# Australia, the United Arab Emirates and the War in Yemen

# Richard Tanter[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

It seems unimaginable that Australia could be involved in the war in Yemen, arguably the world’s worst contemporary humanitarian catastrophe, with more than 10,000 dead, one million cases of cholera, and 11 million in acute need of assistance and protection. Or that Canberra could be building towards a military alliance with a Gulf state dictatorship with deep involvement in that war—the United Arab Emirates. Or that both Coalition and Labor governments approved—and may well have encouraged—one of Australia’s most senior, decorated soldiers to put on the uniform of that dictatorship, earning millions of dollars in the process. Or that this former Australian Defence Force (ADF) general could go on to plan, build, train and command the UAE’s elite military force, and then oversee more than three years of its operations in a war characterised by highly plausible allegations of war crimes and gross violations of human rights. Not only this but accusations by the Yemeni government of UAE seizure of territory amounting to colonisation, leading to a place of horror, where, as a UN panel of experts reported to the Security Council, ‘Yemen, as a State, has all but ceased to exist’.[[2]](#endnote-1)

All this points to a new phase of Australia’s alliance dependent, high-technology liberal militarization, rooted, on the one hand, in the export of highly skilled military specialists as senior or command mercenaries, and on the other in the formation of close ties between second order US allies as an American force multiplier.[[3]](#endnote-2)

The war in Yemen

Mainstream Australian and Western media are reporting enough about the far-away war in Yemen for some of its horrors to have seeped through to public consciousness. Most reports focus, understandably enough, on the humanitarian impacts of the war: the large numbers of Yemeni civilians killed or wounded from aerial bombing and urban warfare, and the epidemics and threats of starvation driven by naval and border blockade. Some with longer media memories may recall Yemen as an early locus of US ‘counter-terrorist’ assassinations of remaining Al Qaeda franchise groups by drone and special forces, with targeting data supplied by Australia’s spy base Pine Gap.

Almost all such media reports also frame the war in one of two highly distorting ways. One is to describe it as a ‘civil war’—at root a conflict between a troubled but legitimately elected Yemeni government and Houthi Islamist rebels; the other, often overlapping, frame combines religious conflicts and geo-strategic motivations to portray the Yemeni government and its foreign allies as Sunni Muslim and their Houthi movement antagonists as Shia proxies for Iran.

In truth, the pattern of domestic conflict has long been more complex than the simple binary connoted by ‘civil war’, and has become even more tortuous since 2014 with the intervention of a large regional military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which effectively controls most of the country. The war led to a revival of older fissiparous tendencies in the south and east of the country, which characterised both the British colonial period of control and, after 1967, its strife-torn successor states. The Yemeni government, recognised by the United Nations and Australia as the legitimate governing power, now resides in Saudi Arabia, governs little of the country, does not control the military forces made up of local militia, mercenaries and UAE troops operating in its name under UAE command, and accuses the UAE of seeking to colonise its territory.[[4]](#endnote-3)

A snapshot history of the most recent phase of the war would note that under Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) the United Nations recognises the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, who came to power in 2011 after acting as vice-president to the former long-time dictator, Ali Abdullah Saleh.[[5]](#endnote-4) Hadi came to power in the early Arab Spring at a time when Saleh was immobilised by health problems, and in the face of a broad-based but complex popular challenge to the Saleh dictatorship led by the northern Houthis and their main political organisation, Ansar Allah. Hadi was installed as president as a result of a 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council mediation, ratified a year later by a presidential election with a 99.8 per cent vote for Hadi for a two-year term. Little changed, however, under the new leadership, in large part because the underlying political economy of patronage remained untouched.

As perhaps the best informed of English-language commentators, Chatham House’s Peter Salisbury, put it in 2011, the

political crisis in Yemen has created a cycle of hyperinflation, currency depreciation and disruption to the supply of basic goods. This is already having a serious impact on the 10.3 million Yemenis living in poverty, with the prospect of worse conditions to come. Yemen’s economy is in thrall to a complex, intertwined network of elites that control the oil industry, imports, processing, and packaging and distribution of goods. Worryingly, many members of these elite groups are also key actors in the current crisis.[[6]](#endnote-5)

Little has changed today, except that it has become worse.

