Sale of Defense Equipment to Saudi Arabia

By

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[The following is a reprint of a statement presented by Mr. Wolfowitz in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington DC on October 4, 1990.]

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to seek Congressional support for the approval of urgently-needed defense equipment for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain on an accelerated basis.

The American forces in the Arabian Peninsula today are there to defend the vital interests of the United States. It is in the context of these interests and this commitment that you are considering our proposal to provide defense equipment to the Saudi forces alongside whom our men and women are serving.

Three fundamental issues are at stake in our policy.

- Will the economic resources necessary to the well-being of the entire world be used for peaceful development, or for furthering the warlike ambitions of international outlaws?
- How will countries resolve their disputes in the post cold war era?
- Will the United States remain a credible security partner for its friends and allies?

How we deal with these issues will determine the shape of the world we live in for many years to come. It is no exaggeration to say that we are at a decisive moment in history.

The main reason American forces are in the Persian Gulf region is to make sure that no hostile power, and particularly not this brutal Iraqi dictatorship, is allowed to dominate the energy supplies that are the lifeblood of the world economy.

The second reason is to make sure that Saddam Hussein's outrageous invasion of Kuwait will not succeed and become the norm of international behavior.

Finally, we are there to ensure that American defense partnerships will be trusted by our friends and respected by our foes. Every country with whom the United States has a security relationship, from South Korea to Israel, to our allies in Europe, can feel more confident because of the decisive commitment we have demonstrated in the last two months. We stand by our friends.

It is undeniable that there are serious threats to our interests in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. As long as these countries possess such valuable resources, there will be those who seek to plunder them. The present threat, of course, is Iraq. Iraq has the world's sixth largest active military forces—behind only the Soviet Union, China, the United States, India, and North Korea. It has 5,500 main battle tanks—more than any NATO country but the United States, more than any Warsaw Pact country but the Soviet Union.

Some have said that once Desert Shield is over Iraq will no longer be a threat, because the U.S. and allied forces will have destroyed the Iraqi military. We cannot count on that. To the contrary, we still hope there will not be a war. No matter what the outcome, we hope that Iraq's massive military machine will be reduced preferably by peaceful means. But no outcome is likely to permanently eliminate Iraq as a regional power, and if it did, that would merely create new threats to regional stability. The fundamental reality is that there is a basic imbalance in the population and resources between the Arabian Peninsula countries, in which we have vital interests, and their two larger, stronger, and frequently hostile neighbors to the north.

What comes after Desert Shield? As we have repeatedly stated, we do not seek a permanent military presence in Saudi Arabia or the other gulf states. Our policy is to develop an effective security system that will ensure that this area, which is so vital to U.S. interests, is never again as vulnerable as it was on the morning of August 2.

We are only at the beginning of working out this system with our partners inside and outside the gulf region, but certain basic principles apply.

In the first instance, the security of the Arabian Peninsula must be the responsibility of those who live there. We are sometimes tempted to take matters out of the hands of those most affected and into our own; that is a mistake. In the long run, we must provide the capabilities the countries in the region cannot provide, but we should not do for them what they can do for themselves.

We are therefore pursuing a strategy based on the principle of coalition defense. We will look for ways to:

- Strengthen the regional countries' ability to defend themselves,
- Encourage greater regional defense cooperation,
- And work with the countries in the region to improve our ability to send and their ability to receive reinforcements in the future, and to operate effectively together in a combined defensive operation.

The cornerstone of this strategy must be strong security ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and a free and independent Kuwait.

A comprehensive program of well-conceived defense sales to the GCC state will contribute to their ability to defend themselves collectively by promoting standardization and interoperability. This standardization on U.S. equipment also promotes the ability of local armed forces to operate more effectively with U.S. units should reinforcement of the region be needed again in the future.

Having said what these sales *are*, perhaps I should make clear what they are *not*. They're not fuel for an arms race in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is outnumbered by Iraq by ten-to-one in main battle tanks, four-to-one in combat aircraft, more than eight-to-one in artillery. The military forces of all six GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries put together are less than half those of Iraq, Iran, Egypt, or Syria. Saddam Hussein did not build up his huge arsenal because he was afraid of Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. On the contrary, a better case can be made that the weakness of those two states led him to believe he could successfully use military force to gain his objectives. If, when this crisis is resolved, it is possible to persuade the Iraqi government to adopt a difference course and reduce its armed forces, the modest improvement we are proposing in Saudi forces will present no obstacle. Indeed, the very idea that Saudi Arabia could be regarded by Iraq as a threat is ludicrous.

