

# British arms sales prolonging Saudi war in Yemen, says Oxfam

Oxfam has accused the British government of prolonging the war in Yemen by allowing the export of air-to-air refueling equipment that it fears could be used to help the Saudi Air Force conduct indiscriminate bombing in the country. The technology was licensed to Riyadh last summer when arms restrictions were lifted, alongside £1.4b of other sales, and can be used to help war planes fly longer missions at a time when the conflict is intensifying, the Guardian reported.

Sam Nadel, head of policy and advocacy at Oxfam, said: "As the US has called for an end to the conflict in Yemen, the UK is heading in the opposite direction, ramping up its support for the brutal Saudi-led war by increasing arms sales and refueling equipment that facilitate airstrikes."

Fighting has surged around Marib, the Riyadh-backed government's last stronghold in the north. Houthi fighters are attempting to take the strategic city, prompting the Saudi-led coalition to launch a succession of airstrikes to prevent their advance.

Until recently, Marib was considered a haven for people displaced from elsewhere by the conflict. Oxfam estimates that there are already 850,000 refugees living in dozens of camps in and around Marib, and on a recent visit, its staff also witnessed, "many



BLOOMBERG

many people sleeping on streets and in doorways".

The British charity has called on both sides to adopt an urgent cease-fire, and on the UK to halt all arms exports that could be used in the conflict. "The UK claims to support peace in Yemen. It can start by immediately ending the sale of all arms that risk being used against civilians and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis," Nadel added.

Earlier this month, the new Biden administration in the US said it would halt the sales of all

arms to Saudi Arabia that could be used in "support of offensive operations". Italy said it had halted missile sales to the Persian Gulf kingdom a few days earlier.

But the UK has resisted pressure to follow suit as the humanitarian situation worsens, in a conflict that dates back to 2014 and has caused the direct and indirect deaths of nearly a quarter of a million people.

Last week, United Nations representatives warned that the war had seen a "sharp escalatory turn" in a briefing to the Security Council

and that five million civilians were "just one step away from famine".

British ministers - Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and International Trade Secretary Liz Truss - approved a surge in arms exports to Saudi Arabia in the third quarter of 2020, after concluding, following a court-mandated review, that there were only "isolated incidents" of breaches of humanitarian law.

The exports totaled at least £1.4b and included the export of "airborne refueling equipment"

and related components under an open export license - as well as nearly £700m of bomb components and £100m of air-to-surface missiles.

The Saudi-led coalition - relying on equipment supplied by the West - has been repeatedly accused of conducting indiscriminate bombing since entering the conflict in 2015, killing, wounding and displacing civilians.

According to the Yemen Data Project, which tracks bombings, 10% of the 125 coalition airstrikes recorded in January targeted civilian sites and 13% hit military targets, while the rest could not yet be accounted for. Over the course of the war, an estimated 8,750 civilians have been killed in airstrikes.

It has been estimated that 80% of the airstrikes conducted by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen are "dynamic", carried out when a war plane sees an opportunity to hit the ground in a combat zone. By refueling, typically shortly after takeoff, planes can loiter in a combat zone for longer, searching for targets.

A government spokesperson said: "The UK operates one of the most comprehensive export control regimes in the world. The government takes its export responsibilities seriously and rigorously assesses all export licenses in accordance with strict licensing criteria."

## Italian ambassador among three killed in attack on UN convoy in DR Congo

Italy's ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo and two other people were killed on Monday in an attack on a United Nations convoy in eastern Congo, Italy's Foreign Ministry and park authorities said.

The convoy was attacked at around 10:15 a.m. (0815 GMT) during an attempted kidnap by assailants near the town of Kanjamaoro, a few kilometers north of the regional capital Goma, the Virunga National Park told Reuters.



TWITTER

The Italian Ambassador Luca Attanasio and a military policeman traveling with him were killed, the Italian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The park had said earlier that two people in the convoy had been killed and the ambassador wounded. The third person killed was a driver, diplomatic sources said, according to AFP. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. "It is with deep sorrow that the Foreign Ministry confirms the death today in Goma of the Italian Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Luca Attanasio, and of a policeman from the Carabinieri," the foreign ministry statement said.

"The ambassador and the soldier were traveling in a car in a convoy of MONUSCO, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo," it said. According to the ministry website, Attanasio had been Italy's head of mission in Kinshasa since 2017 and was made ambassador in 2019.

Dozens of armed groups operate in and around Virunga, which lies along Congo's borders with Rwanda and Uganda. Park rangers have been repeatedly attacked, including six who were killed in an ambush last month.

## Thousands rally in Algiers on second anniversary of protest movement

Thousands of demonstrators defied a heavy police presence in Algiers on Monday for a march to mark the second anniversary of a mass protest movement that convulsed Algeria before the COVID-19 pandemic forced it off the streets.

Chanting "A civilian state not a military state!", "Enough is enough!" and "The people want independence!", protesters walked through the center of the capital, waving national flags, watched by large numbers of police, Reuters reported.

Some of the protesters hope to revive the twice-weekly protests that surged through Algerian cities from February 2019 for more than a year, regularly bringing tens of thousands of people to the streets until the global pandemic began.

"We are determined to continue our battle until victory," said Djamel Habi, a student.

