executive decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

By taking a conflict largely seen in the United States as a regional proxy war and reframing it as a war of Saudi aggression, advocates delegitimized the war and the U.S. role in it. And by forcing floor votes, advocates generated domestic political drama that elevated Yemen in the headlines, and they made members who might otherwise have gladly shied from the issue to take a public stand on it. Taken together, this created pressure that the administration and its foreign partners were hard-pressed to ignore.

### *Reframing the Conflict*

Before advocates could achieve policy changes, they first had to change how members of Congress and their staffs, as well as the broader public, understood the conflict in Yemen and the

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Beckerle; and Alexandra Stark, "Prospects for Ending External Intervention in Yemen's War," in *MENA's Frozen Conflicts*, ed. Marc Lynch, Project on Middle East Political Science no. 42, November 2020, 76–78, [https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/0.-POMEPS\\_Studies\\_42\\_Web.pdf](https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/0.-POMEPS_Studies_42_Web.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Yemen Data Project, <https://yemendataproject.org/data.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Zaller and Chiu, "Government's Little Helper"; Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, 30–32; Kriner, *After the Rubicon*, 12 and 61–69; Fowler, "Congressional War Powers," 826; and Fowler, *Watchdogs on the Hill*, 175.

United States' role in it. This required not just disseminating the facts about a conflict that got relatively little media coverage at the outset but also interpreting those so that advocates' view of the moral stakes became predominant.<sup>10</sup>

Historian Laurent Bonnefoy notes that policymakers in the United States and Europe have often talked about Yemen's strategic importance and yet seldom engaged with the country's internal politics, instead viewing it through "a set of selective obsessions" — namely, after the 2000 USS *Cole* bombing and the 9/11 attacks that soon followed, counterterrorism. In all the years after, countering al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula was the animating concern of their policies. When civil war broke out, they were at a loss to understand it. As a result, three narratives — all tending to reduce Yemenis to "pawns of wider dynamics" — took hold.<sup>11</sup> Contestation over what the proper U.S. role should be vis-à-vis conflict in Yemen has been, at root, contestation over how that conflict should be understood.

From early 2015, the Obama administration averred what Bonnefoy calls the "institutional narrative." This legalistic view highlights the illegitimacy of the Houthis' overthrow of Yemen's recognized government under international law and the legitimacy of the Hadi government's invitation of the Gulf coalition's intervention under the doctrine of self-defense. UN Security Council Resolution 2216, passed shortly after the start of the intervention, reinforced this view in international law.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> On issue framing, see, e.g., Jeffrey S. Lantis, *Foreign Policy Advocacy and Entrepreneurship: How a New Generation in Congress Is Shaping U.S. Engagement with the World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 42–44.

<sup>11</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy, "Yemen and the International Community: Fragmented Approaches," in *Building a New Yemen: Recovery, Transition and the International Community*, ed. Noel Brehony and Amat Al Alim Alsoswa (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Bonnefoy, "Yemen and the International Community," 23–24; and White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson."

The institutional narrative complements a second one: that Yemen is a battlefield on which Iran and Saudi Arabia compete for regional hegemony. This view is premised in part on the claim that the Houthis are an Iranian proxy.<sup>13</sup> Saudi Arabia saw the Houthis as an incipient Hezbollah on its southern border, augmenting its fears of encirclement by Iran and its proxies. The JCPOA would only aggravate the situation by freeing Iran of a bevy of international sanctions.<sup>14</sup>

If the institutional narrative suggested that the Gulf intervention in Yemen was legitimate, this geopolitical narrative suggested that it was strategic — a necessary salvo against an aggressive Iran. It also bolstered arguments for the coalition-enforced blockade, whose rationale was enforcement of the UN-ratified arms embargo. Saudi diplomats touted this narrative, and many members of Congress echoed it.<sup>15</sup> “[We need to] have the Saudis’ back . . . because that may give the Saudis some comfort that, even if we do reach an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program, that doesn’t mean that we’re not going to be willing to confront Iran as it tries to expand its quite nefarious influence,” Representative Adam Schiff said at the start of the intervention.<sup>16</sup> If there was a prevailing view in Congress at the start of the intervention, it was that the Obama administration was not backing the Saudi coalition forcefully enough.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Bonnefoy, “Yemen and the International Community,” 24–25.