Al Ansar forces, with support from Saleh and his patronage networks, took the capital in late 2014, forcing Hadi to resign and to flee with most of his government to Saudi Arabia. It wasn’t long before Saudi Arabia and the UAE and a coalition of Gulf and Red Sea states commenced a massive air and ground operation against the Houthi-led opponents of Hadi, and a month later the Security Council recognised the Hadi government and set in place sanctions against Saleh and Al Ansar leaders. From that moment any sense that the war in Yemen was a civil war became meaningless.

Most informed observers dismiss the Iran/Shia frame. Not only is there little evidence to back up US and Saudi claims of substantial Iranian material involvement to support their putative Shia co-religionists but equating the Zaydi branch of Islam followed by Houthi tribal groups as Shia in the Iranian sense is deeply misleading—akin to equating the Egyptian Coptic Church with Roman Catholicism. Iran has certainly supported the anti-government Houthi movement rhetorically and, according to the evidence of a UN panel of experts, with limited military assistance.[[7]](#endnote-6) But framing the war as a Sunni–Shia conflict in the terms of a homologous and mutually reinforcing domestic conflict (‘Sunni’: Hadi versus ‘Shia’: Houthi) and an international one (‘Sunni’: Yemen-government/Saudi-Arabian/UAE versus ‘Shia’: Iran), has a tenacious grip providing great political benefits in Washington and the Western press.

The Australian connection: up-market mercenaries

The most immediately shocking aspect of Australia’s connection to the war might be the fact that the commander of the most important UAE military unit, deeply involved in fighting in Yemen, is the former senior Australian army officer Michael Hindmarsh. Hindmarsh retired from the ADF as a major general in June 2009 after a career in the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR), serving in Afghanistan and Iraq and as head of the Special Operations Command.

During much of his later ADF career Hindmarsh was closely involved with the UAE, mainly through his role in the expansion of the large, longstanding Australian base at Al Minhad Air Base in Dubai, which still serves today as the command, logistics and training hub of the ADF’s Middle Eastern Area of Operations (MEAO) for Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Indian Ocean. Hindmarsh retired from the ADF following a year commanding the ADF’s MEAO headquarters.[[8]](#endnote-7)

Hindmarsh initially accepted a position in late 2009 as national security adviser to the UAE’s de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, and shortly after as commander of the UAE’s Presidential Guard, reportedly at a tax-free salary of half a million dollars a year. In this role, Hindmarsh is a member of the UAE’s armed forces, wearing a UAE lieutenant general’s uniform and, most importantly, reporting directly to bin Zayed.[[9]](#endnote-8)

There are reportedly dozens of former ADF personnel working with or as part of the UAE armed forces, including a number of senior former officers whom Hindmarsh brought with him. In the age of neoliberal economics, many countries and entities rely on so-called private security contractors to provide security- and military-related services ranging from military combat roles, protection, transport, logistics supply and support to training of all types. Notoriously, the United States has relied on large numbers of such ‘contractors’ to supplement—and in some cases to replace outright—the roles of state military forces.[[10]](#endnote-9)

Much more than other countries, the UAE has recruited foreign military personnel for a wide range of tasks, including some thousands in the Yemen war, and is notable for two factors.[[11]](#endnote-10). First, the military and political structure of the UAE is demographically challenged. Of the country’s 10 million or so inhabitants, only one million are citizens: 90 per cent of the workforce is foreign and almost entirely without political rights, leaving the ruling groups in felt need of special military protection. In turn, 90 per cent of those one million Emiratis work for the state in one way or another, with low unemployment further reducing the attractiveness of citizens serving in their country’s armed forces.[[12]](#endnote-11). Not surprisingly then, foreign mercenary recruiters such as Reflex Responses (R2) provide large numbers of foreign fighters for UAE’s Yemen and Red Sea operations. Erik Prince, founder of the private military company Blackwater, now bases himself in the UAE and is closely associated with R2. According to the *New York Times* Prince reportedly held a half-billion-dollar contract in the late 2000s to build ‘a secret American-led mercenary army’ for the UAE, largely made up of Colombian former soldiers. In mid-May 2011 the UAE government held up the expansion of Prince’s plan until the first battalion proved itself in a ‘real world mission’.[[13]](#endnote-12) It seems Yemen is providing the proving ground.

