

UK Government Defends Arming Saudi Arabia: Secret Court Hearing. Are British Forces in Yemen?

By [Phil Miller](#)

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

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The government refuses to confirm or deny the presence of British special forces in Yemen.

Its missions are exempt from freedom of information and even Parliament's defence committee.

This wall of secrecy cracked slightly after five SBS members were injured in Yemen, causing an insider to speak out anonymously last month.

The insider's allegations were then raised in Parliament, just hours after Foreign Office Middle East minister Alistair Burt resigned over Brexit.

At the Court of Appeal — The government will defend its arms sales to Saudi Arabia at a secret court hearing in London tomorrow in a bid to obscure sensitive details about Britain's covert role in the Yemen war.

The Court of Appeal went into closed session this afternoon with journalists, campaigners and some lawyers forced to leave court room 72 until later today.

Only security-vetted judges and special advocates remained to discuss "a large quantity" of evidence behind locked doors.

The government said the secrecy was required to "protect national security" and avoid divulging highly sensitive aspects of its relationship with Saudi Arabia and the ongoing war in Yemen.

It comes amid incendiary allegations in the press that British special forces are directing Saudi bombing raids in Yemen.

The Mail on Sunday has claimed that members of the Royal Navy's elite Special Boat Service (SBS) have "forward air controllers" on the ground in Yemen. These are specially trained commandos who guide fighter jet pilots on bombing runs to ensure they hit targets.

Their presence in Yemen could explain the British government's insistence that Saudi air strikes are not causing civilian casualties.

Sir James Eadie QC, a lawyer who represents the Department for International Trade, has repeatedly cast doubt on reports by Amnesty International, Medecins Sans Frontieres and even a UN panel of experts who say Saudi Arabia is bombing Yemeni schools, mosques and

hospitals.

Mr Eadie said in open court yesterday that International Trade Secretary Liam Fox is privy to more information than charities and the UN about the Saudi military's decision-making process.

He refused to explain how this was possible in public session and promised to reveal more in secret court.

He only hinted that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) "is able to base its analysis on a wide range of information including sensitive MoD-sourced imagery."

Mr Eadie said this "secures a more comprehensive and immediate picture than that provided by third party commercial imagery" which is used by the UN.

Burt's shoes were filled at short notice by Mark Field, who went off script and promised to hold an internal investigation – into an issue he could neither confirm nor deny existed.

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