November 11, 2018

We write to urge an end to U.S. support for the war in Yemen, now home to the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe.

We do not come at this issue as bystanders. We write as former policymakers, diplomats, intelligence professionals, and others who worked on these issues in the previous administration—some directly, others less so—when the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen began. We did not intend U.S. support to the coalition to become a blank check. But today, as civilian casualties have continued to rise and there is no end to the conflict in sight, it is clear that is precisely what happened. Given this reality, the United States should end participation in or any form of support for this conflict, beyond humanitarian assistance for the Yemeni people. It is past time for America’s role in this disastrous war in Yemen to end.

The Obama administration provided some intelligence, refueling, and logistical assistance to the Saudi-led coalition, in response to a legitimate threat posed by missiles on the Saudi border and the Houthi overthrow of the Yemeni government, with support from Iran. We also did so in an effort to gain leverage to push the coalition to abide by international humanitarian law and support parallel diplomatic efforts. Unfortunately, our approach did not succeed in limiting and ultimately ending the war. However, rather than learning from that failure, the Trump administration has doubled down on support for the Saudi leadership’s prosecution of the war, while removing restrictions we had put in place.

The results have been devastating. Civilian casualties have skyrocketed, climbing 164 percent between June and September of this year alone. Deadly strikes on civilians have continued, including on markets, weddings, and school buses. By blockading the port city of Hodeidah, the coalition exacerbated the humanitarian crisis by preventing critical food and medical supplies from reaching the Yemeni people. The UN has warned of mass starvation as famine threatens up to 14 million people. Rather than remain complicit in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, the United States should be leading the world in demanding access and providing humanitarian assistance.

And yet, in September, Secretary Pompeo formally announced that the United States would continue to support the coalition in light of “demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians... resulting from military operations....” Little could be farther from the truth, and in making this determination Pompeo reportedly overruled professionals in the State Department. They recognize, as we do, that the time has come for us to end our support for and involvement in this brutal conflict, and to throw our efforts squarely behind a diplomatic solution, including through the work of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the UN-led peace process.

We welcome Secretary Mattis’ announcement that the United States will no longer conduct in-flight refueling for the coalition as well as recent statements calling for a reduction in violence and backing the Special Envoy’s efforts. But they should be accompanied by more comprehensive action, namely a suspension of all U.S. support for the campaign in Yemen, a clear demand for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, and increased U.S. investment in the high-level diplomacy needed to end this war.

The war in Yemen is a full-blown crisis. We unsuccessfully tried conditional support to the coalition. This administration has demonstrated the folly of unconditional support.

Now, we must cease support altogether.
Rob Berschinski  
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for  
Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Alexander Bick  
Former Director for Syria, National Security Council

Tony Blinken  
Former Deputy Secretary of State and Deputy National  
Security Advisor

John Brennan  
Former Director, CIA

Tess Bridgeman  
Former Special Assistant to the President and Associate  
Counsel to the President

Rebecca Brocato  
Former Special Assistant to the President for Legislative  
Affairs

Tarun Chhabra  
Former Director for Strategic Planning, National Security  
Council

David Cohen  
Former Deputy Director, CIA

Jon Finer  
Former Chief of Staff and Director of Policy Planning for  
the Secretary of State

Suzy George  
Former Chief of Staff, National Security Council

Avril Haines  
Former Deputy National Security Advisor and Deputy  
Director, CIA

Luke Hartig  
Former Senior Director for Counterterrorism, National  
Security Council

Colin Kahl  
Former National Security Advisor to the Vice President

Christopher Le Mon  
Former Special Assistant to the President for National  
Security Affairs

Jonathan L. Lee  
Former Director for Human Rights and National Security  
Issues, National Security Council

Kelly Magsamen  
Former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs

Rob Malley  
Former White House coordinator for the Middle East,  
North Africa and Gulf regions

Andrew Miller  
Former Director for Egypt and Israel Military Issues,  
National Security Council

Lisa Monaco  
Former Assistant to the President for Homeland Security  
and Counterterrorism

Scott Nathan  
Former Associate Director for General Government  
Programs, Office of Management and Budget

Anne Patterson  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs  
and U.S. Ambassador to Egypt

Stephen Pomper  
Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior  
Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights,  
National Security Council

Samantha Power  
Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

Jeff Prescott  
Former Senior Director for Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf  
States, National Security Council

Ned Price  
Former Special Assistant to the President and  
Spokesperson, National Security Council

Ben Rhodes  
Former Deputy National Security Advisor

Susan Rice  
Former National Security Advisor and U.S. Ambassador  
to the United Nations

Wendy Sherman  
Former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs

Jake Sullivan  
Former National Security Advisor to the Vice President

Linda Thomas-Greenfield  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

All signatories endorse this statement in their personal capacities.