Beyond this general need for foreign military to fill out the ranks, the UAE is also distinctive for its appointment of foreigners to very senior uniformed positions in its armed forces.

Even so, Hindmarsh’s case is almost unique, because of his seniority and potential visibility and because of the nature of the war the UAE is conducting in Yemen. According to Ian McPhedran, then defence correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, Hindmarsh’s initial appointment in 2009 as national-security adviser to Zayed followed some eighteen months of confidential negotiations ‘and was cleared by the Government and Defence Chief Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston’.[[14]](#endnote-13) This appointment was a matter of considerable political sensitivity in Canberra, and with allegations of UAE forces under his command accused of war crimes in Yemen, this concern has been magnified to the point where it has more recently been described, by a former government senator, as ‘a public-relations quagmire’ for the Australian government.[[15]](#endnote-14)

Whatever the political ramifications, there was no legal impediment to Hindmarsh’s mercenary shift in 2009. Australian law on ‘foreign fighters’ has undergone a number of twists and turns since the Fraser government introduced the *Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Act* 1978to deal with the reputational damage caused by harbouring residents accused of terrorist activities in countries such as the former Yugoslavia or serving as mercenaries in foreign wars. This was a time when, as Melbourne lawyer Jessie Smith put it, ‘young Australians were mired in Rhodesia, Angola and the former Yugoslavia, seduced by dollars and guns’.[[16]](#endnote-15). Pressure from community groups representing Australians with dual-citizenship obligations for national service in other countries led the government to modify the intended blanket ban on foreign military service to allow service with any sovereign state, but not non-state organisations. In 1987 the Act’s definition of ‘government’ was amended to include ‘any authority with effective governmental control’ and in 2004 amended again to exclude listed organisations.[[17]](#endnote-16)

In December 2014 the 1978 Act was replaced with a new section of the *Criminal Code Act* 1995, under which ‘The Minister for Home Affairs may permit recruitment of a person or class of persons to serve with an armed force of a foreign country if it is in the interests of the defence or international relations of Australia’.[[18]](#endnote-17) It is likely that at the time Hindmarsh was in negotiation with the Australian government, discussions included not only the Defence Department and the Chief of the Defence Force, as McPhedran mentioned, but also the Attorney-General’s Department and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and quite possibly other departments, too. To date, public embarrassment about Hindmarsh has not been sufficient to prise open the paper trail to allow any redefinition of what kinds of mercenary activities ADF members may be allowed to pursue after they leave the force.

Little direct information is available about what precisely Hindmarsh does in his job as Commander of the Presidential Guard. When the ABC contacted him in 2016 ‘to clarify his role in the UAE actions in Yemen’, he declined to be interviewed, saying ‘I am a serving officer in the UAE Armed Forces… I am not at liberty to speak with you on such matters’.[[19]](#endnote-18) One of Hindmarsh’s UAE military roles, at least to begin with in 2009, and possibly still today, is as an official national security adviser to the Deputy Commander of the Armed Forces and reputed effective leader, Mohammed bin Zayed. What the duties of that advisory role may involve, and what advice may have been given in pursuit of the UAE’s strategic goals and war activities, we do not know. In the event of war-crimes charges, this would have to be investigated.

Hindmarsh’s acknowledged role as Commander of the Presidential Guard, the UAE’s elite fighting force, is much less ambiguous. There have been suggestions that this role is primarily concerned with training the guard and preparing a special-forces unit for its planned role in hard fighting, and with planning the establishment of a more effective army more generally. That in itself would involve some executive role and some measure of responsibility for the activities of the guard in Yemen.