<sup>14</sup> Julian Barnes-Dacey, Ellie Geranmayeh, and Hugh Lovatt, “The Middle East’s New Battle Lines,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2018, [https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/The\\_Middle\\_Easts\\_New\\_Battle\\_Lines.pdf](https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/The_Middle_Easts_New_Battle_Lines.pdf); and Adam Baron, “Yemen,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2018, [https://ecfr.eu/special/battle\\_lines/yemen#menuarea](https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/yemen#menuarea).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, “Quiet Support for Saudi Entangles U.S. in Yemen,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/14/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-us.html>; Julian Pecquet, “Senate Tacitly Endorses U.S. Role in Yemen War,” *Al-Monitor*, September 21, 2016, and <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/09/senate-vote-arms-sales-saudi-arabia-tacit-endorsement-yemen.html>; and CRS, *Congress and the War in Yemen*, 6–7.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Zenko, “Make No Mistake.” In a reversal, Schiff is now a cosponsor of the current WPR bill, H.J.Res. 87 (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 8.

In the following months and years, civil society worked to educate members of Congress and their staff, along with the media, about the conflict's indigenous origins and the domestic consequences of the Gulf intervention.<sup>18</sup> This eroded the predominance of the geopolitical narrative. A third narrative soon supplanted it as the way in which both the public and members of Congress increasingly understood the war in Yemen. In this formulation, the war in Yemen is principally a war of Saudi aggression. A regional powerhouse was bombing and blockading its impoverished neighbor into submission, aided and abetted by its partners in the United States and Europe.<sup>19</sup> This narrative counseled that Washington ought to cut off support for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners.<sup>20</sup> Without the United States to resupply its munitions stocks and maintain its jets, the kingdom could not sustain the war effort.<sup>21</sup>

Corroborating this narrative, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, for example, found that two-thirds of the conflict's direct civilian casualties could be attributed to coalition air strikes.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, much of the conflict's indirect casualties are attributable to the coalition. The Saudi-enforced blockade, along with economic policies imposed by Hadi's government in exile to coerce Houthi-controlled parts of the country, has been a leading driver of hunger and disease.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Beckerle and Paul.

<sup>19</sup> Bonnefoy, "Yemen and the International Community," 26–27.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews with El-Tayyab and senior legislative staffer.

<sup>21</sup> Riedel, "After Khashoggi."

<sup>22</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Over 100,000 Reported Killed in Yemen War," October 31, 2019, <https://acleddata.com/2019/10/31/press-release-over-100000-reported-killed-in-yemen-war/>.

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group, *Instruments of Pain I: Conflict and Famine in Yemen*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/b052-instruments-pain-i-conflict-and-famine-yemen>; and Sami Aboudi and Noah Browning, "Exiled Yemen Government Risks Humanitarian Catastrophe to Cut Off Central Bank," Reuters, August 24, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-centralbank/exiled-yemen-government-risks-humanitarian-catastrophe-to-cut-off-central-bank-idUSKCN10Z0SX>.

