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October 29, 2010

Letter to Administration Regarding Potential Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia


Dear Colleague:

Please join us in sending the attached letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates concerning the notification to Congress of arms sales to Saudi Arabia with a value of approximately \$60 billion, the largest in United States history.

Congress takes seriously its responsibility under the Arms Export Control Act to review potential sales of defense articles and services abroad. Therefore, we are writing to Secretary Clinton in order to raise concerns and pose a number of strategic questions about the impact such sales would have on the national security interests of the United States and our allies.

If you would like to add your signature to this letter, please contact Robert Marcus at the Committee on Foreign Affairs at ext. 5-5021. **The deadline is next Friday, November 5, 2010.**

Sincerely,


HOWARD L. BERMAN
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs


ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Ranking Republican Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs

November XX, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Madam Secretary and Mr. Secretary:

We write concerning the notification to Congress of arms sales to Saudi Arabia with a reported value of approximately \$60 billion, the largest in United States history. Some of us have been briefed about aspects of the sales; others have not. Congress takes seriously its responsibility under the Arms Export Control Act to review potential sales of defense articles and services abroad. Therefore, we are writing to raise concerns and pose a number of strategic questions about the impact such sales would have on the national security interests of the United States and our allies.

We would like you to explain the rationale for a sale of such magnitude. 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? We are also concerned about the potential repercussions for our friends and for our own forces in the region in the event of political change in Saudi Arabia.

We are also concerned about whether these transfers are being integrated into broader U.S. national security policies. As you know, a recently-released report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that the Departments of State and Defense “did not consistently document how arms transfers to Gulf countries advanced U.S. foreign policy and national security goals...”.

We also continue to be troubled about aspects of Saudi regional policy. For example, we have serious concerns about the nature of Saudi involvement in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly since the Saudis have failed to take steps toward normalization of relations with Israel or to augment their financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

Likewise, Saudi officials have often made clear their anxiety over the prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability. But what action, if any, has Saudi Arabia taken to address this threat? For example, have the Saudis used their considerable leverage in the international oil market to diminish Iran’s oil revenue? And what have the Saudis done to stem terrorist financing? What steps has Saudi Arabia taken to support U.S. counter-proliferation efforts and to substantially improve their own non-proliferation record? We would like to know if these types of issues were addressed in the course of negotiating these arms sales with the Saudis.

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.

We believe that arms transfers, particularly those of this magnitude and involving such sophisticated equipment, require careful Congressional scrutiny and oversight in order to ensure that our national security interests are advanced and our allies are protected. We look forward to your response to the questions we have raised and to discussing these matters with you in the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,