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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 10/4/19

[WANTED: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION](#)

Justice for all is a core principle of progressive foreign policy, so it's exciting to finally see a forceful appetite in Congress to hold the Trump administration accountable. But accountability for this administration's abuses can't stop at #UkraineGate (and now [Trump's #ChinaGate proposal](#)). **Hate-driven border militarization, expanding endless wars and their resulting civilian harm, and the empowerment of global authoritarians have all defined this administration's cruelty.**

HATE-DRIVEN BORDER MILITARIZATION

This week we found out [more details](#) about how far Trump is willing to go to deny people seeking refuge access to asylum; in March, Trump had aides look into creating a [moat](#) at the U.S. southern border filled with alligators and snakes. He also wanted to construct an electric fence with spikes at the top and **suggested the U.S. military violates the law and shoot migrants and asylum seekers in the legs to slow them down** – a tactic [used](#) by the Israeli army in Gaza.

Trump reportedly continued his border tirade by [suggesting](#) that his administration simply “take the land...and let them sue us” when advisors pointed out wall that construction couldn't go at the pace he desired because they needed permission from property owners. It appears property rights and upholding the law are unimportant to Trump in his goal to construct a useless, racist border wall.

These reports lay bare that, time and again, Trump has called for illegal and abusive methods to implement and defend his racist border policies, including by raiding congressionally-appropriated Pentagon funds for his wall and by deploying 7,000 U.S. troops to the border, to score political points and inflict harm on migrants. And that's nothing to say of his administration's concentration camps and increasingly dehumanizing conditions for migrant families seeking refuge and opportunity. (For more information on border militarization see our issue brief [here](#) and latest messaging [here](#)).

This week's reports make clear that Congress must do more to end the power of Trump's deportation force, block his continued efforts to construct his racist wall, free the thousands of those suffering in detention, provide access to life-saving protections at the border, and address the role of the U.S. in driving forced migration from Latin America. But we also cannot forget that Trump's abuses aren't occurring in a vacuum; rather this administration's immigration policies have been enabled by decades of migration criminalization that began 25 years ago this week with then-President Bill Clinton's [Operation Gatekeeper](#).

EXPANDING CIVILIAN HARM

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The U.S. is embroiled in multiple, endless conflicts including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. The civilian harm inflicted on those who live in these countries is underreported, and often [blatantly ignored](#), by the U.S. government. The fact that the United States' global endless wars against violent groups that perpetrate terrorism have harmed civilians around the world is certainly not limited to Trump. Yet, **Trump has not only [expanded](#) U.S. wars, he's also [loosened](#) the rules of engagement and other legal protections that have, in turn, caused civilian casualties affiliated with U.S. military operations to [skyrocket](#) around the world.** The past few weeks in particular has been a lethal time for innocent bystanders.

In September, a U.S. drone strike [killed](#) over 30 pine nut farmers in Afghanistan, including children, even though, tragically, the farmers had told the local government authority that they planned to congregate there for harvest. Shortly after that, a U.S.-backed Afghan raid [killed](#) over 40 civilians, including 12 children, as they were celebrating a wedding. In just the first six months of this year, U.S. and U.S.-backed Afghan forces [killed](#) more civilians in Afghanistan than the Taliban according to the UN.

Similarly, **in Iraq and Syria U.S. airstrikes have resulted in huge civilian casualties.** One in five strikes [conducted](#) by the U.S. coalition have resulted in civilian deaths, which is about 31 times higher than the U.S. coalition is admitting to. In both 2017 and 2018, the Pentagon reported about [half as many civilian casualties](#) in the U.S.-led war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as independent estimates. Meanwhile, in Somalia, the U.S. has continued to kill civilians its drone war against al-Shabaab under dubious legal authorities, [largely outside of public scrutiny](#) and with seemingly [little understanding of who it is targeting](#).

In Yemen, Trump has continued to support the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition against the Houthi rebels. The results have been devastating: **U.S.-supported coalition airstrikes in Yemen are the leading cause of civilian casualties in the conflict**, making the United States [complicit](#) in the coalition's ongoing war crimes. This August was "the worst month for civilian casualties in the air war in a year" [according to the Yemen Data Project](#), with the August 31st [airstrike on Dhamar prison](#) that killed over 100 people the deadliest since the beginning of the intervention.

While some in Congress have taken the administration to task for waging war outside of congressional authorization and for the undue harm these wars have caused, **there has been little sustained appetite to question the legal and policy framework that allows Trump to further emmesh the United States in endless wars around the world.** There can be no justice for the innocent lives these wars have taken if there is no reckoning with how congressional and public complacency has normalized the mass violence our government commits on a day-to-day basis.

