

# If we don't sell arms to Saudi Arabia, someone else will, says Boris Johnson

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Tom Peck

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Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said other countries would "happily supply arms" to Saudi Arabia if Britain were to succumb to pressure to stop doing so.

The government has been heavily criticised in recent months over constant reports that British made weapons are being used in alleged war crimes in Yemen conducted by the Saudi-led coalition that has intervened in the conflict.

But Mr Johnson said that suspending sales would end Britain's diplomatic influence in the conflict "at a stroke."

## Theresa May stands by Saudi on Human Rights Council despite bombings

Labour and the SNP have called for an independent UN-led investigation into the allegations, with the suspension of arms sales while it takes place.

In a commons debate on the matter, Johnson said Saudi Arabia should conduct its own investigation first.

"The Saudi government has approached this matter with great seriousness, and the seriousness it deserves," he said.

"But the House should be in no doubt that we in this country are monitoring the situation minutely and meticulously, and will continue to apply our established criteria for granting licences with fairness and rigour, and in full accordance with UK law."

He added: "To those who say, as apparently they now do in this motion, that we should simply disregard those legal procedures, be in no doubt that we would be vacating a space that would rapidly be filled by other Western countries who would happily supply arms with nothing like the same compunctions or criteria or respect for humanitarian law.

"And more importantly, we would at a stroke eliminate this country's positive ability to exercise our moderating, diplomatic and political influence on a crisis where there are massive UK interests at stake."

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The motion in question proposed suspending the sale of weapons to the kingdom, which is the UK's key strategic partner in the region, despite ongoing reports of human rights abuses, beheadings and the continued refusal to allow women to drive cars.

Mr Johnson said the shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry had herself "substantially retreated" from the motion that had been put forward, specifically over whether to suspend weapons sales. And Labour's front bench was attacked by its backbenches over it.

"As to whether or not she would support the immediate suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian-led coalition forces, as is specified in this motion in her name, she refused to say that she would," Mr Johnson said. "I think that she was very

Labour rebel John Woodcock said the withdrawal of support could lead to further civilian deaths in Yemen.

Mr Woodcock, intervening, told Ms Thornberry: "I agree with your calls for an independent investigation into this matter.

"Can you explain to me though why you feel that actually withdrawing the UK's support to the coalition - which is precisely focused on training Saudis to better able to be in compliance with international humanitarian law, therefore our interventions, if they are effective, will create fewer civilian casualties - why you have insisted, despite a number of us asking, in keeping that in the motion making it very hard for many of us to vote for it?"

Ms Thornberry quoted Californian congressman Ted Lieu, in which he questioned if Saudi Arabia was either not listening to the US or did not care.

She later said there are major questions about the coalition's command structure.

Ms Thornberry explained: "All sides will have spoken to experts on the conflict who say there is essentially two coalition forces operating in Yemen.

"One, from the capital which carries out pre-planned operations based on strong intelligence under the direction of the Americans and UK advisers.

"And the other - this answers (Mr Woodcock's) point - there is another centre operating out in southern Saudi Arabia, which carries out dynamic, reactive operations often on the basis of sketchy evidence, often without thinking through the so-called 'collateral damage' and inevitably often with significant civilian casualties.

"Of course, if this is the case that any coalition forces are acting in a reckless or indiscriminate manner when it comes to air strikes in civilian areas, it would itself be a clear violation of international humanitarian law and cause this whole House grave concern."

Ms Thornberry said Foreign Office Minister Tobias Ellwood's explanation of a funeral bombing, which killed more than 140 people, as a "deliberate error" raises the prospect there has been "intentional targeting of civilians by elements of the coalition forces".

She later said: "When we say one thing about Russia and Aleppo but we say another thing about Riyadh and Yemen, what the rest of the world hears is hypocrisy and double standards.

"But today's motion gives us an opportunity to send the opposite message to the world, to show how we hold all countries - friend or foe - to the same high standards that we aspire to ourselves.

"And that while Saudi Arabia will remain a valued strategic security economic ally, our support for their forces in Yemen must be suspended until alleged violations of international humanitarian law in that conflict have been fully and independently investigated, and until the children of Yemen have received the humanitarian aid they so desperately need."



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# Revealed: The UK is training Saudi pilots amid accusations of war crimes in Yemen

**Exclusive:** Liberal Democrats condemn the UK's 'complicity in this murderous campaign'

Rob Merrick Deputy Political Editor | [@Rob\\_Merrick](#) | Saturday 22 October 2016 |



The aftermath of an air strike that hit a funeral gathering earlier in October *REUTERS*

The Saudi Air Force is being trained by the British Government amid accusations that it is carrying out atrocities in neighbouring Yemen, it has emerged.

