

MEMMO

Nov. 12, 2010

Congress Should Examine Impact of Saudi Arms Sale

The Obama administration's proposal to sell \$60 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia represents the largest arms sale in U.S. history. A letter signed by 198 House members and spearheaded by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA) and Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) raises serious questions about this historic sale and U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia. Do we and the Saudis have a common approach to the Iranian threat? How will Israel's qualitative military edge be preserved? Why has Saudi Arabia not taken a more constructive role toward peacemaking between Israelis and the Palestinians? With additional billion-dollar sales expected to soon follow this deal, Congress must closely examine the implications of this immense arms transfer and ensure that it serves America's national security interests and those of our allies.

Congress should exercise its constitutionally mandated oversight authority and examine the proposed sale closely.

- The Obama administration has consulted extensively with Israel about this arms package and has attempted to address Israeli concerns about the weapons and technology included in the sale.
- The Obama administration maintains that Israel's "qualitative military edge"—QME—will be preserved in light of this massive transfer to the Saudis, who are still in a technical state of war with Israel.
- Nonetheless, Congress has an important constitutional duty to closely examine the implications of this sale.
- Congress must seek and receive concrete assurances that the sale will not hurt Israel's QME and that the weapons will not be used against the Jewish state. These assurances should include specific measures that will enforce these assurances during the decades the weapons systems will be in service.
- Congress should also create a mechanism to memorialize the assurances made by the administration and the Saudis, and act to ensure they are adhered to.
- Congress should stay fully engaged in reviewing any proposed changes to arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the coming years, and should carefully review future sales to the Middle East.
- The administration, as it moves forward with this sale, should press the Saudis on other issues of concern, including how they can do more to counter Iranian influence in the region. The administration should continue to press the Saudis to normalize relations with Israel and fully meet their pledges to fund the Palestinian Authority.



Congress should scrutinize the proposed arms sale to ensure that U.S. national security interests are not threatened.

- The United States also should press Saudi Arabia to adhere to its commitment to abandon the Arab boycott of Israel—a commitment that paved the way for U.S. support for Saudi Arabia’s admission into the World Trade Organization.

The proposed sale would provide the Saudis with sophisticated platforms and weapons that could pose challenges to U.S. and Israeli security.

- The proposed sale includes upgrades to existing Saudi fighter jets, new advanced aircraft and helicopters.
- The F-15 fighter jet proposed for sale to Riyadh will be one of the most advanced combat aircraft in service outside the developed world, featuring a revolutionary new advanced radar system and other systems that could largely offset the difference in skill between Saudi and Israeli pilots.
- The sale also includes more than 10,000 missiles and precision munitions—some of which are the most advanced air-to-air and ground attack weaponry in the U.S. arsenal.
- Since the sale will dramatically improve Saudi military capabilities, it could adversely affect U.S. and Israeli national security interests if the kingdom’s political orientation should shift or should it lose control of the weapons to radical elements.
- This sale of highly advanced weapons could also undermine Israel’s qualitative military edge over Saudi Arabia. Some of the arms are on par with or superior to similar weaponry used by the IDF.
- Israel will be forced to take enhanced Saudi capabilities into account in any regional crisis, and may need to make costly investments in the coming years to ensure its military superiority, which remains the foundation of its deterrence against hostile attack.

A letter by Reps. Berman and Ros-Lehtinen raises important questions about the arms sale as Congress seeks to examine the proposal.

- Congress, which has until Nov. 20 to review the arms deal, should ask the administration tough questions about the nature and purpose of the deal, as Berman and Ros-Lehtinen have done in a letter signed by 198 House members.
- The letter, addressed to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, raises important questions, including how the proposed arms sale will affect America’s national security interests and those of our allies:
 - “What U.S. policy goals and interests are advanced by this sale and have we placed any conditions on it?”
 - “What is the threat or threats that this sale is intended to address?”
 - “Do the Saudis share our assessment of those threats, and will they be amenable to, and capable of, carrying out these missions?”
- The letter also raises questions concerning how the administration will maintain Israel’s QME in the face of this sale, and what steps Saudi Arabia has taken to counter the Iranian threat and support the Middle East peace process.