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EMBOLDENING GLOBAL AUTHORITARIANS

From Egypt to Indonesia to Hong Kong to Kashmir, authoritarian leaders are empowered and emboldened in large part because of the Trump administration's erasure of human rights and democracy from nearly all U.S. global engagement. In addition, Trump's own proclivity to draw from the authoritarian toolkit to secure his personal, political, and business interests – including abusing human rights, deploying xenophobic rhetoric, inciting political divisions, and leveraging international corruption networks – has signalled that the U.S. will turn a blind eye to other regimes doing the same. And to make matters worse, the United States' longstanding tradition of providing material support for authoritarian regimes through weapons sales and security assistance makes the U.S. further complicit in these regimes' abuses.

In Indonesia, ongoing protests against the government reached a fever pitch this week. Protests against a series of legislation that would harm civil liberties and weaken the popular, independent Corruption Eradication Commission, turned violent as protesters [clashed](#) with police. Meanwhile, the government is also violently putting down protests in [West Papua](#), where West Papuans are currently demonstrating against government-sanctioned violence against those calling for independence, with dozens [killed](#). **Yet, the administration has remained silent, despite the fact that the U.S. is Indonesia's [top arms supplier](#) and the country's leadership has [sought](#) further arms deals to curry Trump's favor.**

Similarly, Egyptians have taken to the streets in [protest](#) over president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government and the Egyptian military's endemic corruption. Since the first protests on September 27, over 2,000 people have been arrested and internet access has been restricted. **The United States underwrites the Egyptian regime, with Egypt receiving the highest amount of security assistance – \$1.3 billion – per year than any other country besides Israel.** Although the Senate's FY2020 State and Foreign Operations appropriations [bill](#) conditions a small portion of this assistance on human rights reform, more must be done to establish accountability in U.S. policy to address increasing repression and human rights abuses in the country. And of course, Trump has not made a peep about this week's arrests by his "[favorite dictator](#)," who he [told](#) on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly not to worry because "everybody has demonstrations".

Finally, Trump welcomed Indian prime minister Narendra Modi during his public relations tour in Texas last week. Rather than facing scrutiny or condemnation for his leadership of an intolerant and oppressive Hindu nationalist movement, his [past role](#) in religious violence, or his [ongoing, extreme and violent crackdown](#) on Muslim-majority Kashmir, Modi was welcomed with fanfare, Trump's praise, and [an award from a prestigious foundation](#). **Continuing reports of mass detention, torture, and disappearances in Kashmir did little to prevent Trump from [hailing](#) Modi as "one of America's greatest, most devoted and most loyal friends."**

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It is abundantly clear that to Trump, freedom of speech and assembly – the cornerstones of democracy – are unimportant and should be disregarded in favor of crony capitalism and political power. **Trump's continuing silence about the abuses of others, as well as his own penchant for human rights abuses, has dangerously undermined respect for the rule of law and democratic norms around the world.** Without a serious examination of how the United States supports authoritarian regimes around the world, not just in rhetoric but also materially, it will be difficult for the U.S. to help halt the worrying trend of state-led violence against citizens calling for basic human rights and dignity.

All these developments make clear that instead of stopping at Trump's attempts to extort foreign leaders for his personal political gain, Congress must also pursue justice for all those those who are being harmed by these unjust policies. That's the only way we can truly hold the administration accountable and begin to protect democracy at home and abroad.

BURIED LEDES

This week marked the one year anniversary of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's torture and [murder](#), spurring a [petition](#) to be sent to the **International Criminal Court for Mohammad bin Salman to be investigated for crimes against humanity.**

Trump has been [pressuring foreign leaders](#) about the Mueller investigation due to his **belief in debunked right-wing conspiracy theories.**

Shortly after the [announcement](#) of U.S.-North Korea working-level talks, **North Korea tested a submarine ballistic missile on Wednesday.**

At least 42 people have [died](#) in the past four days in Iraq during anti-government protests.

Unaccompanied children are being [targeted](#) by Trump, who is considering putting a two-month deadline on their asylum applications.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE: The official tasked with finding billions of dollars in savings in military spending was [fired](#) for stating the obvious.

The UN has [stated](#) countries like the U.S. who **provide combatants in Yemen with weapons are complicit** in war crimes.

Are you Iranian? Then you just [lost](#) your 2-day shipping with Amazon Prime as **Amazon overreacts to U.S. sanctions and blocks all users in Iran.**

Why is the rum always gone? Because Trump just [put](#) **punitive tariffs on European goods** meaning alcohol, cheese, and many other products will become more expensive.

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And finally, UK Climate activists **lose control of their hose of fake blood** [aimed](#) a British government building to bring attention to UK fossil fuel research and use that's helping drive the climate crisis.