

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- *It's now up to Congress to stop the bloodshed in Yemen.*
- *A bloody battle in Syria looms, and Trump is threatening to make it worse.*
- *Seventeen years after 9/11, it's long past time to leave Afghanistan.*

IT'S CLEAR TRUMP WON'T END THE CARNAGE IN YEMEN, CONGRESS MUST STEP IN

The situation on the ground in Yemen only continues to worsen as the Saudis and the UAE launch yet another offensive on Hodeidah. Coming on the heels of this summer's horrific attacks on a busload of young boys and on even more children [evacuating](#) their homes shortly thereafter, members of Congress are once again preparing to take action.

Earlier this summer, in an effort to move towards accountability, Congress required the Trump Administration to either certify that the Saudi/UAE coalition was finally taking steps to end its war crimes and move towards peace, or to cut off U.S. support for their deadly war in Yemen. This week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a mockery of their efforts by [claiming](#) the Saudis and UAE are doing their best. Now, progressives in Congress are [preparing a push](#) to cut off U.S. support for the war once and for all.

Tragically, while we won't know for a couple of weeks if Congress will finally do its job and vote on the war in Yemen, the people of Yemen will continue to suffer and die in a war that the Trump Administration could have, and should have, ended a long time ago. The uptick in violence and airstrikes in Hodeidah [makes clear](#) that the Saudis and Emiratis have taken Pompeo's deceitful certification as a blank check for more death.

TALKING POINTS

Pompeo's certification that the Saudi/UAE-led coalition is working to reduce civilian casualties simply isn't credible.

- Just weeks ago, the Saudi coalition, by [its own admission](#), **deliberately bombed a school bus, killing dozens of children**. The coalition followed up that bombing with an

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attack on families [evacuating](#) their homes.

- The Saudi/UAE coalition this week has [resumed](#) an assault on the key port of Hodeidah, which U.N. officials [say](#) “**could disrupt the flow of aid into Yemen and create a new humanitarian disaster.**”
- Members of Congress and experts called Pompeo’s certification “[a farce](#),” “[outrageous](#),” “[a mockery of the law](#),” “[a rubber stamp for Saudi Arabia](#),” and “[extreme bad faith](#),” adding that “the Trump administration is openly defying and [lying to Congress](#).” (See our statement on this [here](#) and read an analysis from the Yemen Peace Project [here](#).)

Congress must end this senseless war because it’s now clear that the Trump administration will not.

- Congress can end the U.S. role in this war and end the conflict altogether by supporting the Khanna-Smith-Pocan War Powers Resolution.
- As Bruce Riedel, former advisor on the Middle East to multiple presidents, has [said](#), if the U.S. and the U.K. told the Saudis and Emiratis to end this war, it would be over tomorrow.

The United States is enabling war crimes and fueling one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises.

- Late last month, the United Nations panel of experts tasked with documenting human rights violations in Yemen [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.**
- According to a recent Human Rights Watch [report](#), the coalition’s investigatory body, the Joint Incident Assessment Team – which the State Department [believes](#) should carry out investigations into unlawful airstrikes – 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.

[AS BATTLE FOR IDLIB LOOMS, TRUMP NEEDS TO FOCUS ON DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY IN SYRIA](#)

In Syria, a looming offensive in Idlib could become the bloodiest chapter of the country’s devastating seven-year war, and increase the severity of one of the [most fatal humanitarian catastrophes](#) of the 21st century. The UN [reports](#) 30,000 people have already fled their homes

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since Syrian and Russian forces resumed airstrikes in the province's surrounding villages last week.

Idlib is the last major rebel stronghold in Syria and a significant battle in Assad's quest to consolidate the government's hold over the war-torn country. It's also home to some [three million people](#), hundreds of thousands of whom arrived in the province after escaping violence in other parts of Syria. The city also houses [several thousand fighters](#)—including al-Qaeda affiliates and brutal militant groups whose presence the regime will use to justify indiscriminate military bombardment and the potential use of chemical weapons.

If Assad does use chemical weapons in Idlib, the Trump Administration has [threatened](#) that the U.S. government, joined by allies, would punish the Syrian regime with military force.

TALKING POINTS

The Trump Administration's tough talk and threats of yet more retaliatory missile strikes won't do anything to actually save lives or stop the suffering in Syria.

- **Punitive strikes don't work.** Trump has already bombed Syria for chemical attacks twice before. If Assad uses these terrible weapons again in Idlib, it will only be yet another reminder that military strikes are not an effective deterrent.
- **Punitive strikes are not part of a long-term strategy.** Trump needs to focus on actual diplomacy, not threats, to find a solution that establishes security, stability, and accountability in Syria. One-off military strikes won't accomplish that goal.
- **Military action in Syria is illegal and unconstitutional.** The president needs Congressional authorization for military force, unless the United States is responding to a direct attack (not an attack on perceived national interests) or react to an imminent threat to the U.S. There is no statutory authorization for military force in Syria and neither exception applies.