High-profile atrocities have reinforced this narrative in the American public's eye. The war has not been a routine fixture in U.S. news, but air strikes that incurred startling civilian death tolls — the market, funeral hall, and school bus bombings among them — all made headlines. Reports such as the aforementioned CNN/Mwatana analysis of shrapnel found at bomb sites reinforced the sense that the United States had aided and abetted these atrocities.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, more recent reporting published by the *Washington Post* in collaboration with the NGO Security Force Monitor ties specific coalition fighter jet squadrons developed and sold by U.S. companies, and supported by U.S. maintenance and training contracts, to air strikes hitting civilians or civilian infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

Findings like these, made by the media and civil society, have been all the more remarkable because they refuted long-standing U.S. government claims. On the one hand, the Obama and Trump administrations alike asserted that U.S. support would improve the coalition's targeting, and thus protect civilians.<sup>26</sup> (This despite UN and civil society charges that the coalition failed to take appropriate measures to mitigate harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure.)<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the State and Defense Departments had testified that they did not — or could not — track the end use of matériel whose transfer they had approved. In other words, if U.S.-supplied munitions, jets, or fuel was used in the commission of specific bombings, including ones that might have violated international humanitarian law, the United States could not know it.<sup>28</sup> Reports such as CNN's and

---

<sup>24</sup> Elbagir et al., “Bomb That Killed 40 Children”; and Elbagir, Abdelaziz, and Smith-Spark, “Made in America.” See also Postel, “Progressive Surge.”

<sup>25</sup> Joyce Sohyun Lee, Meg Kelly, and Atthar Mirza, “Saudi-Led Airstrikes in Yemen Have Been Called War Crimes. Many Relied on U.S. Support,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/saudi-war-crimes-yemen/>.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Crisis Group, *Ending the Yemen Quagmire*, 7, 12–14; and letter from Mattis to McConnell.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, S/2018/594, January 26, 2018, ¶ 161, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1639536?ln=en>.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Samuel Oakford, “The U.S. Military Can't Keep Track of Which Missions It's Fueling in Yemen War,” *The Intercept*, September 28, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/09/18/the-u-s-military-cant-keep-track-of-which-missions-its-fueling-in-yemen-war/>; and Declan Walsh and Eric Schmitt, “Arms Sales to Saudis Leave American

the *Post's* made for a powerful rebuttal, highlighting specific instances in which the United States was implicated in likely war crimes.

Public opinion reflected outrage with the sense of U.S. complicity. An International Rescue Committee poll commissioned after the school bus bombing found that Americans who were aware of U.S. support for the coalition were overwhelmingly opposed to continued arms sales.<sup>29</sup> The following June, a Chicago Council survey found that 70 percent of Americans believe that arms sales harm U.S. national security.<sup>30</sup> Nor were these polls characterized by strong partisan polarization: both showed a majority of Republican respondents joining in opposition to arms sales. Members of Congress received phone calls from constituents, heard concerns at town halls, and were the target of protests in their districts and in Washington. Members who had not previously been engaged on the matter of Yemen — or foreign policy more generally — were given an impetus to back pending legislation.<sup>31</sup>

By the 2020 presidential primaries, every candidate was compelled to run against U.S. complicity in the war.<sup>32</sup> Joe Biden, running as the moderate in the race — and an experienced foreign policy hand — pledged to treat Saudi Arabia as the “pariah that they are” and end arms sales

---

Fingerprints on Yemen’s Carnage,” *New York Times*, December 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/world/middleeast/yemen-us-saudi-civilian-war.html>.

<sup>29</sup> International Rescue Committee, “New IRC/YouGov Poll: As Pressure Mounts for Yemen Ceasefire, US Opinion United: End Support to the War,” November 25, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/new-ircyougov-poll-pressure-mounts-yemen-ceasefire-us-opinion-united-end-support-war>.

<sup>30</sup> Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “Americans Consider U.S. Arms Sales a Hazard to U.S. Security,” July 2019, [https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/americans-consider-us-arms-sales-a-hazard-to-us-security\\_0.pdf](https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/americans-consider-us-arms-sales-a-hazard-to-us-security_0.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with El-Tayyab and senior legislative staffer; and Postel, “Progressive Surge.”

