

# US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE YEMENI CRISIS UNDER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

**Dr. Faiza Abdullah Saleh Al-Raimi**

Assistant Professor, Sana 'a University, Yemen. Email: [faizaabdullah753@gmail.com](mailto:faizaabdullah753@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

This research discuss the position of the United States of America on the Yemeni crisis, especially during the era of Donald Trump's administration, and the effect of this administration on the course of the Yemeni crisis, its support for the Arab Coalition, and the expansion of its military operations towards terrorism in Yemen, as well as its varying position on military and logistical support for the Arab Coalition from time to time, which ultimately led to the opposition of the US Congress to that support, and led to a ceasefire. However, the Yemeni crisis is still ongoing and needs an urgent solution. Will the parties to the conflict be aware of this or will we face the longest humanitarian crisis in history?.

## INTRODUCTION

The study aims to highlight the position of the United States of America on the Yemeni crisis in the wake of President Donald Trump, and to identify the most important political and military trends taken by the United States towards Yemen during the period of Trump's rule, and the US position on the war on Yemen varies according to the events resulting from the war, especially the exacerbation of civilian casualties. This constituted a basic starting point for the issuance of many American decisions that stood against the forces of the Arab coalition.

As for the problem of the study, it is that Yemen has occupied an important strategic place in the concerns of US foreign policy since the arrival of the first US diplomatic mission in 1959 to Yemen, and this interest increased after 2001, which made the United States look at Yemen as one of the most important regions of the Middle East that contribute to changing the course of US foreign policy, especially since Yemen oversees the Bab al-Mandab Strait, one of the most important international shipping lines in the world, which makes the regional powers keen on the security and stability of Yemen and the non-interference of any opposition forces in it, in order to preserve the path of global navigation.

As for the methodology of the study on the inductive and deductive approach with the aim of strengthening the research and extracting its intended results, through which the research aimed to ultimately reach an accurate description of the position of the Trump administration on the Yemeni crisis.

The study was divided into the following:

The first topic: The effect of Donald Trump's arrival to power on the Yemeni crisis.

The second topic: The intensification of the crisis between the White House and Congress over the Yemeni crisis.

### **The first topic: The effect of Donald Trump's arrival to power on the Yemeni crisis:**

The arrival of US President Dr. W. Trump in January 2017 had a significant effect on the Yemeni crisis, as evidence emerged that some officials within the White House

and the Pentagon want to increase the pace of counterterrorism in Yemen, and intend to increase the number of US ground forces in those operations. On January 28, 2017, US Special Operations Forces launched an airstrike on Al-Bayda Governorate in central Yemen<sup>1</sup>, killing 14 suspected al-Qaeda members and 16 civilians, which led to the condemnation of President Hadi, the Saleh coalition, and the Houthis of the US raid for<sup>2</sup> killing civilians.

On the other hand, the Trump administration announced that it is doing its best to confront the Iranian threat and expansion in Yemen, and this means that the Trump administration announced its intention to support the Arab coalition as a direct opponent of the Houthis in the Yemeni conflict. This support is undoubtedly part of the US strategy in the region to limit Iran's influence, and it also represents support for the US strategy for the coalition in the form of arms sales and the provision of military advice that the previous US administration had reduced. However, this US position towards the Yemeni crisis and the elements of the conflict in Yemen was accompanied by the call of the US government to lift the indiscriminate siege that hinders the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen<sup>(3)</sup>.

Although this US approach did not have any political, economic or diplomatic consequences for the coalition forces, it somewhat alleviated the suffering of Yemenis by gradually lifting the blockade on humanitarian aid in Yemen. At the same time, the Trump administration has not adopted any positions related to the Hadi government and the future of the Yemeni peace process, which explains the American administration's recognition that the Arab coalition is the alternative party to the government of President Hadi, as it is the party that carries out military operations against the<sup>4</sup> Houthis in Yemen.

On February 1, 2017, the US government explicitly accused Iran of supporting the Houthis who carry out provocative military operations against Saudi Arabia. Despite the Trump administration, it did not have sufficient evidence of Iranian involvement in supporting the Houthis, but these trends were aimed at reducing Iranian influence in the region on the one hand, and favoring Saudi Arabia, which has huge US military infrastructure on the<sup>5</sup> other hand. This trend has been reinforced by the view of US policymakers that arms sales to the Arab Coalition are a good strategy to support the new administration's campaign against terrorist groups in Yemen, and to clamp down more on Tehran<sup>6</sup>.

However, the position of the new US administration was not at the same pace. It began to face opposition at home, especially following the increase in the number of Yemeni civilian casualties. In June 2017, a number of US senators submitted a draft resolution aimed at preventing the sale of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia worth \$7500 million.

After Riyadh learned of this decision, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir wrote a letter to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in which he pledged to be careful to avoid civilian casualties. This decision was approved by 53 members, and 64 voted against it. In order to help Riyadh fulfill its obligations, the US Department of Defense promised that it would support Riyadh with several training programs worth \$750 million, including lessons on avoiding civilian casualties in air strikes<sup>(8)</sup>.

