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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- *There are many reasons to reject Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination. One big one is his record on national security.*
- *Support for ending the U.S. role in Yemen's civil war is growing by the day.*
- *The Iran Regime Change Industry got together this week to strategize on next steps.*

KAVANAUGH'S RECORD ON NATIONAL SECURITY IS APPALLING

The Senate will begin hearings next week on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, Donald Trump's pick to replace retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court.

Much of the media's attention since his nomination has been on Kavanaugh's awful record on abortion rights and health care, sparking concern that he could be the fifth and deciding vote on cases seeking to overturn *Roe v. Wade* or dismantle the Affordable Care Act.

But there's another side to Kavanaugh that's also deeply troubling: his aversion to international law and his belief in nearly unlimited power for the executive branch when it comes to national security. During his time on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, Kavanaugh enabled some of the worst of the Bush-era counterterrorism policies, like indefinite detention, torture, and mass surveillance.

What's more, Kavanaugh may have even lied about his role in these programs as a senior White House aide during his D.C. Circuit Court nomination hearing back in 2006.

For more details on Kavanaugh's draconian national security views, see our memo [here](#) and our statement asking the Senate to reject his nomination [here](#).

MOMENTUM BUILDING FOR U.S. TO CHANGE COURSE IN YEMEN

The U.S. military is starting to grumble publicly about the mounting civilian casualties caused by the Saudi-led coalition's war against Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Just weeks after a Saudi attack on a school bus killed dozens of children, the UN [said](#) another Saudi-led strike killed nearly 30 civilians, most of whom were children.

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Lt. Gen. Jeffrey L. Harrigian, the top U.S. air commander in the Middle East, [told the New York Times](#) this week that there's a "level of frustration" with the Saudis and their level of transparency about the attacks. And Defense Secretary James Mattis [said](#) this week that U.S. support for the Saudi/UAE war in Yemen isn't unconditional and that U.S. aid requires the coalition to avoid civilian casualties and a commitment to peace.

But if a recent Human Rights Watch [report](#) is any indication, Mattis's words won't mean much to the Saudi-led coalition (nor is it clear that Mattis actually means what he says). According to the report, Saudi Arabia is conducting "woefully inadequate" investigations of its errant attacks in Yemen, including actively working to cover up evidence of war crimes and failing to hold anyone accountable.

Also this week, UN human rights experts [accused](#) all sides in the Yemen civil war of committing war crimes, and singled out American-assisted Saudi and UAE airstrikes for causing the most civilian casualties.

In response, a bipartisan group of Senators led by Todd Young (R-IN) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) [sent a letter](#) to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging him to comply with with a recently passed law requiring Pompeo to certify that the Saudi-led coalition is taking steps to minimize civilian casualties and increase humanitarian assistance. Trump issued a [signing statement](#) to that law suggesting he may choose to flout it and ignore the Yemen certification requirement.

Others, like Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT), who has been a leader in efforts to end U.S. involvement in the war, were more blunt. "There it is. WAR CRIMES," he [tweeted](#) in response to the UN report. "Funded and facilitated by the United States. If we don't end our participation in the Yemen civil war now, what on earth will it take?"

Meanwhile, as [mainstream media outlets](#) continue to shine more light on the U.S. complicity in the atrocities in Yemen, Win Without War joined more than a dozen NGOs this week in [urging](#) Secretary Pompeo to comply with the certification, noting that U.S. assistance to the Saudi-led coalition is contributing to the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

"For some time, Yemen has been the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. ... Yemenis have died and continue to suffer from starvation and preventable diseases due to the denial of access to basic goods and services. ... Astonishingly, every ten minutes a child dies in Yemen of preventable causes," the letter states. If the administration does not comply with the law, the letter says, it "will strongly signal U.S. indifference to the inhumane conduct of the war in Yemen, for which millions of civilians in Yemen will continue to pay the price."

