



**Statement of Lead Republican Michael McCaul (R-TX)
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

“U.S. Policy Toward the Arabian Peninsula”
February 6, 2019

Remarks as Prepared

I thank my good friend Mr. Engel for calling this important hearing.

The United States has key national security interests in the Arabian Peninsula, which is why we have spent decades cultivating close partnerships with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

We have a long history of working together to advance our shared strategic interests. Even so, each of these partnerships has its own nuances and complexities. We have often encouraged these partners to make improvements on areas such as human rights, and religious freedom, such as through our annual State Department reports. We have also had longstanding concerns about terror financing and other support for terror emanating from the Gulf.

We are grateful for the progress that has been made in recent years, although there is still work to be done.

Like many, I was heartened to hear of reforms on the horizon in Saudi Arabia, such as lifting the ban on women driving. In the context of this hope for the Kingdom’s future, I was both appalled and deeply saddened by the news of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder.

Jamal’s murder was a major setback in our relationship with Saudi Arabia, a gruesome and disturbing crime that sadly showed how much further the Saudis still need to go. Nothing like this crime can happen again, and everyone responsible must be held accountable. This fall we



also heard distressing reports that women's rights activists had been not only imprisoned, but tortured.

We need to see serious changes in the Saudis' behavior with respect to dissidents and expatriates to regain our trust. The lesson of this terrible event needs to be that intimidation and violence by any government against peaceful dissent will be met with strong disapproval by responsible nations.

All of our witnesses have distinguished records of U.S. government service working on Middle East issues.

Amid daily reports about the fragility of the United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen's ongoing peace efforts, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what the United States can do to help bring a sustainable political solution to the conflict that will help mitigate the urgent humanitarian crisis.

Unfortunately, today's discussion of the Yemen war is complicated by the markup of an ill-advised bill.

I will say more later, but I am alarmed that we are abusing a privileged War Powers procedure to address questions where U.S. forces are not involved in combat. Not only does it fail to meaningfully address the security cooperation issues we face in the region, it also creates a dangerous precedent that could disrupt U.S. security cooperation with partners around the world.

With that said, the number of civilian deaths during this conflict is deeply concerning. Improvements in humanitarian access are critical to preventing the crisis from worsening. Every



effort must be taken to eliminate civilian casualties from air strikes. I hope this hearing will contribute to the conversation about what applicable and appropriate steps the United States can take to decrease the threat that this conflict poses to civilians, rather than adding fuel to the fire of an unproductive conversation about War Powers.

I fear that many of the recent discussions regarding the Yemen conflict have obscured the incredibly damaging role that the Houthis are playing. Recent reports have documented the Houthis' diversion of vital food aid from people in need and brutal torture of detainees.

Iran is also playing an incredibly harmful role in this conflict by supplying the Houthis with ballistic missiles and other forms of support.

The UN itself has reported that Iran has violated UN Security Council resolutions through their support for the Houthis. I hope our witnesses today will discuss how the U.S. and our partners can effectively respond to Iran's role in this conflict.

We also cannot lose sight of the significant terrorist threats continuing to emanate from Yemen.

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats testified last week that the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen, AQAP, remains one of the largest and most capable terrorist groups in the world. We are grateful to our Gulf partners for their help in countering this threat.

I dealt with AQAP and their external operations for many years as Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, and I hope our witnesses can speak to whether our current counterterrorism strategy in Yemen is as effective as it could be, or whether any changes need to be made.