However, these American trends have not been implemented. The Houthis launched a missile on Saudi territory in November 2017, which provoked the Arab coalition. Riyadh began to impose a siege on the Yemeni ports, including the port of Hodeidah in

western Yemen. This trend received support from the US administration led by Trump, which called for fully allowing food, fuel, water and medicines to reach the Yemeni people so that the crisis, which is in dire need, does not worsen, and this must be done for humanitarian reasons immediately<sup>(9)</sup>.

On December 20, 2017, the coalition announced that it would end its 30-day blockade of the port of Hodeidah and allow the delivery of four cranes funded by the United States of America to Yemen to increase the port's ability to unload commercial goods and weapons. The next day, the White House issued a statement welcoming the announcement of the coalition, describing it as a humanitarian action in the face of this great conflict that Yemen is suffering from<sup>(10)</sup>.

The United States of America continued to support and support the Arab Coalition and its military operations in Yemen, and this resulted in a high death toll and the spread of malnutrition and hunger alike, which prompted the United Nations to describe the humanitarian crisis in Yemen as "the worst in the world." In Washington, voices opposed to the continuation of the war in Yemen rose, and called on the US government to cease fire, turn that into a lasting peace, and withdraw US support for the Saudi war effort<sup>(11)</sup>. This shows that the war has lasted for a long time, that the Yemeni crisis has worsened and has become one of the most complex crises in the world, and that the only solution to it is a ceasefire, as well as starting talks aimed at ending the crisis.

### **The second topic: The intensification of the crisis between the White House and Congress on the Yemeni crisis:**

In fact, the continuation of the war in Yemen, and the absence of any indications that it is about to end by military means, led to the intensification of the crisis between the White House and the US Congress on three urgent issues: the US policy towards Saudi Arabia, the regional strategy to confront Iran, and legislative oversight in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy<sup>(12)</sup>.

As a result of those confrontations, Congress passed a War Powers Resolution, calling for an end to U.S. military assistance to the Saudi-led coalition's operations in Yemen. The resolution was passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives and the Republican-controlled Senate<sup>13</sup>.

However, US President Donald Trump overturned the decision in May 2019. On the 24th of the same month, the Trump administration tried to use the exception for emergency cases stipulated in the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, which regulates the US sale of weapons to foreign governments. By declaring an emergency and dispensing with the required review period in the US Congress for fifteen or thirty days, the US administration paved a path forward in selling weapons estimated at \$8.1 billion. To justify this step, US officials stressed the need to support allies in the region against the growing threat<sup>14</sup> from Iran.

In response, a number of bipartisan US senators announced in a press release on June 5, 2019, that twenty-two resolutions aimed at preventing various US arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE were rejected by the US President. They clarified their concerns about human rights violations in Yemen, the worsening humanitarian crisis there, and the behavior of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and insisted that there are more effective means to counter Iran than arms sales. In defending the role of Congress, they described the use of the US administration to exempt

emergency cases from the Arms Export Control Act as "misuse" that "violated the arms sale process"<sup>(15)</sup>.

The efforts of the US Congress to discourage the US administration from proceeding with its plans did not divert. In the summer of 2019, President Trump issued a decision to deploy Patriot air defense batteries at Prince Sultan Air Base in central Saudi Arabia. According to the US State Department, Washington stands firmly with its Saudi partners in defending their borders against the ongoing threats by the Houthis, who rely on Iranian-made weapons and technology to carry out<sup>16</sup> such attacks.

According to a report sent by Trump to the US Congress in December 2019, on the deployment of US armed forces abroad, a small number of US military personnel have been deployed to Yemen to carry out operations against AQAP and ISIS, and that US armed forces continue to work closely with the Yemeni government and regional partner forces to reduce the terrorist threat posed by those groups<sup>17</sup>.

It was clear that the US administration did not want to reduce its military participation in the war against Yemen, but for the circumstances caused by the spread of the Coronavirus, and the rising voices that called for the cessation of all military operations and armed conflicts not only in Yemen alone, but throughout the world. However, despite the fact that the war in Yemen witnessed undeclared pauses and truces between the warring parties in 2020, it erupted again to form another chapter of international interventions, and indifference to the exacerbation of humanitarian crises in Yemen, which still needs to arbitrate reason and logic away from interest so that Yemen can emerge from its crisis and be lifted from this situation that made its population suffer from poverty, hunger and disease. Is it time to solve the Yemeni crisis and tomorrow is near?

## CONCLUSION

After addressing the position of the US administration under Donald Trump on the Yemeni crisis, a set of the following results were reached:

1. The involvement of the United States in the Yemeni conflict was due to its effect on its interests in the region on the one hand, and the favoritism of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries, which have enormous oil wealth on the other hand, and there is no doubt that US arms deals to Saudi Arabia were within this trend.
2. The Iranian factor had a significant and important effect on the directives of US policymakers, as Iranian interventions played an important role in determining the course of the US strategy towards the conflict in Yemen. When Washington approached Tehran and the nuclear agreement was reached between the latter and the major powers in 2015, the US government worked to reduce its participation and support for the Arab coalition towards Yemen.
3. The US Congress' attempt to reduce the sale of US weapons to the coalition countries did not succeed as a result of the Trump administration's commitment and insistence on supporting the Arab coalition, and its goal is to curtail the Iranian role in the region.

## Footnote

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