<sup>32</sup> Interview with senior legislative staffer; and *Washington Post*, “Do you support ending military and intelligence assistance for Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen?”

to the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> The issue was salient enough that Biden felt compelled to address Yemen in his very first foreign policy speech after taking office. Addressing State Department staff, he maintained his commitment to “ending all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales.”<sup>34</sup>

Such reframing is controversial, however, and it does not track with the way many Yemenis themselves understand the conflict.<sup>35</sup> As Bonnefoy suggests, the focus on the “war on Yemen” obscures the “war in Yemen,” which is to say the multisided civil war that has only gotten more complex since the conflict’s internationalization. Singling out Saudi aggression can be interpreted as giving cover to the Houthis, who precipitated the crisis and are responsible for no shortage of civilian harm.<sup>36</sup> Analyst Iyad al-Baghdadi writes: “When it comes to the war of narratives, and despite all of their public relations and lobbying, the Saudis and Emiratis have lost the war of public perception. And this is despite the Houthis’ war crimes, extremism, rampant human rights abuses, and direct links to the IRGC.”<sup>37</sup>

The understanding of the war as U.S.-backed Saudi aggression in fact echoes the Houthis’ own understanding of the conflict, however inadvertently.<sup>38</sup> Some Yemeni analysts, moreover,

---

<sup>33</sup> NBC News, “Democratic Debate Transcript,” November 21, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/read-democratic-debate-transcript-november-20-2019-n1088186>.

<sup>34</sup> President Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World,” February 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-america-s-place-in-the-world/>. Whether his commitments went far enough, and whether he has adequately abided by them, is a matter of controversy among activists and advocates. See, e.g., Alex Emmons, “Biden’s ‘Non-Answer’ About Ending Support for Yemen War,” *The Intercept*, May 27, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/05/27/yemen-biden-support-congress-letter/>. But it remains the case that, even as Biden has largely reversed himself on Saudi Arabia generally and courted Mohammed bin Salman, he has not resumed the PGM sales on which Saudi Arabia relies to prosecute the war.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Berckerle.

<sup>36</sup> Bonnefoy, “Yemen and the International Community,” 26.

<sup>37</sup> Rayyan al-Shawaf, “Getting Washington Wrong,” *Diman*, April 26, 2022, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/86990>.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Salisbury and Alexander Weissenburger, “The Surprising Success of the Truce in Yemen,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/yemen/2022-06-28/surprising-success-truce-yemen>.

express frustration with the American focus on Saudi aggression for emboldening the Houthis to uncompromisingly pursue their aims on the battlefield.<sup>39</sup> The frame may also distort policymaking by falsely suggesting a two-sided conflict; any ostensible peace process that fails to take into account Yemen's fragmentation among myriad armed groups will be doomed.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, this frame is proving remarkably sticky, and some advocates argue that it has outlived its utility. A UN-brokered cease-fire begun in April 2022 has been renewed twice and, as of this writing, remains in force. Meanwhile, a new war powers resolution to end U.S. support for the Saudi war effort is now wending its way through Congress, with 112 co-sponsors in the House.<sup>41</sup> Its advocates say that the bill, which includes a prohibition on the provision of maintenance and spare parts that Riyadh needs to keep its jets flying, will prod the parties to continue to pursue peace talks.<sup>42</sup> In the view of many analysts, however, it is the Houthis who are now the primary obstacle to deepening the truce and proceeding to a negotiated settlement.<sup>43</sup>

### *Taking Advantage of Procedural Hooks*

Advocates likewise took advantage of specific legislative hooks to advance their initiatives. Attaching measures to funding bills provided one way to avoid legislative tactics that so often leave

---

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Nadwa el-Dawsari, "Why the 'End the Yemen War' Narrative Is Problematic," Middle East Institute, February 9, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/why-end-yemen-war-narrative-problematic>.

<sup>40</sup> The UN Panel of Experts wrote, "Instead of a single State there are warring statelets, and no one side has either the political support or the military strength to reunite the country or to achieve victory on the battlefield." *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, S/2016/68 (January 2018), <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/f834db08-28ab-39f2-bfa1-a9147d2b7b1e/N1800513.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> H.J.Res. 87 (2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-joint-resolution/87>.