Yet, as more information emerges about the character of the war and the activities of both UAE forces and the Yemeni forces they control, any distinction between ‘advisory command’ and ‘operational command’ has begun to evaporate. This is the result of a detailed investigation into the role of other foreign mercenaries occupying senior positions in the UAE military. Stephen Toumajan, a former US army lieutenant-colonel, describes himself, and is described by the UAE government, as ‘commander of the UAE’s Joint Aviation Command’, with the rank of major general, yet Toumajan also says he is a civilian contractor and ‘not currently in their armed forces’.[[20]](#endnote-19) Toumajan has good reason for maintaining ambiguity, since under US law US citizens are not permitted to be members of the armed forces of other countries, and the US Army says it is currently reviewing Toumajan’s situation. The State Department has said it has never authorised any contractor to provide ‘direct command functions’ to a foreign army.[[21]](#endnote-20)

In Toumajan’s case, the chances of charges of direct involvement in UAE war crimes in Yemen are very high, in particular because of a March 2017 attack by helicopter gunship on a boat in the Red Sea sailing towards Eritrea carrying unarmed Somali migrants and refugees, leaving thirty-two people killed and twenty-nine wounded, including children.[[22]](#endnote-21)

Critically for the Hindmarsh case, a detailed *Buzzfeed* report quoted from ‘a retired top CIA official who has dealt frequently with the UAE that

‘the two operational guys that they rely on to run the fucking war for them is Mike Hindmarsh and Stephen Toumajan… Basically they’ve got foreign mercenaries fighting the war—or commanding the war, I should say’.[[23]](#endnote-22)

To be sure, a remark by an unnamed news source with a US intelligence background does not constitute damning evidence of command responsibility for war crimes. But an allegation in a major news source that the UAE does ‘rely on [Hindmarsh and Toumajan] to run the fucking war for them’ provides good reason for the Australian government to open an inquiry into the conduct of a former star of the ADF’s high command.

In a UAE uniform Hindmarsh benefits from and is subject to the Geneva Conventions, but accountability for possible command responsibility for war crimes is more murky than usual because of lack of direct evidence about his command responsibilities in a secretive personalistic dictatorship. Neither the UAE nor Yemen are signatories to the International Criminal Court (ICC) statute, but Australia *is* a signatory. Lawyers have pointed to Australia’s responsibility for holding its citizens accountable for alleged war crimes under that statute to investigate and if necessary prosecute under domestic war-crimes legislation or through the ICC.

Hindmarsh’s peculiarly repugnant senior mercenary role was made possible by the intellectual capital he possesses as created through decades of training funded by Australian taxpayers and by the Australian government’s approval of Hindmarsh’s high-level mercenary activities. American legal scholar Rebecca Hamilton has pointed out that Australian war-crimes law has universal jurisdiction, and that command responsibility for Hindmarsh would apply if he ‘knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, was reckless as to whether the forces were committing or about to commit such offences’.[[24]](#endnote-23)

The fact that the Attorney-General’s approval is required before an Australian war-crimes prosecution can proceed is an obvious political obstacle. But there is no such obstacle to an investigation by the Australian Federal Police. If they see sufficient evidence for prosecution, they can refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Such an initiative, conducted in the light of public scrutiny, might be much more difficult for an Attorney-General to block.

The Australian connection: a burgeoning alliance?