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IRAN REGIME CHANGE INDUSTRY GATHERS IN WASHINGTON

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies, an ultra-hawkish think tank that played a key role in killing the Iran nuclear deal, held a “[national security summit](#)” this week largely for the purposes of promoting [its agenda](#) of pushing for war/regime change in Iran. The summit’s lead speakers, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and newly appointed “Iran Action Group” head Brian Hook put forth a number of false and misleading assertions.

- Hook [falsely claimed](#) that the Iran deal was supposed to compel Iran into changing its behavior on issues outside the scope of the nuclear file. The [reality](#) is that **the deal focused only on blocking all Iran’s pathways to building a bomb** — something it is [continuing to do today](#) even with Trump having walked away.
- Hook [erroneously claimed](#) there was a “global consensus” on Trump’s so-called 12 ([completely unrealistic](#)) demands he placed on Iran. The fact is that the international consensus on Iran before Trump came to office [was](#) to reach and **implement the Iran deal and work together to curb Iran’s nefarious activities in the region**. Now, having violated the deal, the U.S. is isolated, with our partners less likely to work with us on regional issues regarding Iran.
- [And seemingly without any sense of the nature of the administration he works for](#), Hook [said](#) Iran’s leaders resemble the mafia in their corruption and self-dealing.
- Haley [said](#), “You have to look at Iran as the next North Korea.” It seems she forgot that her and her boss’s efforts to kill the Iran deal could leave Iran’s nuclear program [unconstrained and](#) **is exactly what will turn Iran into the next North Korea**.

And if it’s not already clear that FDD’s hawking of [war](#) and [regime change](#) is influential, Hook [told](#) the summit audience this week that “we rely a lot on the analysis that FDD does.”

BURIED LEDES

INCREDIBLE: California became the first state to [pass a resolution](#) **calling for restrictions on the president’s “first use” of nuclear weapons**. Grassroots groups like [Beyond the Bomb](#) and [Women’s Actions for New Directions](#) led the effort (which Win Without War proudly supported), demonstrating not only that local communities are concerned about our national security, but also showing the power of democratizing our foreign policy to enact change.

The United Nations [this week](#) **accused the Burmese army of genocide against the Rohingya**. While the U.S. government is [still weighing](#) whether to use that term, new evidence of atrocities is [still emerging](#) “through footage stored on cell phones of survivors,” according to a

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new [video](#) from the New York Times (warning: graphic).

South Korean president Moon Jae-in is moving forward with negotiations to formally [end the decades-old war](#) with North Korea after Trump abruptly cancelled Mike Pompeo's most recent trip to Pyongyang.

Meanwhile, it turns out that **Trump promised Kim Jong-un that he'd sign a declaration on ending the Korean war**, a fact that [seems to explain](#) why North Korean officials keep making that request (and why Trump [ended up cancelling Pompeo's trip](#)).

Two experts with a combined 65-plus years of government experience working on U.S. Middle East policy [say](#) the United States is giving too much to Saudi Arabia and getting too little in return from "a country that **increasingly pursues policies at home and abroad that undermine American values and interests.**"

Trump's attempts to [limit refugees](#) are flashing alarm bells for **his wider plan to dismantle the entire resettlement program.**

Meanwhile, back in January, Trump cancelled Temporary Protected Status for thousands of Nicaraguans, who will be [forced to return home](#) to a country that "**has plunged into violence and political unrest**, with at least 322 people dying there since mid-April."

While Trump is [increasingly preoccupied](#) with saving his presidency and his personal well-being, the neoconservatives -- many who were previously shunned for signing anti-Trump letters -- **are quietly weaseling their way back into government.**

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is [again](#) **trying to pour cold water on the idea of privatizing the war in Afghanistan.**

[A brutal and horrific battle for the last rebel stronghold in Syria is looming](#), and the U.S. this week [warned](#) Russia and Syria against using chemical weapons.

And finally, NO RESPECT: Rep. Devin Nunes, the most prominent carrier of Trump's water on all things Russia, [went to the UK](#) to try to discredit the infamous Steele dossier, but **no one from British intelligence would meet with him.**