However, some other protesters said the march was symbolic rather than a return to regular demonstrations, or that without a clear opposition leadership they were not yet sure whether to continue with protests.

Though the 2019 protests led the army to push veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power after two decades in office and jail many senior figures for corruption, many of the demonstrators wanted a more thorough change.



RAMZI BOUDINA/REUTERS

Demonstrators take part in a protest marking two years since the start of a mass protest movement demanding political change, in Algiers, Algeria, on February 22, 2021.

"We will stick to our principles until all demands are met," said Mohamed Tadjer, a 30-year old employee of Algeria's state insurance company.

"Things must change. We are fed up," said Ahmed Kachime, 25, a student.

The main demands of the leaderless, unorganized protest campaign, known as Hirak (Movement), were the ousting of Algeria's old ruling elite, an end to corruption and the army's withdrawal from politics.

After Bouteflika was ousted, the authorities held a presidential election that Hirak supporters viewed as a sham and which resulted in Abdelmadjid Tebboune winning the presidency in December 2019.

He made some moves to meet protesters' grievances, including minor changes to the constitution, but the very low turnout in a referendum to affirm the reforms indicated that his efforts had little public backing.

Tebboune returned to Algeria last week after spending most of the past four months in Germany receiving medical treatment after contracting COVID-19.

## White supremacy a 'transnational threat', UN chief warns

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Monday that white supremacy and neo-Nazi movements are becoming a "transnational threat" and have exploited the coronavirus pandemic to boost their support.

Addressing the UN Human Rights Council, Guterres said the danger of hate-driven groups was growing daily. "White supremacy and neo-Nazi movements are more than domestic terror threats. They are becoming a transnational threat," he told the Geneva forum. Without naming states, Guterres added, "Today, these extremist movements represent the number one internal security threat in several countries," Reuters reported.

In the United States, racial tensions simmered during the turbulent four-year presidency of Donald Trump. His successor Joe Biden has said the Jan. 6 siege of the US Capitol by Trump supporters was carried out by "hugs, insurrectionists, political extremists and white supremacists".



REUTERS

"Far too often, these hate groups are cheered on by people in positions of responsibility in ways that were considered unimaginable not long ago," Guterres said. "We need global coord-

ination action to defeat this grave and growing danger."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachilet is to report to the council on March 18 on systemic

racism against people of African descent. The global inquiry was launched after George Floyd died in Minneapolis last May when a white police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Guterres also accused authorities in some countries of using the COVID-19 pandemic to deploy "heavy-handed security responses and emergency measures to crush dissent".

"At times, access to life-saving COVID-19 information has been concealed - while deadly misinformation has been amplified - including by those in power," he said.

Guterres warned about the power of digital platforms and the use and abuse of data.

"I urge all Member States to place human rights at the center of regulatory frameworks and legislation on the development and use of digital technologies," he said. "We need a safe, equitable and open digital future that does not infringe on privacy or dignity."

## Strike grips Myanmar, anti-coup protesters defy junta's warning

Myanmar police began to disperse pro-democracy protesters on Monday as businesses around the country shut in a general strike called to oppose the military coup despite a threat from authorities that confrontation could cost lives.

Three weeks after seizing power, the junta has failed to stop daily protests and a civil disobedience movement calling for the reversal of the Feb. 1 coup and release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, according to Reuters.

There were protests in cities and towns across the country on Monday. From the northern hills to the central plains, the Irrawaddy river delta and the southern tip of the panhandle, images on social media showed.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, where the military is headquartered, a police water cannon truck and numerous other vehicles closed in to break up a procession of chanting protesters who scattered when police on foot chased them, wrestling several to the ground.

"They're chasing and arresting us. We're just protesting peacefully," one woman said in video clip posted on Facebook.

The response of security forces this time has been less deadly than in crackdowns in earlier phases of turmoil in almost half a century of military rule but three protesters have been killed - two shot dead in Mandalay on Saturday, and the first, a woman shot in Naypyitaw, who died on Friday.



REUTERS

A flag is waved as demonstrators protest against military coup in Myanmar's largest city Yangon on February 22, 2021.

The Army has said one policeman died of injuries sustained in the protests.

Late on Sunday, state-owned media MRTV warned protesters that they could get killed.

"Protesters are now inciting the people, especially emotional teenagers and youths, to a confrontation path where they will suffer loss of life," the broadcaster said.

Facebook said on Monday it had removed MRTV's pages for repeated violations of its standards, including its violence and incitement policy. On Sunday, it deleted

the military's main page for the same reason.

The junta's warning didn't discourage people from turning out in their tens of thousands.

In a country where dates are seen as auspicious, protesters noted the significance of the date 22.2.2021, comparing it with demonstrations on Aug. 8, 1988, when a previous generation staged anti-military protests that were bloodily suppressed.

Several Western countries have condemned the coup and decried the violence against protesters.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Twitter the United States would continue to "take firm action" against authorities violently cracking down on opponents of the coup in the Southeast Asian country that is also known as Burma.

Britain, Germany, Japan and Singapore have also condemned the violence, while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres again urged Myanmar's military to halt repression immediately.

"Release the prisoners. End the violence. Respect human rights, and the will of the people expressed in recent elections," Guterres said at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The Army seized power after alleging fraud in Nov. 8 elections that were swept by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), denying her and much of the party leadership. The electoral commission dismissed the fraud complaints.