<sup>42</sup> Hassan El-Tayyab, "Time Is Running Out to Save the Truce in Yemen," *Democracy in Exile*, July 22, 2022, <https://dawnmena.org/time-is-running-out-to-save-the-truce-in-yemen/>.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Salisbury and Weissenburger, "The Surprising Success"; and Ibrahim Jalal, "One Sided and Incomplete, Yemen's Truce Faces Implementation Hurdles as Extension Deadline Nears," Middle East Institute, July 29, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/one-sided-and-incomplete-yemens-truce-faces-implementation-hurdles-extension-deadline>.



controversial bills to languish in committee. Making use of the procedural privileges afforded arms control and war powers measures likewise ensured that initiatives on Yemen could not be derailed. These maneuvers meant that members could not avoid taking a position on these bills, at a moment when advocates' reframing of the conflict made these bills harder to oppose. In this way, advocates inside and outside Congress cultivated majorities. Even when the bills failed — or were vetoed — the votes generated additional press coverage of the U.S. role in Yemen and signaled to the administration and the Gulf coalition that maintaining their conduct of the war would be politically costly.

The appropriations power, as political scientist Linda Fowler writes, is the “primary lever Congress can use to assert its war powers.”<sup>44</sup> The Pentagon and military depend on the National Defense Authorization Act being passed every year to maintain their funding. It is thus considered “must-pass legislation,” and members of Congress who can successfully amend it will therefore see their pet issues signed into law.

Advocates of withdrawing U.S. support for the coalition, or otherwise constraining it, have consistently targeted NDAAAs, attaching increasingly stringent measures to them over the years. The FY 2018 law (passed the prior calendar year) required public reporting from the administration on Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners' efforts to minimize civilian harm and improve their targeting practices, among other matters.<sup>45</sup> A stronger measure in the FY 2019 law made continued funding for aerial refueling contingent on similar certifications: that the Gulf coalition was taking demonstrable steps to advance diplomacy, provide humanitarian relief, and minimize harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. A compromise allowed the secretary of state to waive the

---

<sup>44</sup> Fowler, “Congressional War Powers,” 822.

<sup>45</sup> Pub. L. 115–91 § 1265 (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text>.

certification requirement on the grounds that U.S. national security necessitated continued refueling operations, but that too required the administration to defend its position with respect to Saudi and Emirati conduct of the war and U.S. national interests.<sup>46</sup>

By forcing the administration to give such a public accounting, the measure contributed to growing unease and outrage with the war. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued the initial certification in September 2018, less than a month after the school bus bombing. His attestation that Saudi and Emirati forces were “undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure” was met with incredulity, likely bringing more lawmakers into the antiwar camp.<sup>47</sup> A bipartisan letter led by Senators Todd Young and Jeanne Shaheen stated “we find it difficult to reconcile known facts with at least two of your certifications.”<sup>48</sup> The administration ended aerial refueling shortly thereafter, using it as a pretense to avoid future certifications.<sup>49</sup>

Subsequent NDAAAs ratcheted up pressure on the administration: The FY 2020 law, amended after the school bus bombing, codified a two-year prohibition on aerial refueling.<sup>50</sup> The FY 2022 law extends the prohibition another two years and also requires reporting to determine whether aircraft and munitions used in air strikes resulting in civilian casualties had been provided by the United States.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Pub. L. 115–232 § 1290; and CRS, “Congress and the War in Yemen,” 13.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with El-Tayyab.

<sup>48</sup> Young et al. to Pompeo, October 10, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Paul; and GAO, *Yemen: State and DOD Need Better Information*, 39.

<sup>50</sup> Pub. L. 116–92 § 1273 (2019), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1790>.

<sup>51</sup> Pub. L. 117–81 § 1339 (2021), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1605>.

