

War Atrocities in Yemen Linked to US Weapons

Columbia Law School researchers have unveiled a disturbing connection between American arms and civilian deaths.

By
David J. Craig
|
Fall 2022



Saudi Arabian F-15 fighter jets participate in US-led exercises in 2022.
(APFootage / Alamy Stock Photo)

Since 2015, a Saudi-led air campaign to defeat Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war has killed at least nine thousand civilians, with fighter-jet attacks destroying apartment buildings, hospitals, a school bus, a funeral hall, a prison, and other non-military targets. The US government, meanwhile, has defended its approval of tens of billions of dollars' worth of weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and its regional allies

during this period in part by insisting that there is no reason to believe that American-made arms are commonly used in such strikes.

But a joint [investigation](#) by the [Security Force Monitor](#) — a project of Columbia Law School's [Human Rights Institute](#) — and the *Washington Post* recently concluded that a “substantial portion” of airstrikes that have killed civilians in Yemen have been carried out by jets developed, sold, and maintained by US companies and flown by US-trained pilots. The researchers, led by Columbia's Tony Wilson, made the discovery by analyzing thousands of publicly available news stories, photographs, and videos about the Yemen war along with US military contracts. This enabled them to show that particular Saudi, Emirati, Kuwaiti, and Bahraini fighter squadrons that have flown sorties over the country are heavily reliant on US equipment and training. (The Security Force Monitor was founded in 2016 to conduct research that increases the accountability of police, military, and security forces around the world.)

Wilson and Priyanka Motaparthi '09LAW, a Columbia Law School associate research scholar who contributed to the research, published an [essay](#) about the investigation in the online publication *Just Security* on June 4, the same day the *Post* ran its story. They expressed hope that their revelations will put pressure on the US government to more thoroughly scrutinize its support for foreign militaries.

“It is high time for the United States to finally spend the time and resources to review whether coalition squadrons that benefitted from U.S. military contracts conducted attacks in Yemen that may constitute war crimes — and to disclose their findings to Congress and the public,” they write. “A continued failure to do so would ensure that the United States remains complicit in ongoing — and perhaps future — serious human rights abuses in a war that has claimed countless lives, with no accountability.”

This article appears in the Fall 2022 print edition of Columbia Magazine with the title "Law-school researchers link war atrocities in Yemen to US."

Read more from

[David J. Craig](#)



[Guide to school abbreviations](#)

[All categories >](#)

Read more from

David J. Craig