



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Emergency: Saudi Arabia and the war in Yemen February 2021

Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen has created what the U.N. calls "the worst [humanitarian crisis](#) in the world." South and North Yemen united in 1990 after centuries of separation. The current war in Yemen began in 2014 when Houthis from northern Yemen, a largely Shi'a movement supported by Iran, took control of Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. The internationally recognized government retreated to Aden in southern Yemen.

In March 2015, at the request of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Sunni-majority Arab League states formed a [coalition](#) to support Hadi's military campaign to retake control of northern Yemen.

Saudi intervention in Yemen has included massive [airstrikes](#). [Over a third](#) have targeted civilian areas, including hospitals, homes, markets, schools, and mosques, directly killing over 12,000 civilians. [Only half](#) of hospitals continue to operate. Saudi naval blockades have cut off food supplies. Thousands of children have died of starvation. A cholera epidemic afflicted 800,000 civilians and killed thousands. [Eighty percent](#) of the population depends on humanitarian relief. The Yemeni Archive and Oxfam report that the Saudi-led coalition has systematically destroyed 130 [bridges](#) essential for delivery of humanitarian aid. Houthis have also prevented food aid from reaching populations in areas they control. At least 233,000 civilians have died in Yemen's civil war.

Bombing of civilians and blockades of food aid are war crimes. The United States and United Kingdom are complicit in these war crimes. The U.S. and U.K. sell Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates the advanced aircraft and laser-guided Raytheon bombs used to kill civilians, despite a U.S. Congressional prohibition on such sales. Secretary of State Pompeo, President Trump, and other American policy makers authorized sales of these weapons with knowledge that they would be used to kill civilians. These American officials could be tried for war crimes.

Within Saudi Arabia, Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and other non-Muslims have no freedom to practice their religions. Saudi Arabia prohibits [public worship](#) of religions other than Islam. Although the right to worship in private is recognized by law, it is not always respected in practice. Shia Muslims are significantly limited in their ability to [build mosques](#).

Saudi women's and human rights activists are arrested, subjected to pre-determined trials and given lengthy prison sentences. Shi'a Muslims face [employment discrimination](#). School curricula and books still contain anti-Shi'a and anti-Jewish rhetoric, even after [reforms](#) implemented in 2018-2019.

Saudi Arabia is a police state. Mohammed Bin Salman has his critics murdered. The assassination of [Jamal Khashoggi](#) is the most notorious example. Security forces kill protestors, e.g., in protests against the demolition of a historic neighborhood in [Awamiya](#). Torture is standard practice in Saudi jails and prisons.

Genocide Watch considers Saudi Arabia to be at **Stage 8: Persecution** for its treatment of Shi'a Muslims domestically and **Stage 9: Extermination** for its war crimes and blockade of food aid in Yemen.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The United States government should not accept Saudi Arabia's request to designate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, which would cripple delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Saudi Arabia should end its bombing and blockades in Yemen.
- The Saudi Arabian government should commit to protection of human rights for all Saudi residents.
- Mohammed bin Salman and other Saudi leaders should be charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity in Yemen in courts with universal jurisdiction, and with murder for killing Jamal Khashoggi.
- The U.S. and U.K. should end all arms sales to Saudi Arabia.