



Details of the Deal

In November 2010, then-chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), and then-ranking member, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), initiated a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates that raises questions about the Obama administration's decision to sell \$60 billion in weaponry to Saudi Arabia.

The arms package reportedly includes 84 F-15 fighter jets, 72 Black Hawk helicopters, 70 Longbow Apache helicopters and 36 Little Bird helicopters. The sale is also expected to include technology and equipment to modernize 70 of the F-15 jets that Saudi Arabia has previously purchased from the United States.

While the United States has consulted extensively with Israel about the Saudi arms deal, the Jewish state still has reason for concern. Saudi Arabia is among the 20 of 22 Arab states that do not recognize Israel. In fact, the Saudi government refuses to have any contacts with Jerusalem until Israel withdraws from every inch of land that it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War.

In addition, Riyadh actively participates in the longstanding Arab League boycott of Israel. And while Israel does not share a border with Saudi Arabia, the desert kingdom is visible from the Eilat Mountains. A Saudi F-15 stationed in northwest Saudi Arabia could fly to Israel in minutes.

The sale, when completed, would force Israel to spend more money in order to retain its qualitative military edge in the Middle East. Recently, Israel approved the purchase of 20 F-35 jets from the United States to help ensure its aerial superiority over its foes. But the purchase comes at a substantial cost. The \$2.75 billion price tag for the 20 jets will force Israel to re-appropriate funds from other defense programs and needs.

Because of such concerns, Berman and Ros-Lehtinen explicitly wrote in their letter to Clinton and Gates that, "We also want a clear understanding of how these sales are likely to impact others in the region. America has long been committed to Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)—that is, its ability to prevail against any combination of regional threats. While we understand the Administration has worked productively with Israel to address Israeli security concerns, we would like to know how these arms sales will affect Israel's QME and what steps we have taken or are planning to take to maintain and strengthen Israel's edge."

By sending this letter, Berman, Ros-Lehtinen and the 196 other members of the House of Representatives who signed this letter have sent a powerful message to the Secretaries of State and Defense: Such a large sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia demands that Congress clearly understand what steps are being taken to ensure that America's most reliable and stable Middle Eastern ally, Israel, remains strong enough to defend itself.