Here's what the U.S. should do instead of illegal military strikes:

- Work multilaterally to apply diplomatic and economic pressure for an immediate ceasefire that allows aid organizations unfettered access to affected areas.
- Support the [UN envoy's call](#) for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to allow civilians to escape the violence.

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- Increase and better allocate funds to UN agencies working to address Syria's humanitarian and refugee crisis, including funding to refugee host nations like Turkey.
- Rescind the Muslim Ban, raise refugee caps, and re-designate Temporary Protected Status for Syria.
- Mount a robust diplomatic campaign to establish an accountability mechanism to hold those responsible for atrocities committed in Syria.

Any major military assault on Idlib will result in tragic loss of life, regardless of whether chemical weapons are used. Assad must be held accountable for his war crimes, but after seven years of bloody war, a few more missile strikes will not do that. The war in Syria is [ending](#). Idlib is one of its final chapters. The Trump Administration now should focus on helping draw the war to a diplomatic close that allows the Syrian people to rebuild their lives and achieve justice, not further inflame the violence with illegal military strikes.

[ANOTHER YEAR OF ENDLESS, USELESS WAR](#)

We marked another anniversary of the 9/11 attacks this week. Seventeen years after that terrible day, we're still fighting the same war with the same result in search of a different outcome (see Win Without War Director Stephen Miles' [take](#) on this point). In fact, today, children who weren't even born at the time of the 9/11 attacks [can now enlist](#) to fight in our nation's endless "war on terror."

Since September 11, 2001, we've spent upwards of [\\$5.6 trillion dollars](#) chasing terrorists and [creating new ones](#) in the process.

On that last point, the chairs of the 9/11 Commission report -- the U.S. government's official account of just what happened that day and in the lead up to it -- [said in a new study](#) that extremist threats around the world have actually expanded since 9/11. Extremist groups, they say, have tried to push the U.S. toward "military, financial, and political exhaustion through the relentless grind of asymmetric warfare." Indeed, this was [Osama bin Laden's intent](#), yet it's clear it's a lesson U.S. generals and policy makers have failed to understand.

Indeed, one veteran of the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan -- who signed up for the military after 9/11 to avenge the death of his brother, who was working on the 102nd floor of the World Trade Center's north tower -- wrote in a widely shared New York Times [op-ed](#) this week:

...it has embarrassingly taken me 17 years to realize something, and what I realized was this: Seventeen years ago, staring at that picture of Mohammad Atta, I wanted revenge

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against the people who killed my brother. But what I finally realized was that the people who killed my brother died the same day he did.

I refuse to take Atta's orders, or Bin Laden's. I will not "stay quiet." End the war.

There was one member of Congress -- one -- who voted against the authorization for the use of military force after 9/11. Rep. Barbara Lee [told her story this week](#) about that vote, its aftermath, and why [we need to repeal](#) the war authorizations that continue our endless wars.

BURIED LEDES

UN secretary general Antonio Guterres [warned](#) this week that "we face an existential threat" because "**climate change is moving faster than we are.**"

Remember when Trump administration officials were trying to convince us Iran and Al Qaeda were best buds? Here's [more evidence](#) that **that's completely false.**

Trump's plan to slap oil sanctions on Iran just might backfire and [raise gas prices](#) here in the U.S. Diplomacy Works [called out](#) Trump for preemptively blaming OPEC.

[There is](#) **no downside to a political declaration to the end of the Korean war.**

It's bad enough that Trump wants more (and so-called "usable") nukes, what's worse is **he's working to limit protections of those who build them**, and [cutting back staff who inspect them](#). In a small piece of good news, at least two members of Congress [voted against](#) a bipartisan spending package because it funds Trump's new low-yield nuclear weapon.

A right-wing magazine famous for [pushing the line](#) that Saddam Hussein was in cahoots with al-Qaeda is somehow an official news fact checker on Facebook, and is [using that power to take out progressive news outlets.](#)

After **the Trump administration's dismal failure to help people in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria**, which [killed](#) nearly 3,000 people in Puerto Rico alone, Trump [amped up his delusions](#) on Twitter.

Lindsey Graham [is](#) **even more awful than we thought.**

A retired Navy Rear Admiral and Judge Advocate General [says](#) the Senate should vote no on Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination because **his "role on the Court could be harmful to both our security and our rights."**

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And finally, we suppose it's fitting that a prominent Inside the Beltway news outlet would **celebrate the birthday of one of the biggest advocates for regime change in Iran ...** [on 9/11](#).