

General Joseph L. Votel  
Commander, U.S. Central Command  
7115 South Boundary Boulevard  
MacDill AFB, FL 33621-5101

February 4, 2019

Dear General Votel,

I write to seek further information and clarification regarding United States support for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi coalition's operations in Yemen.

In a letter dated August 14, 2018, I asked you why the U.S. was unable "to determine whether U.S.-provided fuel or munitions were used as part of a KSA- or UAE-led coalition strike" when other U.S. government agencies were able to make such a determination as detailed in media reports. I also asked "what additional resources or authorities would it take for CENTCOM to routinely track this information?"<sup>1</sup> Your responses to some of my questions dated August 28, 2018 were classified, but additional public reporting has become known that raises further questions.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, on December 25, 2018, the *New York Times* reported that unspecified American liaison officers detailed to the coalition's headquarters in Riyadh readily had access to a "database that detailed every airstrike: warplane, target, munitions used and a brief description of the attack." This report also quoted Larry Lewis, a former State Department advisor who specialized in civilian harm and worked with the Saudi-led coalition from 2015-2017. Lewis reportedly said that liaison officers frequently emailed him copies of the alleged database: "If the question was 'Hey, was that a U.S. munition they used?' You would know that it was."<sup>3</sup> This new information raises the troubling possibility that CENTCOM does in fact have access to information that would allow it to determine whether and when Saudi or United Arab Emirates (UAE) aircraft armed or refueled with U.S. support have struck targets in Yemen, if CENTCOM chose to do so.

Separately, new information has come to light that also calls into question statements about U.S. support for the Saudi coalition by CENTCOM officials under your command. For

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to Commander of U.S. Central Command General Joseph L. Votel, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/oversight/letters/warren-presses-centcom-commander-on-us-involvement-in-yemen>

<sup>2</sup> Letter from General Joseph L. Votel to Senator Elizabeth Warren, August 28, 2018

<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, "Arms Sales to Saudis Leave American Fingerprints on Yemen Carnage," Declan Walsh and Eric Schmitt, December 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/world/middleeast/yemen-us-saudi-civilian-war.html?>

instance, in response to a request from a *Yahoo News* reporter a CENTCOM spokesperson said that the U.S. did not provide specific training support for the Saudi-led coalition's campaign in Yemen, saying "we do not conduct exercises with members of the [Saudi-led coalition] to prepare for combat operations in Yemen."<sup>4</sup> However, on January 16, 2019, *Yahoo News* published Air Force documents provided under the Freedom of Information Act that show units under your command have in fact done so. Specifically, the Air Warfare Center was recommended for an Air Force Organizational Excellence Award for "advanc[ing] the UAE's F-16 fighter pilot training program" and "creat[ing] 4 new instructors & 29 combat wingmen *who immediately deployed for combat operations in Yemen.*"<sup>5</sup> This is in addition to longstanding U.S. training and sustainment support to the Royal Saudi Air Force.<sup>6</sup>

I appreciated your prompt and thorough response to my earlier letter, but I am concerned about continued public reporting about the extent of U.S. involvement in the Saudi-led coalition's operations in Yemen. Additionally, you raised a number of points in our recent meeting that raise additional questions. Accordingly, I respectfully request that you respond to the following questions no later than February 15, 2019:

1. Does an airstrike database as described in the *New York Times* report referenced above, or any other system used to track airstrikes, exist?
  - a. If so, who has access to this database and with whom is it shared?
  - b. Specifically, what information does this database contain?
2. Do American representatives in Saudi Arabia have access to this airstrike database or any other system used to track airstrikes?
  - a. If so, which representatives from which agencies?
  - b. If so, have these representatives accessed this database and passed it up their chain of command or to other U.S. government agencies?
  - c. If so, why wasn't this database referenced in your response to my August 2018 letter?
  - d. If so, will you provide me a copy?
3. Has CENTCOM ever requested access to this database or any other system used to track airstrikes? If so, was it granted?
4. Are the American military liaison officers described in the *New York Times* report under your command?

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<sup>4</sup> Yahoo News, "Despite denials, documents reveal U.S. training UAE forces for combat in Yemen," Nick Turse, January 16, 2019, <https://news.yahoo.com/despite-denials-documents-reveal-u-s-training-uae-forces-combat-yemen-171513437.html>

<sup>5</sup> Yahoo News, "Despite denials, documents reveal U.S. training UAE forces for combat in Yemen," Nick Turse, January 16, 2019, <https://news.yahoo.com/despite-denials-documents-reveal-u-s-training-uae-forces-combat-yemen-171513437.html>

<sup>6</sup> Air Force Technology, "Saudi Arabia requests \$750m air force blanket order training programme from US," Lopamudra Roy, June 7, 2017, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/uncategorised/newssaudi-arabia-requests-750m-air-force-blanket-order-training-programme-from-us-5835850/>

5. What specific training has CENTCOM provided to Saudi Arabia and the UAE since March 2015?
6. Please describe the Air Force Organizational Excellence Award given to the Air Warfare Center?
  - a. For what specific activities did the Air Warfare Center receive the award?
  - b. Did any of these activities involve any training or training support for UAE military personnel?
  - c. If not, what did the Air Force mean when it commended this unit for “creat[ing] 4 new instructors & 29 combat wingmen who immediately deployed for combat operations in Yemen.”<sup>7</sup>
7. When providing refueling support to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, did refueling tankers assigned to CENTCOM log tail numbers of those aircraft?
  - a. If not, how did the tankers track fuel offloaded to KSA and UAE aircraft to ensure each country was invoiced correctly?
8. U.S. military advisors reportedly advise Saudi Arabia on compliance with the Law of Armed Conflict and best practices to avoid civilian casualties and collateral damage. Have those efforts resulted in a reduction in civilian casualties? If so please provide evidence to support that assessment.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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<sup>7</sup> Yahoo News, “Despite denials, documents reveal U.S. training UAE forces for combat in Yemen,” Nick Turse, January 16, 2019, <https://news.yahoo.com/despite-denials-documents-reveal-u-s-training-uae-forces-combat-yemen-171513437.html>