The other two major legislative vehicles advocates have used to rein in U.S. support for the Gulf coalition are the Arms Export Control Act of 1976 (AECA) and the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (WPR). The AECA gives Congress a formal role in reviewing arms sales<sup>52</sup> — a power that in other countries bypasses the legislature entirely.<sup>53</sup> The WPR can be used to compel a withdrawal of U.S. forces from “hostilities” absent congressional authorization.<sup>54</sup>

The historical record suggests neither has lived up to its promise: only once, in 1985, has Congress blocked an arms sale through the AECA despite dozens of attempts since;<sup>55</sup> no president has ever recognized the constitutionality of the WPR,<sup>56</sup> and until Yemen, the House and Senate had never jointly asserted their prerogatives under it to challenge presidential use of force.<sup>57</sup> But the laws’ procedural idiosyncrasies, by inverting the usual role of the Senate, served to enhance the indirect pressure that congressional action on related bills could generate.

The U.S. system is one of many veto points, and the Senate, by design and tradition, is a particularly daunting one. It is, ordinarily, the chamber where popular initiatives passed by the House languish, entangled by tactics like the filibuster or suppressed by the chamber’s leadership. Moreover, members of Congress are typically risk averse when it comes to matters of war and peace;

---

<sup>52</sup> See generally CRS, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, updated June 10, 2022; and Alexandra Stark, *Managing U.S. Security Partnerships*, updated October 26, 2020, part II, <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/tools-congress-manage-us-security-partnerships/part-ii-arms-sales>.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Beckerle. Campaigners in the United Kingdom, by contrast, have sought to cut off UK arms exports through litigation, taking advantage of British law, which states that arms exports licenses shall not be issued “if there is a clear risk the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law.” See, e.g., Louisa Brooke-Holland and Ben Smith, *UK Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia: Q&A*, House of Commons Library, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8425/CBP-8425.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> CRS, *The War Powers Resolution: Concepts and Practice*, updated March 8, 2019, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42699>.

<sup>55</sup> CRS, *Fact Sheet*.

<sup>56</sup> Fowler, “Congressional War Powers,” 822.

<sup>57</sup> Robbie Gramer and Amy Mackinnon, “U.S. Lawmakers Are Making a Historic Push for Peace. But a Trump Veto Is All But Assured,” *Foreign Policy*, April 4, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/04/congress-makes-history-war-yemen-powers-bill/>.

most would prefer to avoid taking any vote on military engagements with uncertain outcomes, seeing little upside and potentially much electoral downside to going on record.<sup>58</sup> The AECA and WPR, however, provide that bills taken up under them are expedited and privileged. Debate is limited, and there is no filibuster; the full Senate must take a vote on them.<sup>59</sup> This, in turn, meant that reluctant lawmakers had no choice but to publicly declare a position.<sup>60</sup>

The more that Yemen was understood as a war of Saudi aggression — one aided and abetted by the United States — the harder it would be for lawmakers to vote to allow continued arms sales or U.S. support for the coalition more broadly. As one campaigner sees it, “When we’ve done things publicly, we tend to win on the Saudi war in Yemen. When things are happening in private, we tend to lose, we tend to see a continuation of human rights violations, and we see no accountability.”<sup>61</sup> In that way, advocates secured majorities for war powers and arms sales bills by 2019. The vetoes notwithstanding, these majority votes sent powerful signals to the White House and the Gulf coalition that they would incur escalating political costs by maintaining the status quo.

### *Indirect Influence and Its Limits*

The bills that would have mattered most for restraining the Saudi-led coalition either fell short of garnering majorities or passed both chambers of Congress only to be vetoed by the president. And yet, if not for this activity, it is difficult to imagine that the Trump administration would have urged the coalition to accept the Stockholm Agreement, that Saudi Arabia would have

---

<sup>58</sup> John Zaller, “Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis,” in *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 261–262.