The Liberal Democrats seized on the instruction being given, in both Saudi Arabia and the UK itself –

describing the revelation as “shameful”.

Tom Brake, the party’s foreign affairs spokesman, called on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to end the training immediately and for much stricter controls on arms exports to the oil-rich kingdom.



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Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said the Royal Saudi Air Force was helped in order to “improve their targeting processes” – and, therefore, their compliance with international law.

But Mr Brake said: “It is shameful that the UK Government is not only arming Saudi pilots, it is training them as well. The indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, in clear breach of international humanitarian law, is now well documented. The Government must end its complicity in this murderous campaign.”

The training opens up a new front in criticism of Britain’s close links with Saudi Arabia – with the Saudis currently leading a coalition bombing campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen – at growing humanitarian cost.

Earlier this month, air strikes carried out by the coalition’s air forces killed at least 140 people and injured up to 600 more at a funeral. A report by the Saudi-led coalition’s Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) admitted responsibility having promised an investigation into the incident, but blamed “wrong information” from allies of the internationally recognised Yemeni government, which it is supporting in the conflict.

“A party affiliated to the Yemeni presidency of the general chief of staff wrongly passed information that there was a gathering of armed Houthi leaders in a known location in Sanaa, and insisted that the location be targeted immediately,” investigators said in a statement at the time.

Saudi Arabia insists the coalition it leads keeps to international laws, with any incidents investigated.

Despite the accusations of alleged war crimes, Theresa May has defended selling arms to Saudi Arabia by insisting close ties “keep people on the streets of Britain safe”.

The admission that training is also taking place came in a written parliamentary answer obtained by Labour MP Stephen Doughty from Mr Fallon.

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The Liberal Democrat demanded to know what training and advice had been given by the UK on authorising military operations and the “targeting of aerial operations” over the past year.

In reply, Mr Fallon wrote: “As part of our ongoing defence engagement with Saudi Arabia, the UK has provided training to the Royal Saudi

Air Force (RSAF) both in the UK and in Saudi Arabia, including international targeting courses for RSAF personnel, to improve their targeting processes and to support International Humanitarian Law (IHL) compliance.”

The Defence Secretary said the UK had also delivered two training sessions in Saudi Arabia on the process for investigating alleged IHL violations, under a joint incident team it supported.

But he added: “The UK has not been directly involved in investigations undertaken by the JIAT, has not provided any specific operational advice to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for operations in Yemen and has not provided training on political authorisation of military operations.”

Saudi Arabia has insisted its campaign in Yemen is being waged "in accordance with international humanitarian law, in a legitimate war of self defence, in a legitimate war to defend the legitimate government of Yemen".

Mr Brake said the latest revelation emphasised the urgent need for strict rules to require the Foreign Secretary to sign off personally any arms sales to countries such as Saudi Arabia.

His plan would see all 28 countries on the Foreign Office’s "countries of concern" list – which also includes China and Russia – denied arms without proof there was “no risk they’ll be used in human rights abuses”.

Mr Brake announced plans to bring forward a backbench Bill, hoping to win the support of both Labour and the Scottish National party for the crackdown. ●

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# UN experts say Saudi coalition violated international humanitarian law in Yemen attack

The UN Ministry of Health estimated 114 were killed and 613 injured in an attack on a funeral in Sanaa on October 8

By Edith M. Lederer | Friday 21 October 2016 | 



A community hall that was struck by an air strike during a funeral on October 8, in Sanaa, Yemen *Mohamed al-Sayaghi/Reuters*



UN experts investigating the double bombing of a packed funeral hall in the rebel-held Yemeni capital on Oct. 8 are accusing the Saudi-led coalition of violating international humanitarian law by attacking civilians, the wounded, and medical personnel.

The UN humanitarian coordinator cited initial reports saying over 140 people were killed and more than 525 injured in the attacks. The Ministry of Health has estimated 114 dead and 613 injured.

The panel of experts said the first bomb hit the Al-Sala Al-Kubra hall in Sanaa, which was packed with at least 750 adults and children including leaders of the Shiite Houthi rebels mourning the father of the acting interior minister. The second bomb was dropped three to eight minutes later when civilians and medical personnel were trying to help casualties from the first attack.

