[Saudi Arabia Threatened to Break Relations With U.N. Over Human Rights Criticism in Yemen](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/07/saudi-arabia-threatened-to-break-relations-with-un-over-human-rights-criticism-in-yemen/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

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By Colum Lynch

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Saudi Arabia threatened this week to break relations with the United Nations and cut hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance to its humanitarian relief and counterterrorism programs to strong-arm the U.N. into removing Riyadh and its allies from a blacklist of groups that are accused of harming children in armed conflict.

The threat — which has not been previously reported — worked, and the U.N. subsequently dropped the Saudis from a rogues’ gallery of the world’s worst violators of children’s rights in conflict zones.

In their Monday warning, senior Saudi diplomats told top U.N. officials Riyadh would use its influence to convince other Arab governments and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to sever ties with the United Nations, the officials said. The threats were issued in a series of exchanges between top Saudi officials in Riyadh, including Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, according to U.N.-based officials. The Saudi mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday afternoon.

Riyadh was enraged after U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon included the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen on a list of countries, rebel movements, and terrorist organizations that killed, maimed, or otherwise abused children in conflict. The 40-page [report](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E) — which was issued last week and primarily written by Leila Zerrougui, the U.N. chief’s special representative for children and armed conflict — claimed the coalition was responsible for about 60 percent of 1,953 child deaths and injuries in Yemen since last year.

Hoping to mollify the Saudis, Ban issued a statement Monday saying he would remove the Saudi-led coalition from the list, pending a review of the matter by a joint U.N. and Saudi panel. The reversal triggered a wave of criticism of the U.N. from human rights groups, who accused Ban of caving to Saudi intimidation.

“It appears that political power and diplomatic clout have been allowed to trump the U.N.’s duty to expose those responsible for the killing and maiming of more than 1,000 of Yemen’s children,” Sajjad Mohammad Sajid, Oxfam’s country director in Yemen, said in a statement. “The decision to retract its finding is a moral failure and goes against everything the U.N. is meant to stand for.”

The Saudi threat reflects a growing trend by U.N. member states to threaten retaliation against Turtle Bay for challenging their human rights records.

In March, Morocco expelled 84 international staffers from a U.N. peacekeeping mission in the disputed Western Sahara region after Ban characterized the territory as “occupied.” Last year, the United States warned that Congress might cut off funding to the U.N. if it included Israel on the same blacklist of armed entities that killed or injured children in conflict, according to two U.N. diplomatic officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity. In that case, Ban removed Israel from a draft blacklist before it was made public.

Pushing Monday for Riyadh to be delisted, Saudi Arabia’s U.N. ambassador, Abdallah al-Mouallimi, said it was unfair for Israel to be quietly let off the hook, while the kingdom initially was not.

“We have to ask the question: Why was Israel removed from the list last year?” Mouallimi said. “Israel has been guilty of crimes against children that are far in excess of even the inaccurate numbers that report contains about Yemen.”

At the time, Israel said it should not be part of a list that also included outlawed extremist groups like the Islamic State, al Qaeda, and the Taliban. Israel also maintained it continually sought to protect civilians from its warfare with Palestinian armed groups.

Mouallimi said he protested Saudi Arabia’s inclusion on the 2016 list in a face-to-face meeting Monday morning with U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and said Ban had shown “wisdom” in striking Israel from the tally in 2015. “We fail to see why he has not exercised the same wisdom in this report this year,” Mouallimi said.

But hours later, Mouallimi praised Ban for seeing the light and reversing his position.

Taking Riyadh off the list “clearly vindicates” the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, he told reporters. The U.N. decision, he insisted, is “irreversible and unconditional.”