<sup>59</sup> 50 U.S.C. § 1546.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with El-Tayyab.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

declined U.S. aerial refueling, or perhaps even that the UAE would have withdrawn from the coalition if not for the pressure drummed up by congressional debate. All this is indicative of Congress exerting influence indirectly.<sup>62</sup>

This influence runs along two tracks. Most clearly, it reverberates on the executive branch. The White House is attuned to public and elite opinion. By reframing the conflict and forcing votes, advocates in Congress turned opinion against the war, raising the political costs of untrammelled support for the coalition. State Department and Pentagon officials, meanwhile, want to maintain good relations with members of the committees that oversee them and appropriate their budgets, giving these executive branch actors further reason to be responsive to Congress.<sup>63</sup>

Congressional influence also weighs on foreign capitals. Scholars have previously noted that U.S. foreign policy debates have an international audience. Just as adversaries observe whether Congress is supportive or skeptical of a president and, on that basis, assess the credibility of a president's threats,<sup>64</sup> partners are likewise attentive to legislative opposition. The Gulf countries are particularly keen observers of Washington politics, and they depend on Congress's goodwill to advance various security and economic priorities. As majorities had coalesced in Congress around blocking arms sales and passing the WPR, it stood to reason that the Gulf countries would moderate their conduct of the war (or, in the UAE's case, largely withdraw from it) rather than risk still greater legitimacy costs.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Fowler, "Congressional War Powers," 823–826.

<sup>63</sup> Hersman, *Friends and Foes*, 41–47

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Kenneth A. Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (December 1998): 829–44; and Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*, 27–29.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Beckerle; and Juneau, "The UAE and the War in Yemen."

## IV. Conclusion

The case of U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen suggests both the potential and limits of working through Congress to restrain the use of force. Congress is unlikely to deter the resort to arms in the first place. Obama, after all, had no reason to anticipate congressional opposition, which was hardly inevitable and only crystallized after several years of dogged advocacy in combination with mounting evidence of atrocities. Nor is Congress likely to compel an end to participation in hostilities; the barriers to mustering veto-proof supermajorities are immense. But it can influence the conduct of war by raising the political costs faced by both the administration and its foreign partners.<sup>1</sup> In a conflict marked from the outset by disregard for civilian lives and livelihoods, that may be a modest achievement, but it is hardly negligible.

Advocates who worked assiduously to cobble together majorities to rein in U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition have not only left a template for future campaigns; they have also lowered the hurdles that will be faced by their successors. The WPR's provisions for Congress to compel a withdrawal from hostilities had laid dormant ever since they were established nearly a half century prior. Part of the Yemen campaign entailed simply educating members and their staff that they had tools provided for by the WPR and the AECA at their disposal.<sup>2</sup> As one legislative aide says: "We had to get them out of the tool shed and dust them off."<sup>3</sup>

This newly developed institutional knowledge is poised to shape congressional initiatives that go well beyond Yemen. In early 2020, Congress wasted little time passing a second war powers resolution, this time concerning Iran. The Trump administration had just assassinated the Iranian

---

<sup>1</sup> Kriner, *After the Rubicon*, 57–69.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with El-Tayyab.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with senior legislative staffer.

general Qassem Suleimani. As tensions reached a fever pitch, a bill mirroring the Yemen resolution's language passed the Senate approved it by a 55–45 vote and the House by a 227–186 vote. Trump vetoed it. Arguably, however, it still served de-escalatory purposes at a particularly fraught moment, signaling to both Trump and Iran that Congress had little appetite for war.<sup>4</sup>

An evaluation of this campaign's strategies, successes, and shortcomings should be of interest to other campaigners seeking transparency and accountability for U.S. military engagements. The U.S. way of war no longer entails massive troop deployments, and with them, large numbers of American casualties. (These are the circumstances that much of the scholarly literature on Congress and war powers contemplates.) Instead, the United States is more likely to pursue its military goals through drone strikes, as it has in Yemen against al-Qaeda and the Arabian Peninsula, or local forces, as it has by subcontracting ground fighting in the anti-ISIS campaign to the Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq and People's Defense Units in Syria.<sup>5</sup>