Australian military forces have been involved in armed conflict in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa with one imperial partner or another for over a century. Since 2009 Al Minhad Air Base in the UAE has been the centre of Australian military and naval operations in the Middle East.[[25]](#endnote-24) As Australia’s largest overseas base, Al Minhad houses the MEAO headquarters, serves as the logistics and training launch pad for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for almost two decades has supported Australian naval operations as part of the US-led Combined Maritime Forces in the western Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Horn of Africa.[[26]](#endnote-25) At times, more than 800 Australian personnel have been based at Al Minhad. RAAF air bombing, refueling and airborne early-warning and control operations over Iraq and Syria from 2014 have been based out of Al Minhad.[[27]](#endnote-26) It is unlikely that Al Minhad’s importance will diminish greatly in the near future, even with the end of bombing operations in January this year. Defence observers have pointed out that this requirement provides the UAE government with considerable leverage over Australian policy.[[28]](#endnote-27)

However, Australian connections to the UAE involve much more than a very large military base. Over the past decade, Labor and Coalition governments have publicly identified the UAE as the hub of Australian commercial, financial, diplomatic and military activities in the Middle East. The largest component is Australian citizens working in the UAE in the upper levels of the business world. Two-way trade has expanded dramatically, and Australia actively pursues UAE petrodollars for investment, tourism and education exports. A nuclear-supply agreement means that Rio Tinto will be able to supply Australian uranium to fuel the UAE’s Korean-built nuclear reactors starting to come online. Other agreements involve financial market and regulation technology, law enforcement and research.

Arms exports are of concern to the Turnbull government under its plan to make Australia one of the world’s top ten arms exporters within ten years, increasing arms exports from $2 billion a year to $10 billion. Minister for Defence Industry Christopher Pyne has identified the UAE as a particularly important partner for this plan, and has reportedly had discussions with the UAE about a long-term partnership that would lead to a defence plan that includes more than $1 billion in arms sales to the UAE and the transfer of Australian technology to bolster the UAE’s military production capacity.[[29]](#endnote-28)

Pyne’s dark fantasy of a billion-dollar arms agreement with the UAE and revelations of a previously unknown expansion of arms orders from Saudi Arabia come at a time when a number of countries have reconsidered their previous policies of weapons exports or defence cooperation with the UAE and Saudi Arabia because of their conduct in the Yemen war. After a three-fold increase in arms exports to Saudi Arabia over 2016–17, Germany halted arms-export approvals to Saudi Arabia in January this year.[[30]](#endnote-29) In the same month, ‘due to the increasing risks associated with the UAE’s military engagement in [Yemen]’, Norway banned export licences to the UAE of military equipment ‘with the strategic capacity to influence the military balance beyond the immediate vicinity’.[[31]](#endnote-30) Exports to Saudi Arabia had already been suspended. Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden have all restricted or suspended arms exports to the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[[32]](#endnote-31)

Even in the United States there have been concerted efforts in Congress to restrict US involvement in the war, most conspicuously in a Senate resolution in March this year. Three senators—one Democrat, one Republican, and Bernie Sanders—moved a resolution that would remove ‘US armed forces from hostilities between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis in Yemen’. This followed a successful House of Representatives resolution in November 2017 stating that the US military had not been authorised to assist Saudi Arabia in its war in Yemen. Remarkably, the Senate vote to debate the resolution lost by only forty-four to fifty-five, after a strenuous campaign by the administration to prevent debate.[[33]](#endnote-32)

What was once a ‘modest’ 2007 Defence Cooperation Agreement between Australia and the UAE is beginning to pick up steam, with annual meetings of a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee and associated military and intelligence coordination and networking activities. UAE officers have been training at Australian defence schools, while UAE aircraft have been participating in Australia-based military exercises. Hindmarsh took a considerable number of senior military colleagues with him to Abu Dhabi, linking UAE-based training and military institution-building to parallel activities in Australia. Most importantly, as John Watts, an Australian analyst based at the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, noted, there is much for Washington to be optimistic about in the burgeoning Australian–UAE relationship. Watts’ advocacy of yet closer Australian ties to the UAE fits with Washington’s growing encouragement to US allies to make their own connections to other allies. For the United States this offers the possibility of closer bilateral relations between second-tier allies as a force multiplier, a second-order network effect geared to what are expected to be common understandings of interests.[[34]](#endnote-33)

