

Nominee for US Ambassador to Yemen Is No Friend of the Yemeni People

Confirming Christopher Henzel as the US Ambassador to Yemen will continue the US role in the starvation and deaths of millions of Yemenis.

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While the press has closely followed the Senate efforts to stop US support for the Saudi war in Yemen in the wake of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder, a December 4 Senate Foreign Affairs Committee meeting introducing Donald Trump's nominee for Ambassador to Yemen slipped under the radar.

Christopher Henzel is presently the Charge d'Affairs, or acting Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. A career Foreign Service officer, he has been the acting Ambassador since the departure of the Obama administration's appointee in January 2017. He is now Trump's pick to become the highest US diplomat to the wartorn nation of Yemen, but his initial appearance before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee did not go very well. Watch video [here](#).

Senators Corker, Mendenez, Kaine, Markey and Young used the appearance as an opportunity to skewer the Trump administration's participation in the Saudi war on Yemen and its handling of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Earlier in the day Foreign Relations Committee Chair Bob Corker and the heads of the Senate Armed Services, Appropriations and Intelligence Committees received a briefing from CIA director Gina Haspel on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's (MBS) involvement in the Khashoggi's murder and dismemberment. In the committee hearing, Corker said "There is zero doubt in my mind that Prince Mohammed ordered and monitored the killing of Khashoggi. If Prince Mohammed were put on trial, a jury would unanimously find him guilty in about 30 minutes." Corker said that the Trump administration's assertion that there is no direct evidence of MBS's involvement was "unacceptable."

At a time when US senators, both Democratic and Republic, are finding the US relationship with Saudi Crown Prince MBS untenable, Henzel, as the acting US Ambassador, has been close to MBS. As top US representative in Riyadh, Henzel is undoubtedly the American who has had the most meetings with MBS and senior officials of the Saudi government, including accompanying President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo in their meetings with MBS.

This will probably continue to be the case. With the war raging in Yemen, the US Embassy in Sanaa is closed and the US Ambassador to Yemen will be located conveniently in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in the same building as the US Embassy in Saudi Arabia. Since the Trump administration has not filled the position of US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Henzel as the new Ambassador to Yemen will be seen as the top US diplomat.

Granted, Henzel does have extensive experience in the Middle East, but no history of any diplomatic breakthroughs. Like so many other foreign service people in the region, he seems to have been more an appendage of the Pentagon. He was director of the Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs at the Department of State in Washington from 2013 to 2016. He headed the provincial reconstruction office in Mosul, Iraq in 2010-2011; was deputy chief of mission and chargé in Manama, Bahrain from 2004-2007, when peaceful protesters were brutally repressed. He worked in US Embassies in Yemen and Pakistan, and from 1985 to 1987 in Saudi Arabia. When assigned in Washington, Henzel worked on budgeting for U.S. military and economic assistance for the Near East region, on Egyptian and Maghreb economic affairs, and was the desk officer for Iran.

Senator Menendez asked Henzel if he had read the recent reports by human rights organizations about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Henzel replied that he had heard that the reports were finished, but he had not read them, to which Menendez asked: "Wouldn't it be wise for a person coming before the committee to have read the reports?" Henzel bumbled a "Yes."

Other questions to Henzel about the Saudi war on Yemen included the Saudi breaking of the ceasefire with 45 air attacks the previous day, the continued closing of the port of Hudidah where food deliveries have fallen by 50 percent. Senator Tim Kaine reminded Henzel that the Iran had not been involved in Yemen until the Saudis began attacking the Houthis. Houthis had been challenging the central government of Yemen for decades because they as a minority had been left out.

As the acting US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Christopher Henzel is neck-deep in the blood of the Yemeni people and confirming him as the US Ambassador to Yemen will continue the US role in the starvation and deaths of millions of Yemenis. His experiences on Middle East issues from Palestine to Iran, from Saudi Arabia to Yemen are supporting policies calling for death and destruction rather than non-killing approaches through real diplomacy.

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