Wars waged this way are politically easy to sustain. By displacing risk onto others, whether foreign civilians or forces, presidents render risk to American troops exceedingly low. These wars are more easily hidden from the press's view, not least because they are often waged in secret. Moreover, the press may report on them, and yet they still may not register with the public; even in far more visible wars, "the deaths of others" have routinely been met with public indifference.<sup>6</sup> Members of Congress, who generally have few incentives to engage in robust oversight of the use of force, may be even less inclined to do so when the executive branch offers a counterterrorism rationale; that implicates the national interest more clearly than the war in Yemen does. And yet

---

<sup>4</sup> S.J.Res. 68 (2020), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/68>; and interview with El-Tayyab.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Krieg, "Externalizing the Burden of War: The Obama Doctrine and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 2016): 97–113, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12506>.

<sup>6</sup> John Tirman, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

there are promising signs that some members are eager to champion these issues. In August 2022, Representative Ro Khanna joined four other House members in inaugurating a new Protection of Civilians in Conflict Caucus.<sup>7</sup>

As Mary Dudziak argues, “military engagement no longer seem[s] to require the support of the American people, but instead their inattention”<sup>8</sup> — the sort of inattention that might be occasioned by a military intervention announced by nothing more than a routine White House press release. The campaign to end U.S. support for the Gulf war in Yemen suggests ways that advocates may overcome this very inattention, force contemporary wars onto the public agenda, and, in so doing, attenuate their harm.

---

<sup>7</sup> “Release: Reps. Ro Khanna, Sara Jacobs, Jason Crow, Andy Kim, and Tom Malinowski Launch New Caucus to Prevent and Reduce Civilian Harm,” August 26, 2022, <https://khanna.house.gov/media/press-releases/release-reps-ro-khanna-sara-jacobs-jason-crow-andy-kim-and-tom-malinowski>.

<sup>8</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 132.



## Selected Bibliography

The following list comprises scholarly sources consulted for this thesis. All other sources are given in the footnotes.

- Baum, Matthew A., and Philip B. K. Potter. 2017. *War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bonnefoy, Laurent. 2021. "Yemen and the International Community: Fragmented Approaches." In *Building a New Yemen: Recovery, Transition and the International Community*, ed. Noel Brehony and Amat Al Alim Alsoswa. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Carter, Ralph G., and James M. Scott. 2009. *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Dudziak, Mary L. 2012. *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fowler, Linda L. 2011. "Congressional War Powers." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress*, ed. George C. Edwards, et al. New York: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199559947.003.0035>.
- 2017. *Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hersman, Rebecca K. C. 2012. *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Howell, William G., and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Juneau, Thomas. 2020. "The UAE and the War in Yemen: From Surge to Recalibration." *Survival* 62 (4): 183–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1792135>.
- Krieg, Andreas. 2016. "Externalizing the Burden of War: The Obama Doctrine and US Foreign Policy in the Middle East." *International Affairs* 92 (1): 97–113.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12506>.
- Kriner, Douglas L. 2011. *After the Rubicon Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lackner, Helen. 2022. *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State*. London: Saqi.
- Lantis, Jeffrey S. 2019. *Foreign Policy Advocacy and Entrepreneurship: How a New Generation in Congress Is Shaping U.S. Engagement with the World*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

- Pierce, Jonathan, and Katherine Hicks. 2017. "Advocacy Coalitions in Foreign Policy." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Cameron G. Thies. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780190463045.001.0001>.
- Schultz, Kenneth A. 1998. "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review* 92 (4): 829–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586306>.
- Stark, Alexandra. 2020. "Prospects for Ending External Intervention in Yemen's War." Project on Middle East Political Science. <https://pomeps.org/prospects-for-ending-external-intervention-in-yemens-war>.
- Tirman, John. 2011. *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woodward, Susan L. 2017. *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller, John. 1994. "Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis." In *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zaller, John, and Dennis Chiu. 1996. "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1991." *Political Communication* 13 (4): 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1996.9963127>.