

Will Saudi Arabia Prevent the UN From Investigating Its War Atrocities in Yemen?

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As Saudi government launches diplomatic blitz against human rights probe, Obama administration remains silent

The Saudi Arabian government is unleashing a vigorous diplomatic campaign to block a United Nations proposal for a human rights investigation into the country's six-month-old [military assault on Yemen](#)—waged with the backing of international powers including the United States.

President Barack Obama has so far remained silent on the resolution, which was submitted by the Netherlands Thursday and calls for the UN Human Rights Council to launch a probe into abuses committed by all parties.

The Dutch proposal requires the UN High Commissioner to “dispatch a mission, with assistance from relevant experts, to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Yemen.” In addition, the resolution calls for players to grant access to humanitarian aid, in a clear reference to the Saudi-led and U.S.-backed naval blockade that is choking off food and medical aid.



“The international community must seize this moment to establish a credible, international inquiry that offers hope for accountability and justice for victims of serious violations and abuses in Yemen,” said James Lynch of Amnesty International. (Photo: Getty Images)

The proposal follows the call, earlier this month, by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein for an “international, independent, and impartial” investigation into human rights violations. Groups including the Cairo Institute for Human Rights, the Gulf Center for Human Rights, and Human Rights Watch have also [urged](#) the international community to end the “impunity that fuels humanitarian crisis” in Yemen.

“With no end to this deadly conflict in sight and a spiraling humanitarian crisis, civilian suffering is at an all-time high,” James Lynch, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Amnesty International, warned in a [statement](#) released Friday. “The international community must seize this moment to establish a credible, international inquiry that offers hope for accountability and justice for victims of serious violations and abuses in Yemen.”

However, the Saudi government and some of its key allies appear determined to prevent

such a probe.

“Saudi diplomats have robustly lobbied Asian, African and European states through their capitals or missions in Geneva,” Nick Cumming-Bruce [reports](#) in the *New York Times*.

“Gulf countries Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have argued for shelving plans for an independent inquiry into rights abuses in Yemen,” [writes](#) *Foreign Policy* journalist Colum Lynch, citing notes obtained from a September 17 intergovernmental meeting. “They maintained that a commission of inquiry established by the Saudi-backed Hadi government should be given a chance to demonstrate whether it has the capacity to do the job.”

What’s more, Saudi Arabia submitted a competing resolution on Monday excluding any reference to an independent investigation and focusing solely on abuses committed by “Houthi militias against the government.”

Despite its role in the war, the U.S. has yet to weigh in on the debate.

“The United States, which has provided extensive support to the Saudi-led coalition, has been surprisingly discreet on whether a U.N. mission should be dispatched to investigate crimes in Yemen,” [said](#) Philippe Boloipon, the U.N. and crisis advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. “This stands in sharp contrast to U.S. support for international inquiries and missions in Syria, North Korea, Libya, Sri Lanka, and Eritrea.”

The Obama administration’s muteness is in keeping with its larger silence about the Saudi-led military campaign, which the U.S. is arming, politically backing, and directly participating in through logistics and intelligence support.

At least 2,100 civilians, including more than 400 children, have been killed—the vast majority by the Saudi alliance, which [stands accused](#) of war crimes. The coalition has also fired [cluster bombs](#) produced in the United States and launched deadly air strikes on humanitarian aid warehouses, internally displaced persons camps, factories, densely populated residential neighborhoods, schools, shelters, and water infrastructure.

The Saudi government’s efforts to prevent a probe come amid growing concern over the petro-monarchy’s recent appointment to head a UN human rights panel, a development that was [welcomed](#) by the U.S. State Department.

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