

The Mass Execution in Saudi Underlines Britain's Hypocritical Foreign Policy

By [Morning Star](#)

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Saudi Arabia's execution of 81 people at the weekend is a sharp reminder of the need to challenge Britain's hypocritical foreign policy.

Boris Johnson is reportedly planning to travel to the Gulf kingdom this week to plead for increased oil production to make up for the impact of sanctions against Russian oil following Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Yet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — a man whose British propaganda operation included emblazoning London taxis with the slogan “Saudi Arabia is changing” a few years ago, a charm offensive undermined by the murder and dismemberment of critical journalist Jamal Khashoggi — is not only a tyrant presiding over a sharp increase in state beheadings.

His state is engaged in a brutal war against its poverty-stricken southern neighbour Yemen that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

Russia's savage attack on Ukraine has rightly been condemned across the political spectrum.

Yet the British establishment has a very different attitude to the war in Yemen.

The two are in some ways analogous.

In 2014, a Ukrainian government friendly to the regional big power, Russia, was overthrown in an uprising sponsored by the United States and EU.

In 2014, a Yemeni government friendly to the regional big power, Saudi Arabia, was overthrown in an uprising supported by Iran.

Russia's response to the Maidan coup of 2014 was immediate, through the annexation of Crimea and the provision of support to a separatist uprising in the Donbass.

Eight years on, Moscow has decided to launch a full-scale invasion of its neighbour, whose precise war aims are still unclear — Putin's demands for "demilitarisation," "de-Nazification" and "de-communisation" are open to varying interpretations — but appear rooted in a determination to reverse Ukraine's alliance with the United States.

Saudi Arabia launched its onslaught on Yemen in 2015. And it has been horrific.

The Saudis have bombed children on their way to school — [on August 9 2018 they bombed a school bus](#), killing 40 children aged between six and 11.

They bought the bomb in question from US arms firm Lockheed Martin, whose share value is now soaring because of the new war in Ukraine.

The world erupted in justified outrage last week at the Russian bombing of a hospital in Mariupol.

The Saudis have bombed hospitals in Yemen repeatedly. In 2017, just two years into the war, Save the Children and Watchlist [recorded 160 attacks](#) against medical facilities and personnel in Yemen.

In 2016 they bombed the Abs hospital in Hajjah, killing 19 and injuring 24. The two charities' report specifies that "at the time of the attack, 23 patients were undergoing surgery [and] 25 children including 13 newborns were in the paediatric unit."

So blatant has been the deliberate killing of civilians that the US Congress even voted to stop selling arms to the Saudis, though Washington has since resumed doing so.

Britain has maintained an uninterrupted supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia and continues to provide logistical assistance for the war. The [wounding of five British special forces soldiers in Yemen in 2019](#) indicates that our military is even more deeply involved than is officially admitted.

To point to the crimes of one country in response to the crimes of another is sometimes dismissed as "whataboutery."

If it is a bid to deflect blame the accusation carries weight. Putin's crimes in Ukraine are no less shocking because of Bin Salman's crimes in Yemen.

But it is absolutely justified for British campaigners to highlight the hypocrisy of our government that cries crocodile tears for Ukraine while actively supporting Saudi Arabia's war. And to campaign for that support to end right now.

At its conference last autumn, Labour shadow foreign secretary Lisa Nandy said Britain should stop arms sales to Saudi Arabia. If Sir Keir Starmer is to avoid the charge of being as hypocritical as Johnson, he must repeat that demand this week.

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