We and our partners have no illusions that we can or should build the Saudi armed forces, or the collective forces of the GCC, into the equal of the Iraqi armed forces. What the Saudis can do, given the will and the necessary equipment, is to build a force that would be capable of doing so much damage in the defensive role that any aggressor would have to think very seriously about invading Saudi Arabia. If deterrence fails, we would expect Saudi forces to slow and perhaps stop an attacking army long enough for reinforcements to arrive. The force we and the Saudis have in mind would then be able to operate effectively with U.S. and allied reinforcements and to provide capabilities, such as fire support and heavy armor, that we would not be able to lift quickly from the United States.

Having placed our proposals into their proper strategic context, why are we pursuing these specific sales at this particular time? As you know, we originally consulted with Congress on a larger package of equipment as part of a multi-year program. The sales before you today are the most urgently needed elements of this larger package, which the President decided to divide because of your desire to consider at greater length the majority of the sales we propose to make. We constructed this first phase based on three criteria:

- Items that could be delivered within a short period, to be of immediate help in the current crisis; or
- Items that required immediate decisions because of production considerations; or
- Items that are particularly important to close urgent vulnerabilities that would be created by the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

The equipment we propose to sell in this first phase would start to arrive almost immediately after the completion of this notification, and most of it will be delivered within 12 months.

The specific components of the sale are:

- **Patriot Fire Units.** There is little doubt that Saudi Arabia needs a longer-range air defense missile than the Hawk now in its inventory. Saudi Arabia has recognized this need for some time, and the regional threat has already led us to deploy Patriot to protect our own forces in the region. One particular value of Patriot is that it is the only system available that provides any defense against tactical ballistic missiles. Six fire units, the equivalent of one standard U.S. Patriot Battalion, is an extremely modest capability given the area that Saudi Arabia must defense. These units will be provided out of U.S. stocks when U.S. air defense units depart Saudi Arabia at the conclusion of Desert Shield. This will help close an urgent gap in Saudi Arabia's defense capability.

Armored Vehicle Package. One of the lessons of Desert Shield is that there is a pressing need for a greater anti-armor capability in Saudi Arabia. Last year we took the first step toward upgrading Saudi Arabia's armored force when we notified Congress of the sale of 315 M1A2 Abrams tanks. The 315 M1A2s would replace the 290 obsolescent AMX-30s that now equip the two Saudi armored brigades. The Saudis have now determined that the expansion and modernization of their tank force must be accelerated and that they want to standardize on a single tank, the M1A2. This sale of armored vehicles, built around 150 M1A2s—the equivalent of one armored brigade—is the next step toward this accelerated expansion and modernization. It helps to close what was our single greatest vulnerability during the early days of Desert Shield—the lack of adequate ground capability to stop Iraqi tanks.

We are not talking about a huge or threatening force by any standard. It is certainly small compared to others in the region. All three of Saudi Arabia's non-GCC neighbors have over 1,000 tanks apiece. Elsewhere, Sweden and Switzerland, both peaceful, neutral countries with much smaller land areas, maintain inventories of about 800 tanks each.

One final point on this package concerns why we are notifying the M1A2s now. By moving now, we will be able to produce these tanks concurrently with the 315 tanks notified last fall. This will lower costs for U.S. forces and make the M1A2 more attractive to other potential buyers. It will also shorten the lead-time for closing what I have already noted is Saudi Arabia's single greatest vulnerability and would be our greatest vulnerability if we ever have to bring our forces back.

Apache Helicopters. Having to face Iraq's large numerical advantage in tank forces, the Saudis need a quick-reaction anti-armor capability. They presently have no attack helicopter forces at all. The Apaches will compliment the capability provided by the armored vehicle package. Twelve Apaches are a small fraction of the U.S. Apache force now deployed to deal with the Iraqi threat and are clearly not an unreasonable force to begin the Saudis' enhancement in this area.

TOW-IIA Launchers. The most advanced anti-tank missiles now in the Saudi inventory, the I-TOW, have no night capability and would not be effective against the Iraqi T-72. The Saudis are already buying the TOW-IIA missile to cope with this threat, but will not have a launcher capable of using the missile's full capability until their first Bradley vehicles are delivered. This sale would give them an immediate capability to use the TOW-IIA.

MLRS Launchers. The Multiple Launch Rocket System is an ideal way for an outnumbered force to lay down heavy fire over a wide area to slow and channel an attacking force and to counter the Iraqi advantage in gun artillery. It has counterbattery, anti-personnel, and anti-armor capabilities. Nine launchers is the equivalent of one U.S. MLRS battery, which we would normally combine with batteries of Howitzers in the the artillery battalion of an armored or mechanized brigade.

Naval Communications. This equipment is necessary to improve coordination of Saudi coastal patrol activity with other elements of their armed forces as well as with U.S. and other friendly foreign forces. The first elements of this integrated package would be delivered from U.S. stock in about five months; the remainder would come from new production.

