

Saudis Drop US-Made Cluster Bombs in Criminal War on Yemen

Saudi-American rogue state alliance flouts global decency norms

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[Costa Rica condemns Saudi Arabia's dropping US-made cluster bombs on Yemen, in defiance of international law, including the \[Convention on Cluster Munitions\]\(#\) that specifically outlaws the development, production, distribution, stockpiling, and use of cluster munitions, including the cluster bombs the Saudis have used since March 26 in their uncontested air attack on Yemen with an estimated 215 jet fighters from nine countries. \(The Saudis are also \[bombing people in Syria and Iraq\]\(#\).\)](#)

Human Rights Watch presented evidence of the Saudi cluster-bombing campaign in a widely under-reported analysis presented May 3. The New York Times had a [story datelined Cairo](#) on page A8 of its [May 3 print edition](#) covering the Human Rights Watch report, but the paper has had no follow-up. The online version of the Times story noted, near the end, that both the Saudis and Americans have used cluster bombs in Yemen as long ago as 2009, without provoking significant protest.

[Amnesty International](#) issued a report May 8 documenting Saudi bombing of densely-populated areas of Yemen where the Saudis mostly killed civilians. An earlier Amnesty report documented the [Saudi killing of hundreds](#) of Yemeni civilians in its US-supported bombing campaign. Also on May 8, the Saudis announced that it would begin a unilateral ceasefire beginning at 11 p.m. on May 12, conveniently timed to precede meetings of President Obama and [Arab dictatorship representatives](#), including the five countries leading the attacks on Yemen, starting May 13.

[Cluster munitions](#) are a particularly hideous weapon of war, designed primarily to kill people indiscriminately, both immediately and for years after they have been dispersed. Anti-personnel cluster munitions, whether delivered by air or artillery, burst in mid-air, spreading submunitions or bomblets that can remain lethal for years, as they have, for examples, in Viet-Nam, the Falklands, Chechnya, Croatia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Georgia, Libya, Syria, and now Yemen.

By condemning Saudi and others' use of US cluster bombs, Costa Rica is an exception among the "civilized" nations of the world. Costa Rica is one of [116 current signatories](#) to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which [entered into force](#) on August 1, 2010. Most countries in Europe and North America have signed the convention, but the United States and Russia have not. Neither have China or Israel. Nor has the [coalition of Arab dictatorships](#) attacking Yemen: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco. (Among Middle East countries, the only ones that have forsworn cluster bombs

are Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.)

Cluster munitions help hold down the cost of global militarism

The United States position, as expressed in 2011 by [the Heritage Foundation](#), is a morally duplicitous defense of American militarism ability to do whatever it considers its imperial necessity:

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is a misbegotten treaty that neither advances the laws of war nor enhances security. It is an unverifiable, unenforceable, all-or-nothing exercise in moral suasion, not a serious diplomatic instrument. It creates perverse incentives for insurgents to use civilian populations as human shields, undermines effective arms control efforts, inhibits nation-states' ability to defend themselves, and denigrates the sovereignty of the United States and other democratic states.

The U.S. should emphatically reject both the convention and the undemocratic Oslo Process that produced it and should instead continue to negotiate a realistic and enforceable protocol on cluster munitions that balances U.S. military requirements with the humanitarian concerns posed by unexploded ordnance.

This thoughtless think tank expression of the establishmentariat's view of the need for heavily-muscled US exceptionalism had been expressed considerably more forthrightly in May 2008 by then-Acting [Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Stephen Mull](#):

Cluster munitions are available for use by every combat aircraft in the U.S. inventory, they are integral to every Army or Marine maneuver element and in some cases constitute up to 50 percent of tactical indirect fire support. U.S. forces simply cannot fight by design or by doctrine without holding out at least the possibility of using cluster munitions.

What that really means is that cluster munitions cost a lot less than standard ordnance, so the military can kill lots more people with many fewer airplanes, rockets, and artillery. In one test, the alternative to cluster munitions was found to be nine times as expensive and to take 40 times as long to create equivalent destruction.

Current US policy relies on diversion and moral obtuseness

The US State Department spins the issue along the lines of moral relativism, as well as irrelevance, by bringing in landmines (unexploded cluster bombs become, in effect, landmines) - without mentioning that the US is NOT among the 162 signatories to [the landmine treaty](#) of 1997 (along with China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Russia, Saudi Arabia and 26 others). The publicly stated US policy on "Cluster Munitions" is, in its entirety, morally bankrupt:

The United States shares in the international concern about the humanitarian impact of the indiscriminate use of all munitions, including cluster munitions. That is one of the reasons that it spends more than any other country to eliminate the risk to civilians from landmines and all explosive remnants of war, including unexploded cluster munitions.

