

Despite Talk of Promoting Democracy Trudeau in Bed with Repressive UAE Monarchy

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Given his personal history perhaps it is no surprise that Justin Trudeau is fond of monarchies.

The United Arab Emirates is a repressive monarchy that pursues violent, anti-democratic, policies in its region. Despite this — or maybe because of it —Trudeau’s Liberal government has strengthened ties to the federation of seven Emirates. And unlike Canada’s claims to be promoting democracy in Venezuela or the Ukraine, there has been little mention of this in the media or scrutiny in Parliament.

The UAE has propped up the Transitional Military Council in Sudan that has faced massive protests calling for civilian rule. Two months ago the oil rich country put up half of a \$3 billion package (with Saudi Arabia) to support Sudan’s military rulers and the head of the military council [visited](#) powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi in late May. Many pro-democracy activists believe the UAE and Saudi Arabia pushed Sudan’s military to [destroy a major](#) protest site that left dozens dead at the start of June.

Abu Dhabi fears democracy in Sudan for various reasons. One immediate concern is the likelihood that a government in Khartoum representing the popular will would withdraw the 10,000 Sudanese soldiers in Yemen. The UAE has played a key role in the war in Yemen, which has left [100,000 dead](#), millions hungry and sparked a terrible cholera epidemic.

In Libya the UAE was recently caught [delivering weapons](#) to warlord Khalifa Haftar in violation of UN sanctions. Abu Dhabi has financed and [supported](#) Haftar’s bid to seize the Libyan capital by force. The Tripoli-based Government of National Accord [said](#) a UAE F-16 fighter jet was responsible for bombing a migrant detention centre that left some 50 people dead last week.

Elsewhere in the region the UAE has engaged in a two year [blockade of Qatar](#) designed to force Doha to heed their and close ally Saudi Arabia’s belligerent, anti-democratic, position towards Iran, Egypt and elsewhere. In recent years [UAE](#) helped [crush](#) Bahrain’s 2011 uprising, dispatched forces to Libya to support the NATO war and financed the return of military rule to Egypt in 2013. Abu Dhabi also plowed hundreds of millions of dollars [of weaponry](#) and other [forms](#) of support to Al Qaeda linked rebels in Syria.

Domestically, the UAE is a repressive monarchy that [outlaws](#) labour unions and [hangs](#)/stones individuals to death. The country heavily restricts religious freedoms and women’s rights. Recently, the wife (one of six) of Dubai’s ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum [sought asylum](#) in the UK fearing for her life.

From what I could find the Trudeau government has stayed mum on Abu Dhabi's efforts to derail democracy in Sudan. Nor have they made any comment on its violation of UN sanctions in Libya. Over four years they've barely made a peep about the UAE's bombing and troops in Yemen. Instead of challenging the monarchy's egregious policies, the Liberals have deepened ties to the Gulf Kingdom.

On July 1 officials from the two countries highlighted "[the bond](#) between Canada and the United Arab Emirates" by raising a Canadian flag-inspired display on Abu Dhabi's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Ten days ago, the government announced that Canada would participate in Expo 2020 Dubai. International trade minister Jim Carr declared, "[our presence](#) at Expo 2020 affirms the vitality of Canada-UAE relations."

A UAE delegation led by Minister of Energy and Industry Suhail bin Mohammed Faraj Faris Al Mazrouei [attended](#) the International Economic Forum of the Americas in mid-June. At the Montréal conference Al Mazrouei met economic development minister Navdeep Bains and trade minister Jim Carr. During the opening of the last UN General Assembly session [Trudeau met](#) UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed and he [visited foreign](#) minister Chrystia Freeland in Ottawa last May.

Despite their violence in Yemen, the Trudeau government has deepened military ties to the UAE. There are a small number of Canadian troops in [the UAE](#) and Royal Canadian Navy vessels in the region regularly coordinate with their Emirates counterparts. Last week Canada's ambassador in Abu Dhabi, Masud Husain, [met](#) defence minister Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Bowardi. Canada's Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan also met Al Bowardi there in April. According to Emirates News Agency, Canadian and UAE officials discussed "[cooperation](#) in the military and defence sectors" and "current regional and international developments." In December 2017 Sajjan traveled to the Gulf State to sign the [Canada-UAE Defence Cooperation Arrangement](#).

According to [Radio Canada International](#), the Canada-UAE defence accord "[will make](#) it easier for the Canadian defence industry to access one of the world's most lucrative arms markets." During the last four years the Trudeau government has promoted arm sales at the Abu Dhabi-based International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX). With support from "[15 trade](#) commissioners and representatives from the Government of Ontario, National Defence, Global Affairs Canada, and the Canadian Commercial Corporation", 50 Canadian arms companies flogged their wares at IDEX in [February](#). To help the arms companies move their products, commander of the Bahrain-based Combined Task Force 150, Commodore Darren Garnier, [led a Canadian](#) military delegation to IDEX.

In February of last year Parliamentary Secretary to minister Bains, David Lametti, who is now Justice Minister, [promoted](#) Bombardier's delivery of surveillance planes to the UAE. Montreal-based flight simulator company CAE [trains](#) UAE Air Force pilots at a facility in [Abu Dhabi](#). Some UAE pilots bombing Yemen also likely [trained](#) at NATO's Flying Training in Canada, which is run by CAE and the Canadian Forces.

As Anthony Fenton has documented in detail on his fantastic Canada-Gulf focused [Twitter handle](#), armoured vehicles made by Canada's Streit Group in the UAE have been [repeatedly videoed](#) in Yemen. At IDEX 2019 Streit Group officials were photographed pitching their Sherp All-terrain military vehicle to UAE officials.

After a high profile diplomatic spat with Saudi Arabia last August Canadian officials privately

worried it would negatively impact relations with UAE. That didn't happen, of course. In fact, the spat may have spurred closer ties to Saudi Arabia's main regional ally.

It's time for some mainstream journalists and parliamentarians to devote a little attention to the Trudeau's government hypocritical embrace of the UAE monarchy.

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Featured image: UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed with Justin Trudeau (Source: Yves Engler)

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