

US Involvement in the War against Yemen: Trump's Veto

The Powers of the US Congress have Been 'Effectively Diminished' According to Ken Stone

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According to Canadian analyst Ken Stone, member of the Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War the power of the US Congress has been “effectively diminished” as it failed to override President Trump’s veto of a bipartisan bill to end US military involvement in Saudi Arabia’s murderous war against Yemen.

“US Senator (and presidential candidate) Bernie Sanders and other senators succeeded in passing through the US Senate the Yemen War Powers Resolution, which was, in turn, passed as well in the House of Representatives and sent to President Trump to sign into law. However, he used his veto to kill the bill and, unfortunately, there was not the 66% majority of legislators in Congress to over-ride Trump’s veto. There are two results: one is that the war in Yemen will go on for a while yet; the other is that the power of Congress has been effectively diminished in relation to the US president,”

Ken Stone told Tasnim in an interview.

Ken Stone is treasurer of the Hamilton Coalition To Stop The War, an executive member of the Syria Solidarity Movement.org, a former National Steering Committee member of the Canadian Peace Alliance, and an occasional contributor to GlobalResearch.ca.

The following is the full text of the interview.

Tasnim: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday vetoed a bill Congress passed to end US military assistance in the Saudi Arabia-led war on Yemen. What’s your take on the veto by Trump?

Stone: I agree with my colleagues in the US peace movement who argue that US participation in the illegal and brutal Saudi war on Yemen is unconstitutional according to the US Constitution and the War Powers Act of 1973. They argue that, unless the US has been directly attacked, the US president can only make war on another country with the explicit prior consent of Congress. Yemen has not attacked the US. Exactly the opposite is the case. So US peace activists lobbied their elected representatives to invoke the War Powers Act of 1973 to force President Trump to stop aiding and abetting the Saudi Coalition in waging its illegal and very brutal war on Yemen. US Senator (and presidential candidate) Bernie Sanders and other senators succeeded in passing through the US Senate the Yemen War Powers Resolution, which was, in turn, passed as well in the House of Representatives and sent to President Trump to sign into law. However, he used his veto to kill the bill and,

unfortunately, there was not the 66% majority of legislators in Congress to over-ride Trump's veto. There are two results: one is that the war in Yemen will go on for a while yet; the other is that the power of Congress has been effectively diminished in relation to the US president.

In our anti-war activities, we recognize the participation of the USA in the Saudi war on Yemen is significant. US (and UK) military officers sit in the command room of the Saudi Coalition. They sell and service the military aircraft and other military equipment. They provide the bombs and the intelligence to plot missions. They rescue downed pilots from the sea. US ships help the Saudis enforce an illegal embargo of food and humanitarian aid that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen. It is, in effect, a US-Saudi war on the people on Yemen.

The situation in Yemen is indeed so dire – according to UNICEF, a Yemeni child dies on the average every ten minutes due to malnutrition and lack of medicine – that, a few days ago, an official of the UK government (whose hands are also stained with the blood of Yemeni children) called on the United Nations to put more pressure on Saudi Arabia to live up to the truce it signed on January 7, 2019, brokered by the UN, to withdraw from Hudaydah, the port through which most of the humanitarian aid, destined for Yemen, enters the country. There are, in fact, several ways that the UN could increase pressure on Saudi Arabia to abide by the terms of the January 7 truce and indeed to end its war on Yemen, both through the Security Council and the General Assembly. It remains to be seen if anything will come of the UK initiative. Up to now, with the war entering its fifth year, the UN has been relatively ineffective in stopping the naked aggression by Saudi Arabia, the richest state in the Arab world, against Yemen, the poorest.

Here's the thing. When the organs of governments and international organizations fail to do the job for which they were created, it's incumbent on ordinary people around the world to step up to the plate. The USA, like Canada and other NATO countries, shamefully sells massive amounts of arms to Saudi Arabia. These sales are like a license to kill Yemeni men, women, and children. We, ordinary folks in all these NATO countries, need to do more to urge our governments to end these arms sales and effectively remove from the despotic Saudi regime its license to kill Yemenis. I note that Germany banned arms to Saudi Arabia last year following the Khashoggi Affair, followed by Denmark, which also cited the war on Yemen, and Finland, which cited ONLY the war on Yemen. Momentum to end the war on Yemen is building.

