

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Rod Rosenstein
Deputy Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein:

We write regarding two recently reported aspects of the Saudi-led war in Yemen. In December, the Senate voted to end U.S. military support for this ill-conceived and bloody conflict that has created a humanitarian nightmare, killing as many as 85,000 children from starvation alone. Media reports indicate that Saudi Arabia is paying poor Sudanese child soldiers to fight as mercenaries in its war in Yemen. It also appears that the United Arab Emirates—a U.S. ally in the Gulf that is part of the Saudi war coalition in Yemen—is arming Yemeni warlord Abu al-Abbas, who the Trump administration sanctioned in 2017 for being a prominent al-Qaeda military instructor and fundraiser. In addition, Abu al-Abbas fought with and financed ISIS. These actions raise serious policy and legal questions about any U.S. involvement in this conflict.

The New York Times reported on December 28, 2018, that since 2016, Saudi Arabia has been offering as much as \$10,000 for Sudanese to fight in Yemen. The majority of recruits are reportedly largely desperate survivors from the Darfur conflict, and interviews suggest as many as 20 percent of these units are made of child soldiers. Additionally, the article reported, “to keep a safe distance from the battle lines, their Saudi or Emirati overseers commanded the Sudanese fighters almost exclusively by remote control.” One quoted Yemeni witness said, “They treat the Sudanese like their firewood.”

Such use of child soldiers is not only abhorrent and life scarring, but also in violation of U.S. laws—most notably the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-457) and the Child Soldiers Accountability Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-340)—which prohibit U.S. military assistance to governments known to use child soldiers and make it a violation of U.S. criminal and immigration law to recruit or use child soldiers. As such, we ask for an immediate review of the Saudi coalition’s use of child soldiers and the implications for future U.S. military assistance or potential legal action. We also request information on whether any such Sudanese child soldiers are being trained or supplied with U.S. weapons via the Saudi coalition.

Further, we request information on alleged UAE support for Abu al-Abbas, who is known as Adil Abduh Far Uthman al-Dhubhani on the U.S. sanctions list. On January 2, the Washington Post reported that U.S. military weapons and equipment have ended up in al-Abbas’s possession. In fact, he is quoted as saying a month earlier that, “the coalition is still supporting me.” In the article, a senior administration official is said to have confirmed knowledge of coalition-backed militias in parts of Yemen that are “al-Qaeda all but in name and in some cases openly identifying themselves with al-Qaeda.” The official continued that the UAE preferred to work

with some fundamentalists who served as a “counterweight” to its enemies elsewhere in Yemen. It is alarming that the United States through its key allies may be helping to provide weapons or equipment to al-Qaeda or its allies in Yemen. Quite simply, the U.S. should not be providing arms or military assistance to organizations with goals that run counter to U.S. foreign policy.

We recognize the Houthis in Yemen also bear considerable responsibility for the country’s suffering and strongly condemn their reported use of child soldiers as well. Nonetheless, there has been no Congressional authorization for U.S. involvement in this war. In fact, on December 13, 2018, the Senate passed S. J. Res. 54 indicating this body’s support for the removal of U.S. forces from hostilities in the civil war in Yemen. We remain disturbed by reports of gross abuses by our allies and recipients of U.S. assistance in the conflict. As such, we request not only clarification on these matters, but a halt to any U.S. involvement in the described actions.

Thank you for your attention to these serious allegations and we look forward to your prompt response.

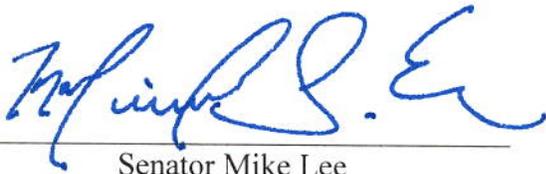
Sincerely,



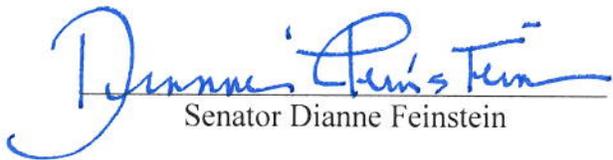
Senator Richard J. Durbin



Senator Chris Murphy



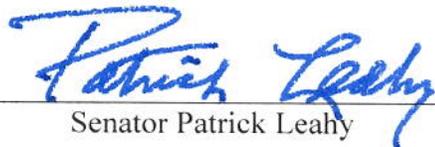
Senator Mike Lee



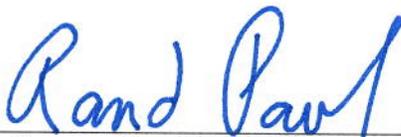
Senator Dianne Feinstein



Senator Susan Collins



Senator Patrick Leahy



Senator Rand Paul, M.D.

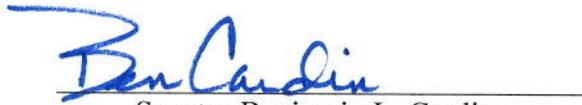


Senator Thomas R. Carper

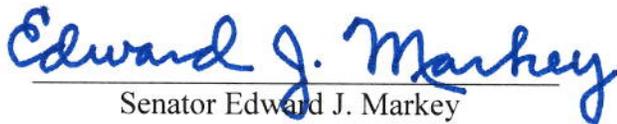
CC: The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security


Senator Chris Van Hollen

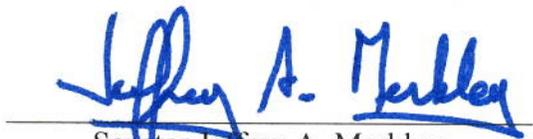

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