The United States has few formal allies in the Middle East, which is a region critical to its strategic interests, but it does have several close strategic relationships that amount to alliances. Washington will be greatly encouraged by the growing alignment emerging between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The possibility of the UAE as a ‘western anchor’ for Australian Indo-Pacific strategy is attractive to Washington, and evidently to both Canberra and Abu Dhabi.[[35]](#endnote-34)

Are Australia and the UAE developing something like a military alliance? In 2017 the ABC released a list of top-secret code-worded files apparently presented to cabinet’s National Security Committee in July 2012. One item on the list was entitled ‘Bilateral planning with the United Arab Emirates on the defence of the UAE in the event of Iranian Hostilities’.[[36]](#endnote-35) This appears to refer to consideration of the document in relation to an agenda item of the National Security Committee (NSC), a body made up of the prime minister, his deputy and senior ministers. While the NSC is a committee of cabinet, its website states that ‘Decisions of the NSC do not require the endorsement of the Cabinet’.[[37]](#endnote-36) In fact, the NSC is the locus of Australia’s opaque war-powers decision-making machinery, a body without any specific legal basis and accountable to no other body.[[38]](#endnote-37)

Early this year, news emerged in Seoul that the Republic of Korea had a secret deal, unknown to its legislature, to send South Korean military forces to defend the UAE in the event of a conflict. Kim Tae-young, who served as defence minister in the Lee Myung-bak administration, announced that in 2009, in order to assist Korean nuclear manufacturers in the intense competition to win the order to build four nuclear power reactors in the UAE worth $18 billion, the Lee administration made a secret part of a defence cooperation agreement. The public part of the deal was the dispatch of a 130-strong special-forces team to train UAE forces, following a request from the UAE. The secret part of the deal was a commitment that Korean troops would ‘automatically’ intervene if the UAE became involved in a military conflict.[[39]](#endnote-38)

What are we to make of the NSC document in the light of the parallel Korean revelations? We do not know what the NSC decided, proposed or even just considered about committing Australian troops, but it is not at all fanciful to suggest that some kind of alliance-like arrangement was contemplated.[[40]](#endnote-39)

Given the nature of the rest of Australia’s military relationship with the UAE, the nature of that country’s dictatorial government, the almost total opacity around the decision by the Rudd government to authorise Hindmarsh’s repugnant mercenary role with the UAE, and above all, the UAE’s literally atrocious role in the war in Yemen, any suggestion of closer military relations with the UAE must be rejected and existing relations repudiated.

