

Several Gulf States Pull Diplomats from Lebanon over Criticism Regarding the Devastating Saudi-Led War in Yemen

A diplomatic rift has taken shape over the past week, as several Gulf states have pulled envoys from Lebanon following criticism regarding the devastating Saudi-led war in Yemen. The remarks were made by Lebanese Information Minister George Kurdahi in a recently-aired interview from back in August, before being named to his current post, and merely echoed the sentiment among many rights activists lamenting the futile and wasteful nature of the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Kurdahi expressed that, like others, he did not believe that there was a need for the war, which has created what impartial observers deem to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, to continue and that it is time for it to end. Some analysts have highlighted that Saudi Arabia seems to be using the comments as a pretext and reasoning for the perpetuation of their longstanding squeeze on Lebanon. This destructive level of foreign interference has been going on for years, and the reaction to Kurdahi's remarks appears to be just the latest justification for the attempted destabilization of the Lebanese government by external forces.

The past remarks made by Lebanese Information Minister Kurdahi are not controversial, and in fact, are widely shared by rights activists who have worked to shed light on the egregious human rights violations taking place in Yemen. In its totality, the Saudi and UAE-led coalition war effort against the Houthis in Yemen has caused the largest humanitarian disaster currently in existence in the world, according to the United Nations and others. The blockade has hindered the ability of Yemeni citizens to receive much-needed resources, and the indiscriminate airstrikes have killed and displaced thousands of civilians. Since the outbreak of the conflict back in 2015, more than 4 million Yemenis have been externally or internally displaced, with over two-thirds living in dangerous areas which have severely limited access to water, food, health services, and sanitation. The devastating airstrikes conducted by Saudi-led forces have been the main contributing factor to the destruction of infrastructure, civilian casualties, food shortages, and deteriorating health care services, with an undeniable link between the nature of these attacks and the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia has had an undermining influence on the economic and political circumstances in Lebanon, making efforts to impede its internal affairs through sanctions and financial support to destabilizing actors. The economic crisis in Lebanon is partly manufactured by Saudi Arabia and its partners who have been trying to hamper the country's institutions because of certain groups' roles in the government. Saudi Arabia's halt on importing various goods and the preventing of its nationals from going to Lebanon is not a new occurrence, as they have been looking for reasons and ways to squeeze Lebanon for years. Much of the continued instability in Lebanon is a direct result of the damaging impacts stemming from this high degree of foreign interference. The decision by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to pull their diplomats offers the likely prospect of only further regional destabilization.

Ultimately, Lebanon has found itself embroiled in Saudi Arabia's attempts to curb the influence of its perceived rivals and threats in the region. The presence of some of these actors within Lebanon's governmental system has caused Saudi Arabia to increasingly expand its obstruction efforts in recent years via both economic and political means.