KC-130 Tanker Aircraft. The Saudis, due to the current crisis, need to support much greater numbers of F-5 and Helicopter sorties. The KC-130 will enable them to meet this requirement and give them greater flexibility in their air operations. The aircraft will be delivered from production within the year.

Tactical Wheeled Vehicles. A total of 10,000 vehicles, primarily trucks, are needed to meet the logistical requirements of the Saudi and friendly foreign forces now deployed to deter or defend against Iraq. The need is especially acute in the area of supporting the foreign forces in Saudi Arabia, for which the Saudi forces have primary logistic responsibilities. Many of these vehicles will be delivered from existing stocks, the remainder will come from new production over the coming year.

C-130 Aircraft. The Saudi Air Force's lift capability has been severely strained by the demands of the crisis. Ten more C-130s are required to augment the current Saudi Arabian fleet of 45 C-130s. These aircraft will begin being delivered from new production within the next few months.

UH-60 MedEvac Helicopters. A number of years ago, the U.S. recommended that Saudi Arabia give greater attention to its battlefield medical capability. The Saudis did not give this program high priority until the invasion of Kuwait demonstrated that an imminent threat exists. While the production lead time for these helicopters is about 24 months, we believe the need for medical equipment is urgent enough to justify beginning the process now rather than losing more time by postponing this sale to the second phase.

Bahrain M60A3 Tanks. In addition, we are proposing the sale of 27 M60A3 tanks to Bahrain to augment its current fleet of 54—one battalion. Bahrain has contributed ground forces to the GCC force near the Saudi-Kuwait border. By providing these tanks, we would enable the Bahrainis to add an armor contribution to the GCC force while retaining half a battalion for defense of their island. These tanks would be provided from U.S. Army stocks.

It would probably be in order to say a few words about the absorption of this equipment, a subject that has been the focus of some comment in the past. In those areas where the Saudis have concentrated their efforts over the years, especially the Air Force, they have succeeded in building credible capabilities. But until now, the Saudis have not taken the threat of a land invasion as seriously as that of air attack. Recent events have obviously changed that. The Saudis are now determined to build sufficient land forces to deter Iraq, as they built their Air Force to deter Iran. Given this determination, I am convinced that the Saudis are indeed capable of absorbing the types and amounts of equipment we propose to sell them.

Mr. Chairman, we are proposing these sales because we believe strongly that they enhance the protection of U.S. security interests in the Persian Gulf region. At the same time, we are certainly not unmindful of Israeli concerns about defense sales to a country that is at least technically in a state of war with Israel.

We firmly believe that the risks this sale poses to Israel are minimal. This is based in part on the Saudi record of relatively minimal military involvement in the Arab-Israeli wars and in part on the geographic obstacles to Saudi use of this equipment against Israel. It is also important to remember that U.S. systems come with strict conditions, requiring purchasers to use them only for defensive purposes, and restricting the transfer of U.S. equipment to third parties. I might add that Saudi Arabia's record for complying with these conditions is excellent.

Let me make a point that is frequently overlooked in public discussion of this issue, but I believe is fundamental. A secure Saudi Arabia is in Israel's best interest. A secure Saudi Arabia will be able to make a far more constructive contribution to the peace and stability of the region than a Saudi Arabia living under the gun of the Iraqi bully. The Saudis have made a momentous decision to stand up to this bully and to base their security on a strong defense partnership with the United States. It is in everyone's interest to make this partnership work.

Israel's real security problem lies elsewhere than in Saudi Arabia. As this crisis has clearly demonstrated, Israel has more than ample reason to be concerned about Iraq. We are working closely with the Israelis to deal with the real and most pressing threat to their security posed by the present crisis, the threat of an Iraqi ballistic missile attack. To that end, the President has decided to provide two batteries of Patriot missiles, with an anti-tactical ballistic missile capability, to Israel under Section 506(A) of the Foreign Assistance Act. These systems will come out of U.S. Army stocks. Israel has acted very responsibly during this crisis, going to great lengths to avoid actions that could appear provocative or divert attention from Saddam Hussein's aggression. It has been able to do so, in spite of extreme threats by Saddam, in considerable measure because we have worked with Israel over the years to maintain Israel's qualitative edge and preserve a strong deterrent. A secure Israel contributes to peace and stability. We will be continuing to work with

the Government of Israel to respond to threats to Israel's security, to which this Administration is, and will remain unshakably committed.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the sales we are proposing for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are a reasonable, prudent response to the threat faced by countries in which the United States has vital national interests. They are an integral part of a comprehensive, long-term approach to provide more effectively for the security of the Persian Gulf region. For many years we have demanded that allies elsewhere in the world assume more of the burden for their own defense. That is what our partners in the Arabian Peninsula are seeking to do now through these purchases of American equipment. These sales should be approved not just because Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the other GCC countries need this capability, but because we need them to have it.