

# The Saudi Arms Deal: The U.S. Stirs Persian Gulf Waters

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It would be the single largest foreign arms deal in United States history.

Pending congressional approval, the Obama administration plans to sell \$60 billion in advanced aircraft and sophisticated weaponry to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia . Add \$30 billion in proposed enhancements to the country's navy and ballistic missile-defense systems, and the result is one huge jobs program, further deterioration in Saudi-Iranian relations and heightened tension in the Persian Gulf—all calculated endpoints.

That the colossal arms package was made public enough to be reported on in Monday's *Wall Street Journal* indicates it comes without serious Israeli objection—giving credence to the longstanding notion that Saudi Arabia and Israel maintain increasingly close ties, joined by a mutual animus toward Iran.

The agreement would authorize Riyadh to buy 84 new F-15 fighter jets, upgrade another 70 and purchase three types of attack helicopters: 70 Apaches, 72 Black Hawks and 36 Little Birds. If Congress makes no significant modifications and Saudi Arabia opts for the entire package, a \$90 billion deal to allegedly help the Kingdom counter Iranian influence is in the offing.

Boeing would be responsible for production of all aircraft other than the Black Hawk. They estimated the deal would support at least 75,000 direct or indirect jobs in 44 states. The muted criticism of the proposal by reflexively pro-Israel lawmakers was aided—not by the potential for job creation—but by knowledge that the fighters will not be equipped with long-range missiles and would soon be followed by the sale of the even more advanced F-35 Joint Strike Fighter to Israel as part of \$30 billion in military assistance over 10 years.

Loren Thompson, defense consultant with the Lexington Institute, said, "With domestic demand for weapons headed down, the big defense companies have been looking overseas to customers like Saudi Arabia to make up the difference. Those countries have money to spend at a time when the U.S. government is in dire fiscal straits."

It is lamentable that the type of economic stimulus upon which the Obama administration is embarking will come at the expense of exacerbating, rather than easing, hostilities between Persian Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran .

Anthony Cordesman, defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies superficially concluded that the anticipated sale will " ... help give Saudi Arabia the capability to convince Iran that it can't use missiles or air power against Saudi Arabia or its

neighbors.”

That might hold true if anyone seriously believed Iran was foolish enough to contemplate the use of military force against its Arab neighbors. In fact, it is arguably Iran who ought to be wary of Saudi Arabia .

As *The Sunday Times* reported in a June 2010 article titled “Saudi Arabia gives Israel clear skies to attack Iranian nuclear sites,” U.S. defense sources stated that Saudi Arabia had agreed to stand down its air defenses and allow Israel use of a narrow stretch of airspace should they decide to conduct bombing raids into Iran.

“The Saudis have given their permission for the Israelis to pass over and they will look the other way ... This has all been done with the agreement of the [ U.S. ] State Department,” said one source.

The etiology of Saudi Arabia ’s antagonist Iran posture is multifactorial. It not only involves the Wahabi establishment’s intolerance of Shia Muslims (the same Wahabis whose religious sanction is required for the al-Sauds to govern at all), but recognition of what Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution led to and may continue to inspire: the overthrow of repressive, corrupt, Western-backed royal dynasties.

The same anxieties are held by other like-minded Persian Gulf monarchies, Egypt and Jordan —all recipients of American military largesse. Indeed, the U.S. and Israel have done their utmost to stoke and capitalize on these fears.

The massive arms deal with Saudi Arabia is just one more step toward war, one more step toward death in the Persian Gulf .

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