1. \* Many thanks to Alison Caddick and Sarah Bailey for their patience and always helpful editing, and to Jessie Smith for helpful discussion. This is an extended and documented version of an article that first appeared in *Arena Magazine* No. 155, August 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council resolution 2342 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council 26 January 2018*, p. 2/329, at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1800513.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Richard Tanter, ‘Tightly Bound: Australia’s Alliance-Dependent Militarization’*, Global Asia*, Spring 2018, Vol.13 No.1; extended and documented version: ‘Tightly Bound: The United States and Australia’s Alliance-Dependent Militarization‘, *Asia-Pacific Journal,* Volume 16, Issue 11, Number 2 (31 May 2018), at <https://apjjf.org/2018/11/Tanter.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. The most startling development of the intervention has been the degree of brazen seizure of Yemeni territory by the UAE and their proxy forces and by Saudi Arabian forces. Saudi Arabia now appears to have a naval base on their western side of the Red Sea at Assab. The UAE now controls the ports of Mukalla, Aden and Mokha, and by the time of publication, may well have driven Al Ansar forces out of the largest remaining port under Houthi control, Hodeidah. The strategic island of Perim at the mouth of the Red Sea is under UAE control. The UAE now has a naval base at Berbera in Somaliland, a part of Somalia ruled by a separatist government. UAE forces control the strategically-located island of Socotra mixing a charm offensive with military deployments that the Hadi government rejects as colonialism. The UAE-backed Southern Transition Council centred on Yemen is now the de facto government of the Aden region, and the Hadi government’s orders telexed from Riyadh are ignored. See ‘The conquest of southern Arabia - Saudi Arabia and the UAE are gobbling up Yemen’, *The Economist*, 22 February 2018, at <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/02/22/saudi-arabia-and-the-uae-are-gobbling-up-yemen>; Noah Browning and Alexander Cornwell, ‘UAE extends military reach in Yemen and Somalia’, *Reuters*, 11 May 2008, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uae-security-yemen-somalia/uae-extends-military-reach-in-yemen-and-somalia-idUSKBN1IC12A>; Peter Salisbury, *Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order*, Chatham House, December 2017, p.22, at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/yemen-national-chaos-local-order>; Jeremy Binnie, 'UAE stops work on Bab al-Mandab island base’, *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 28 March 2018, at <http://www.janes.com/article/78929/uae-stops-work-on-bab-al-mandab-island-base>; Jeremy Binnie, 'Saudi warships seen at Assab', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 23 November 2017, at <http://www.janes.com/article/75896/saudi-warships-seen-at-assab>; Jeremy Binnie, 'UAE discontinues training mission in Somalia', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 18 April 2018, at <http://www.janes.com/article/79374/uae-discontinues-training-mission-in-somalia>; Jeremy Binnie, 'UAE base in Somaliland under construction'*, IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 November 2017, at <http://www.janes.com/article/75758/uae-base-in-somaliland-under-construction>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Siomini Senguptaapril, 'U.N. Security Council Bans Sales of Arms to Houthi Fighters in Yemen', *New York Times*, 14 Aril 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Peter Salisbury, *Yemen’s Economy: Oil, Imports and Elites,* Chatham House, October 2011, p.2. See also Peter Salisbury, *Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order*, Chatham House, December 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council resolution 2342 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council 26 January 2018*, paras 79-121, at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1800513.pdf>.

Space prevents a detailed discussion of either the Saudi-led bombing campaign or the Houthi use of shortrange missiles. Many of the initial Saudi air attacks in 2015 were aimed at sites from Houthi forces could launch Scud-C short-range ballistic missiles and surface-to-air missiles converted for ground attack inherited from former Soviet stocks supplied to earlier Yemen governments. According to UN reports, these Saudi attacks were almost wholly unsuccessful. While there are conflicting reports of the numbers of SRBMs and FFMs launched at Saudi targets, the UN panel of experts reported that

‘The tactical military impact of short-range ballistic missiles is limited due to their small numbers, inherent inaccuracy and relatively small high explosive warhead size (less than 600 kg to 950 kg).’

These attacks ended in mid-2017. However, in 2017 the Houthis, possibly with Iranian technical assistance, managed to modify an unknown number of Scud-C short range missiles to extend the range. Between May and December 2017, the Houthis launched four extended range Scud-C ballistic missiles to reach the vicinity of the Saudi capital of Riyadh.

While none of the four extended range missiles launched resulted in any reported casualties, the strategic consequences was considerable. Not only were the missile attacks condemned by the UN panel of experts as violations of international law, the launches also triggered a heightened US round of support for Saudi Arabia, including use of surveillance aircraft on the border and over Yemen, and a unit of US special forces troops deployed on and over the border of Yemen to search for and destroy Houthi launching sites. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Ian McPhedran, ‘Emirates poach our top brass’, Daily Telegraph, 3 December 2009; Sophie McNeil, ‘Retired Australian Major General Mike Hindmarsh faces questions about knowledge of civilian attacks’, 7.30 Report, ABC, 8 February 2016, at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/retired-australian-major-general-mike-hindmarsh/7150658Facebook>; ‘The RFTG completes Exercise Sea Khanjar in UAE'*, Royal Navy*, 15 October 2013, at <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2013/october/15/131015-sea-khanjar>.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. Ian McPhedran, ‘Emirates poach our top brass’, Daily Telegraph, 3 December 2009; Sophie McNeil, ‘Retired Australian Major General Mike Hindmarsh faces questions about knowledge of civilian attacks’, *7.30 Report*, ABC, 8 February 2016, at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/retired-australian-major-general-mike-hindmarsh/7150658Facebook>.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. There is a large literature on contemporary use of mercenaries and their activities, and the related field of private military force. A central concern of states such as the United States and Australia influenced by neo-liberal economic policy is to displace the term ‘mercenary’ by use of ‘private military contractor’. On the general issues, see, for example, P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, Updated Edition, Cornell U.P. 2008; Caroline Vargin, *Mercenaries, Hybrid Armies and National Security: Private Soldiers and the State in the 21st Century*, Taylor and Francis, 2014; and Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, Nation Book, Revised edition, 2008. On legal issues see *Private Security Contractors in Iraq: Background, Legal Status, and Other Issues*, Congressional Research Service, RL32419, Updated 12 August 2008, at

