

Houthi Hysteria Breaks Out at the Wall Street Journal

The famously hawkish editorial pages are doing PR for the Saudis.

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Global Research, December 15, 2021

[Responsible Statecraft](#) 13 December 2021

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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Who knew that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the biggest importer of sophisticated weaponry in the developing world going back a generation and more, is SO fragile?

Apparently, the Wall Street Journal’s editorial board thinks so. Last week, it published [an alarmed editorial](#) that relayed the Saudis’ urgent pleas “for America for help as it runs out of ammunition to defend against the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.”

As if the Houthis, also known as Ansarallah, are raining down drones and missiles throughout Saudi territory, it asserted that the “more than 70,000 Americans in the Kingdom ... could become victims” and, in a curious choice of words suggested that the threat posed by the Houthis to the most hyper-armed state in the Middle East could be “existential.”

If that weren’t enough, the Journal published a longer, arguably [more alarming op-ed](#) by its former publisher and managing editor, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Karen Elliott House. “The threat to Saudi Arabia is real,” she declares. “The Journal reports that the Houthis have conducted 375 cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia this year. This Monday Saudi air defenses intercepted a ballistic missile over the capital. In March the Houthis unsuccessfully attacked a major Saudi oil port. A sophisticated attack on Saudi Aramco’s oil facilities in September 2019 forced a brief suspension of Saudi oil production.”

House failed to note that [most experts](#) believe that the last attack was carried out from Iraqi or Iranian territory despite Houthi claims that they had carried it out. But then her op-ed fails to mention a remarkable number of relevant facts and context.

It omits any mention of cross-border bombing raids by Saudi Arabia that have been going on since Riyadh intervened in Yemen nearly seven years ago — a total of 23,000 between March 2015 and September of this year, or an average of ten a day — [according to a report by UN experts](#) that concluded that those strikes have killed or wounded at least 18,000

Yemeni civilians.

House also didn't mention the war's total death toll of [well over 350,000](#). An estimated 70 percent of those have been children under the age of five who died primarily as a result of hunger and preventable diseases due in major part to the destruction of health facilities and other basic civilian infrastructure by the Saudi bombing campaign and [a Saudi-led blockade](#) of Houthi-controlled territory amounting to what the UN's humanitarian agency has [called](#) the "world's worst humanitarian crisis."

There was also no mention of the kingdom's use of "[incentives and threats](#)" — including the threat of denying citizens of predominantly Muslim members of the UN Human Rights Council permission to making the haj pilgrimage to Mecca — as part of a successful lobbying campaign to shut down a UN investigation of war crimes committed by all parties to the Yemen conflict earlier this fall.

The reader clearly doesn't need to know any of that context, according to House who wonders why, oh why, Biden is ignoring Saudi "begging" for Patriots. "One Saudi theory is that he and his progressive allies are intent on punishing Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his alleged role in the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi." Maybe, she opines, he's worried that progressive Democrats would oppose his Build Back Better bill if he transfers the Patriots. That makes perfect sense.

But MBS and the Saudis are doing wonderful things that presumably deserves Patriots, she insists. "A country that banned movie theaters until 2018 now hosts Justin Bieber concerns, Formula One races, international golf tournaments and female sports teams."

"...To continue this modernizing path, the kingdom needs stability. Efforts to build a tourism industry along the Red Sea, for instance, won't succeed if Saudi territory is constantly threatened with attack." Worse, by not providing the kingdom with the help it says it needs, she concludes, it is "encouraging Iran to step up its decades-long effort to," among other things, "lay claim to Islam's holiest sites and Arabia's oil."

Credit where credit is due. Unlike House, the Journal's editorial does recognize, albeit summarily, that the Saudis has not behaved well in Yemen. "The Saudis aren't always attractive friends, and they have fought the Yemen war in often brutal fashion, though less so with the help of U.S. trainers during the Trump years," the latter being a somewhat questionable assertion. "But," the Journal adds somewhat mysteriously, "in the Saudis' neighborhood, the military choices can be existential," apparently implying that, had the Saudis not acted with brutality, the Houthis could have somehow destroyed the Saudi state, another questionable assertion to say the least.

It's not that the Houthis are angels, and, as the UN experts and international human rights groups, including [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), have documented, they should be held to account, including for their [missile and drone attacks](#) on civilian sites in Saudi Arabia. Nor is it untrue that Iran hasn't lent them material support and guidance, although many experts agree that the amount of that assistance, as well as the influence Tehran may enjoy with the Houthis, have been [greatly exaggerated](#) by both the Saudis, their coalition partners (mainly the United Arab Emirates), and their highly paid shells in Washington.

But the fact remains it was the Saudis who intervened in what had become a civil war in

Yemen and who bear primary responsibility for a substantial majority of both the direct and indirect physical and human devastation that the Arab world's poorest country has since incurred over the past seven years, Justin Bieber concerts notwithstanding. (Civilian Saudi losses, as regrettable as they are, have been tiny, virtually infinitesimal by comparison, international golf tournaments notwithstanding.)

If the Journal and House want to protect the poor Saudis, whose military budget this year came to a measly [\\$50 billion](#) — or roughly twice [Yemen's entire 2021 gross domestic product](#) — from the Houthis, the most obvious and speediest course to do so might be for Riyadh to lift the blockade and stop the bombing, [the two conditions](#) which the Houthis have laid down for halting their operations against targets in Saudi Arabia. That would also be the most cost-effective way: bombing runs are very expensive, and [Patriot missiles cost](#) more than \$3 million a pop. Cost-effectiveness should appeal to the Journal's readers.

And finally, what would a compelling Wall Street Journal editorial on the Arab world be without citing [Bernard Lewis](#), "the late, great scholar of the Middle East [who] once quipped to us that while it is dangerous to be America's enemy, it can be fatal to be its friend" — the point being that the Biden administration has been a faithless friend to Saudi Arabia by not providing the Patriots? That's the same Bernard Lewis who introduced [Ahmad Chalabi, the greatest con man of the 21st century](#), to both the Journal's editorial board and Dick Cheney and who convinced them both that U.S. troops would be welcomed in Iraq as liberators. It's also the same Bernard Lewis who [warned on the Journal's op-ed page](#) that Iran would try to bring about "the apocalyptic ending of Israel and if necessary of the world" on August 22, 2006.

Yet people still ask why the Journal doesn't have a comics section.

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