



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 24, 2017

Rand Paul Wants Senate to Vote on Trump's Saudi Arms Deal

Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.; shown) is expected to introduce a measure this week to force a vote on the \$110 billion weapons sales agreement President Trump signed with Saudi Arabia during his recent visit there. In his May 21 speech to what was billed as "the Arab Islamic American Summit," Trump said:



Yesterday, we signed historic agreements with the Kingdom that will invest almost \$400 billion in our two countries and create many thousands of jobs in America and Saudi Arabia.

This landmark agreement includes the announcement of a \$110 billion Saudi-funded defense purchase — and we will be sure to help our Saudi friends to get a good deal from our great American defense companies. This agreement will help the Saudi military to take a greater role in security operations.

A report in *The Hill* stated that under the Arms Export Control Act, a senator can bring a weapons sales measure up on the Senate floor after 10 calendar days, but since the Senate is leaving town on Friday for a week-long Memorial Day break, it will be early June before a vote can be scheduled.

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Paul's primary objection to the arms deal is that it may pull the United States into the civil war in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia is leading a coalition supporting the former Yemeni government.

However, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on May 20 offered the Saudi involvement in Yemen as a positive situation, saying that the arms deal will allow the kingdom to keep up military pressure on the Iranian-backed rebels attempting to take control of Yemen.

While Paul's reason for opposing the Saudi arms deal on the grounds that might increase U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen is certainly well founded, unfortunately, our nation is *already* involved there — and as more than just an arms supplier.

We discussed this U.S. involvement in our February 8 article, "[What Is the U.S. Military Doing in Yemen? Is It Worth the Cost?](#)" That article led off with a reference to the then-recent commando raid by U.S. Navy SEALs in Yemen on January 29 that reportedly killed 14 al-Qaeda operatives. However at least 15 civilians were also killed in the raid including an eight-year-old girl, and a Navy SEAL.

The conflict in Yemen that has prompted U.S. intervention has been years in the making, and it is difficult to provide all of its background concisely. However, as [we noted in an article in 2015](#), our intervention in the beleaguered nation has only aggravated the situation.

We observed in that 2015 article that much of our counterproductive intervention in Yemen came under the leadership of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi as he fought to hold onto power.



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Hadi went temporarily into exile in Saudi Arabia and the Saudis bombed Hadi's opponents in Yemen — the Houthi — with U.S. support. In September 2015, Hadi returned to the Yemen port city of Aden as Saudi-backed government forces recaptured the city.

The Houthi rebels, who are fighting against forces loyal to Hadi, are allied with forces loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was president of Yemen from 1990 to 2012. Furthermore, Saleh's loyalists are al-Qaeda's most powerful opponents, but the Saudi-led bombing threatens to weaken them. Therefore, the Saudi bombing of the rebels, which is supported by the United States, will have the effect of helping al-Qaeda.

The January 31 raid into Yemen by the U.S. military, which was the first commando operation approved by Trump, indicates that on foreign policy the Trump administration is more likely than not to follow the neoconservative, interventionist policies of George W. Bush. A noninterventionist leader such as former Rep. Ron Paul or his son, Sen. Rand Paul, had either of them been elected president, would have been unlikely to have approved such a raid.

Senator Paul almost certainly has learned much from his father, former Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), who has been a constant opponent of U.S. intervention in Yemen and elsewhere for years.

In a February 2015 article for Townhall.com, entitled "The Failed 'Yemen Model,'" the elder Ron Paul noted that then-President Obama had cited his drone program in Yemen as a successful model of U.S. anti-terrorism strategy. Obama had said the previous September that he would employ the Yemen model in his effort to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Paul wasted no time in calling out Obama, writing: "If Yemen is any kind of model, it is a model of how badly U.S. interventionism has failed."

Paul summarized the history of U.S. interventionism in Yemen as follows:

In 2011 the U.S. turned against Yemen's long-time dictator, Saleh, and supported a coup that resulted in another, even more U.S.-friendly leader taking over in a "color revolution." The new leader, Hadi, took over in 2012 and soon became a strong supporter of the U.S. drone program in his country against al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula.

Then Paul described an incident that is eerily similar to what happened again on January 31 of this year:

And the drone strikes have continued. Last Monday, in the first US strike after the coup, a 12 year old boy was killed in what is sickeningly called "collateral damage." Two alleged "al-Qaeda militants" were also killed. On Saturday yet another drone strike killed three more suspected militants.

The U.S. government has killed at least dozens of civilian non-combatants in Yemen, but even those it counts as "militants" may actually be civilians. That is because the Obama administration counts any military-aged male in the area around a drone attack as a combatant.

Paul concluded his article with this lesson: "The lesson from Yemen is not to stay the course that has failed so miserably. It is to end a failed foreign policy that is killing civilians, creating radicals, and making us less safe."

In theory, there should be nothing objectionable about the United States selling arms to other countries, so long as their governments are not controlled by communists or Islamic radicals or other totalitarian regimes. In the case of Saudi Arabia, however, our history of intervention in Yemen poses



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the risk that Paul is concerned about. It might be better to make a clean break altogether, as the senator recommends.

In general, however, it would be far better for our nation to *sell* arms to allies or neutral countries than to *give* them away as part of foreign aid packages. Sales produce a positive revenue flow to our nation while foreign aid drains our treasury. Furthermore, arming our allies through weapons sales would make it easier for them to defend themselves, eliminating the excuse offered for unconstitutional U.S. intervention.

Photo of Sen. Rand Paul: Gage Skidmore

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