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The Saudi-led coalition, which is backed by the US, has been targeting Houthi leaders since March 2015 when it intervened in Yemen's civil war in support of the internationally recognised government.

The experts' report, obtained Thursday by the Associated Press, said preliminary information indicates that “the attack resulted in a

disproportionately higher numbers of civilian casualties, when compared to military casualties, and that this could have been anticipated prior to the attack.”

International humanitarian law prohibits attacks that may cause incidental civilian deaths and injuries or damage to civilian buildings, and requires any party planning an attack to first assess its “proportionality,” the report said.

The experts' report, to the head of the UN Security Council committee monitoring sanctions against the Houthi Shiite rebels, said the panel was unaware of any measures taken by the coalition to make such an assessment - or to prevent death and injury to civilians and damage to civilian buildings.

The panel said it “remains unconvinced” that the requirements under international law were met but it will continue to investigate.

But it said the second air strike “almost certainly resulted in more casualties to the already wounded and the first responders,” a practice prohibited under international humanitarian law.

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“The panel thus finds, in respect of the second air strike, that the Saudi Arabia-led coalition violated its obligations” not to attack those unable to fight, the wounded and medical personnel, “and did not take effective precautionary measures to minimize harm to civilians, including the first responders,” the report said.

The coalition's Joint Incidents Assessment Team last Saturday blamed “wrong information” for the bombing. It said a “party” affiliated to Yemen's General Chief of Staff headquarters had provided intelligence that the hall was filled with Houthi leaders and was “a legitimate military target.”

The experts recommended that the head of the UN sanctions committee ask coalition members to stop using “the 'double-tap' attack tactic during air strikes,” in which a first bomb is quickly followed by a second, “as this nearly always leads to fatalities and injuries to first responders.”

They also said Saudi Arabia should be asked to cooperate and share data with the panel.

*Associated Press* ●

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# Theresa May fails to give assurance that no civilians have been killed by British made missiles in Yemen

'How can she possibly – in good conscience – continue selling them to Saudi Arabia?'

Ashley Cowburn Political Correspondent | [@ashcowburn](#) | Wednesday 19 October 2016 | 

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Theresa May has failed to assure MPs that civilians have not been killed by British manufactured bombs dropped by Saudi Arabia on Yemen.

The Prime Minister was asked twice by Angus Robertson, the SNP's leader in the Commons, to provide an assurance that the Paveway IV bombs, manufactured in Britain, and under licence from the Government to the oil-rich kingdom, have not killed civilians in Yemen.

“Thousands of innocent civilians have now been killed by Saudi airstrikes,” Mr Robertson added.

But Ms May appeared to avoid the question, claiming: “We have one of the toughest regimes in the world in relations to arms exports. When these allegations arise then we have been pressing... the Saudi Arabian government have properly investigated these issues.”

Mr Robertson then pressed again on the same question. “It's beyond doubt that Saudi air forces bombing Yemen, flying planes that are made in Britain, by pilots that are trained in Britain and they are dropping missiles that are made in Britain. I asked her a direct question and she couldn't answer it,” he said.

He added if Ms May “doesn't know the answer to the question how can she possibly – in good conscience – continue selling them to Saudi Arabia?”

She responded: “The point I made is a very simple one – that we press for proper investigations into what has happened on those incidents before we reach a decision or a conclusion on what has happened in relation to those incidents. We do have a very strong relationship with Saudi Arabia that is important for this country – it is important in terms of dealing with counter terrorism and a number of other issues.

Last **week arms campaigners demanded, in the wake of one of the deadliest massacres of Yemen's ongoing civil war, that arms exports from Britain “must end now”**. It followed an attack, two weeks ago, which is strongly believed to have been carried out by the Saudi-led coalition air force, killing at least 140 people and injured as many as 600 more at a funeral. Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Yemeni



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rebel government's spokesman in Sana'a said the airstrike was an act of "genocide" by the Saudi-led alliance, which is fighting the rebels.

Andrew Smith of Campaign against the Arms Trade (CAAT) added: "The humanitarian situation in Yemen is dire and getting even worse. Innocent people are dying every day. The UK Government's response has been to continue supporting the Saudi forces that are dropping the bombs, and to sell them even more weapons.

Theresa May has previously defended selling arms to Saudi Arabia despite the country facing accusations of war crimes, insisting close ties "keep people on the streets of Britain safe". Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, however, has called on the Prime Minister to halt the sales because of the "humanitarian devastation" caused by the coalition waging war against rebels in Yemen. ●

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