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<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-31/cabinet-files-reveal-inner-government-decisions/9168442#chapterfilesmissing>; and

<http://www.abc.net.au/res/sites/news-projects/narrative-cabinet-files/pdf/94b98246-7dad-45bf-b8ed-309f323f4946.pdf>. See also Rodger Shanahan, 'Exposed! Australia’s secret war plans to attack Iran! (Maybe)', *The Interpreter*, 5 February 2018, at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/exposed-australia-s-secret-war-plans-attack-iran-maybe>. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
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39. Kim Rahn, ‘Ex-defense minister admits secret military deal with UAE’*, Korea Times*, 9 January 2018, at <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/03/205_242164.html>; and June Park and Ali Ahmad , ‘Risky Business: South Korea's Secret Military Deal With UAE, *The Diplomat*, 1 March 2018, at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/risky-business-south-koreas-secret-military-deal-with-uae/>. According to the Korean constitution, the National Assembly must consent to the dispatch of troops abroad. In January Kim told the *Joong Ang Ilbo*:

‘If the Assembly did not approve the dispatch, all our efforts (to win the bid for the nuclear project) would have been wasted. So I insisted the issue not be brought to the Assembly, saying I would take responsibility if anything went wrong. From the current point of view, it (the secrecy) may be problematic, but at that time it was the best choice for the national interest.’

About 1,600 ROK Army special forces soldiers have been deployed in the Akh (‘Brother) unit in Abu Dhabi. While South Korea has other peacekeeping units operating in South Sudan, Oman and Lebanon, according the Seoul National University political scientist June Park and nuclear power researcher Ali Ahmad,

‘only the Akh Unit has been granted the authority to conduct standalone missions and to engage in combat apart from carrying out peacekeeping operations.’

Reportedly the current Moon Jae-in administration baulked on discovery of the deal, and sought to withdraw the Akh unit. The UAE then ‘put pressure points on Korea, threatening to put SK & GS [major Korean corporations] at a disadvantage in their pursuit of refining facility construction deals’. The Moon administration remains in negotiations with the UAE government. See Oh Young-jin, 'Korea-UAE row to blow up again', *Korea Times*, 19 January 2018, at <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/01/356_242657.html> . [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
40. See also Rodger Shanahan, 'Exposed! Australia’s secret war plans to attack Iran! (Maybe)', *The Interpreter*, 5 February 2018, at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/exposed-australia-s-secret-war-plans-attack-iran-maybe>. Shanahan sensibly suggested a little care be taken that ‘before people go off thinking that Australia has some type of mutual defence treaty with Abu Dhabi’. Perhaps, Shanahan suggested, it was a bit of mirror boxing by Canberra:

‘In the Australian context, it is quite possible Canberra decided that the appearance of cooperation, in the form of planning assistance, may have been a sufficient way of placating the UAE leadership, without the need to commit to anything more substantive. Or the discussion may have been something that Defence saw as a useful exercise, and sought government permission to explore.’

Taking some comfort from what appeared to be a moderation of US-Iran tensions with what seemed then the solid bedding down of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iranian nuclear weapons development, Shanahan concluded that

‘It is likely that the circumstances that precipitated that paper regarding Australia's bilateral planning with the UAE have passed.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-39)