Peace movements in the West should redouble our efforts to stop these arms sales through lobbying our elected officials, demonstrating, waging social media campaigns, making the sales an election issue, and so on. This is what ordinary people can do to end the US-Saudi war on Yemen.

Tasnim: According to media reports, the US Congress has grown uneasy with the president's close relationship with Saudi Arabia. The lawmakers have criticized Trump for not condemning Riyadh for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. What is the reason behind this close relationship?

Stone: The US empire, like the British empire before it, has always maintained close relations with the Saudi regime. In fact, the British empire put the dissolute Saudi family in power in Riyadh in the first place to manage the oil fields in its interest. And it's unlikely that

the anti-democratic and barbaric Saudi regime would have remained in power this long were it not for the solid support of the USA. The Saudi regime provides many services for its present imperial masters: it banks its billions in New York and London financial institutions; it buys lavish arms systems it doesn't have the capability to operate; it supplies bribes and loans to western politicians; it provides funding and terrorist mercenaries as the foot soldiers in western regime change operations from Libya to Syria to Afghanistan. The Saudi government is one of the pillars – the other is Israel – by which the USA seeks to dominate the Middle East (and the world).

During the Obama years, in which the US-Saudi war on Yemen began, the US Congress mounted no significant opposition to President Obama over this murderous and illegal aggression. This was because Obama was a Democrat and his co-partisans in the US Congress were in agreement with their Republican colleagues that the war on Yemen coincided with US interests.

However, once the killing of Khashoggi was widely reported in the media, there was widespread public revulsion, fanned by the mainstream media, among the electorate that the US government was in bed with such a despotic Saudi regime, which showed no respect even for its own domestic laws. In effect, the people of the USA were led to sympathize more with the murder of one man than the whole Yemeni nation.

President Trump stuck by his Saudi friends, however, for the same old reasons. The class of billionaires he represents makes trillions of dollars through arms sales and war and through exploiting the resources of all the countries in the US sphere of influence. Trump even managed to squeeze more out of the compliant Saudi client state since the Khashoggi Affair.

But the Democrats now hold a slim majority in Congress and now the president is a Republican. In the cynical world of US politics, the same people who previously supported or were silent on the US-Saudi war on Yemen are today more vocal against it and against President Trump.

In the meantime, public opinion has turned massively against the slaughter in Yemen. And so it's time that anti-war activists took advantage of the public's growing awareness of Yemen to push for an end to arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the war on Yemen itself.

Tasnim: Sen. Tim Kaine, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement that the veto was “part of an alarming pattern of Trump turning a blind eye to Saudi Arabia’s actions that fly in the face of American values” and accused the administration of “deference to Saudi Arabia at the expense of American security interests.” Do you believe so?

Stone: Senator Kaine's statement of April 16 makes some good points. He notes the humanitarian crisis created by the US-Saudi war. He mentions the murder of Khashoggi, the jailing of women's right activists, and the acquisition of nuclear technology by the Saudi regime, “despite the Saudi regime's threats to create a nuclear program and refusal to agree to nonproliferation rules that would prevent the development of nuclear weapons.”

However, it's difficult to ascertain for certain what are “American values” today. The US government, whether under a Democratic or Republican administration, shows no regard for international law and uses its domestic law increasingly to pauperize and jail its own citizens. It's increasingly an oligarchy run by the 1%.

As for US security interests, the Saudis fit in perfectly with the increasingly anarchic world order in which rogue states such as the USA and its client regimes such as Israel and Saudi Arabia run amok all over the planet, threatening the peace with military bases, nuclear weapons, and regime change operations.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is not the body that will address the increasing insecurity of the USA or all the other nations of the world. I think that's the job ultimately of the people of the world in demanding a new, non-nuclear peaceful world order.

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