Cluster munitions have demonstrated military utility. Their elimination from U.S. stockpiles would put the lives of its soldiers and those of its coalition partners at risk. Moreover, cluster munitions can often result in much less collateral damage than unitary weapons, such as a larger bomb or larger artillery shell would cause, if used for the same mission.

The essential perversity of US policy is demonstrated by its banning the export of almost all cluster munitions, but [allowing export of the CBU-105](#) that is used in Yemen on the basis of the humanitarian argument that this state-of-the-art cluster munition has a lower failure rate than earlier designs. The CBU-105 is banned under the Convention on Cluster Munitions as posing an unacceptable risk to civilians.

Financing of cluster munitions manufacturing is predominantly American. In 2012, [Pax Christi found](#) that of 137 cluster-munition financing institutions, 63 were US-based, followed by South Korea with 22 and China with 16. Together these banks and others invested more than \$43 billion in cluster bomb makers during 2009-2012. Among the leading US-based investors in cluster bombs are AIG, Wells Fargo Bank, JP Morgan Chase, and Goldman Sachs. Investment in cluster [bomb making continues to grow worldwide, according to Pax Christi](#). Two years ago, companies that make cluster munitions thought they were feeling some heat and thought there was jeopardy to their profits from “a global advocacy campaign that targets manufacturers of military hardware,” [according to National Defense](#), NDIA’s Business and Technology Magazine. In an April 2012 article, the magazine fretted about the possibility of no more war, according to senior fellow Steven Groves at the Heritage Foundation, attacking Code Pink and others, arguing that they:

... don’t like drones because they’re a projection of American power. But if you ban drones, you’d have to also ban cruise missiles and F-16 fighter aircraft.... You start with the most unpopular weapons and you work your way back. You attack the munitions, the depleted uranium, the drones, all the way to tanks and soldiers. Antiwar activists want to ban war by banning all weapons of war.

That threat still hasn’t materialized.

Meanwhile the Saudis lie, bomb, and kill with US blessings

Search for “cluster bombs” on the [Saudi Embassy website](#), then wait quite awhile, and eventually it tells you: “This webpage is not available.” Chances seem good that a Saudi webpage about cluster bombs has never been available. Search for “Yemen” and you get the same result online. On the ground in Yemen you can find Saudi cluster bombs all too easily, but that is reality, and reality for the Saudi dictatorship is a variable that must be carefully and unscrupulously manipulated.

Even though the Saudi site search finds no “Yemen,” the Saudi Embassy [Public Affairs page](#) of May 8 featured a Yemen story of May 6, accusing Yemenis of attacking Saudi civilians, under the headline: Four killed, eleven injured in shelling from Yemen

That story, in its entirety, reads: “A spokesman of the civil defense in Najran Province announced today that four people were killed and eleven injured as a result of shelling originating from Yemen. The spokesman said that shells have hit a civilian targets.”

The rest of the sanitized Saudi propaganda version of its illegal, aggressive war on Yemen is

covered on another page for “Operation Decisive Storm” that begins with one Orwellian headline on March 25 -[Saudi Arabia launches military operations in support of legitimate Yemeni government](#) - and ends with another on May 4 - Saudi Arabia to establish unified coordination relief center for Yemen.

The so-called “relief center” doesn’t appear to be a “center” at all, but refers to promised Saudi efforts to consult with its co-aggressors and with donor nations to coordinate the delivery of international human relief aid already waiting to go to Yemen but delayed by the continuing Saudi bombing campaign. The Saudis already control the unchallenged air war that is devastating a defenseless Yemen, the poorest country in the region. Now, as they make it clear in their May 4 press release, the Saudis are determined to decide which Yemenis get fed and which starve:

Minister [of Foreign Affairs Adel bin Ahmed] Al-Jubeir said that Saudi Arabia is consulting with coalition members and all countries supporting the coalition’s efforts in Yemen in order to determine specific areas in Yemen where humanitarian aid to be delivered. The foreign minister added that all air operations would cease at specific times in these areas to allow the delivery of relief supplies....

Mr. Al-Jubeir warned that Houthi militias and forces loyal to former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh will try to exploit the ceasefire and prevent the people of Yemen from receiving aid. He reiterated that Saudi Arabia will respond to any violations of this ceasefire by resuming air attacks targeted at Houthi militia groups.

Waging aggressive war with cluster bombs is a war crime within a crime against humanity, not that there is much international outrage at these US-supported atrocities. The Houthis in Yemen are a designated despised minority, like the Jews of Europe or the Armenians of Anatolia, and if the world ever cares, it will be a belated, contrived contrition too late to matter to the dying and dead now.

William M. Boardman has over 40 years of experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

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