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Trump kicked off his White House meeting with his authoritarian "good friend" Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman by pulling out charts listing the weapons the U.S. is selling to Saudi Arabia - Ben Norton reports.

BEN NORTON: President Donald Trump has removed the mask on U.S. foreign policy and dispelled any illusions that it is based on human rights, rather than economic interests.

Trump held a historic meeting in the White House with Saudi Arabia's crown prince on Tuesday, March 20. Immediately at the beginning of their Oval Office press briefing, Trump boasted of his arms sales to the Saudi regime, praising the repressive absolute monarchy as a "very great friend" and a "big purchaser of equipment."

DONALD TRUMP: Thank you very much, everybody. It's a great honor to have the crown prince with us.

Saudi Arabia has been a very great friend and a big purchaser of equipment and lots of other things. And one of the biggest investments in the United States is their, I guess it's your big investment, is buying stock in companies and various other things in the United States and creating jobs.

We've become very good friends over a fairly short period of time. I was in Saudi Arabia in May. And we are bringing back hundreds of billions of dollars into the United States.

BEN NORTON: Trump didn't beat around the bush; he instantly made it clear that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was there to finalize arms sales he had made during his trip to Riyadh in May. Just 40 seconds into their meeting, Trump pulled out a cardboard chart listing the billions of dollars in arms sales the United States is doing with the Saudi regime.

DONALD TRUMP: Some of the things that □ have been approved and are currently under construction and will be delivered to Saudi Arabia very soon, and that's for their protection. But if you look, in terms of dollars, \$3 billion, \$533 million, \$525 million.

BEN NORTON: Within 90 seconds of their meeting, Trump then pulled out another cardboard chart, this one showing the U.S. states that are manufacturing these weapons. The map makes it clear that Trump is using these massive arms sales to gain support in what the chart describes as "key states" □ those that will be important in the 2020 election, including the Rust Belt states and swing states like Florida.

DONALD TRUMP: And that have been ordered and will shortly be started in construction and delivered: the THAAD system □ \$13 billion; the C-130 airplanes, the Hercules, great plane □ \$3.8 billion.

BEN NORTON: What Trump did not acknowledge is that these billions of dollars of U.S. weapons are being used to massacre Yemeni civilians. In fact his meeting with the Saudi crown prince came in the same week marking the third anniversary of the Saudi war on Yemen.

Saudi Arabia has used this U.S. military equipment to relentlessly bomb civilian areas in Yemen, including hospitals, schools, residential houses, refugee camps, and even funerals. The U.S.-backed Saudi coalition has killed many thousands of Yemeni civilians, pushed millions to the brink of famine, unleashed an unprecedented cholera outbreak, and created what the United Nations says is the largest humanitarian catastrophe on Earth.

Trump expressed no concern whatsoever over the millions of lives being crushed in Yemen. Nor did he even mention the egregious human rights abuses committed by Saudi Arabia and its de facto leader Mohammed bin Salman, who has been purging his political rivals, imprisoning human rights activists, and crushing all dissent.

Instead, Trump made it clear that his political strategy is to sell weapons and rely on \$400 billion of Saudi investment in key states that can help him win re-election.

DONALD TRUMP: And the other thing that I really am very happy about is that we talked about 400 billion dollars' worth of investment, of which we've already invested and seen invested \$200 billion to our companies, to various other places, and people that make things.

So a lot of places throughout the United States are benefitting by this massive investment made by Saudi Arabia to buy product from the United States. And again, we make the best military

product in the world, whether it's missiles or planes or anything else. There's nobody that even comes close.

So I just want to thank you and I want to congratulate you on everything. Thank you very much.

BEN NORTON: Reporting for The Real News, I'm Ben Norton.