

# Arms Sales Policies Toward the Middle East

By

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I welcome this opportunity to join you today to discuss U.S. interests in the Middle East which concern us all. Rather than review recent events that have occurred throughout the region since our last session together, I would like you to consider some thoughts and observations about broader trends in the region and how they affect our interests. I would particularly like to address the relationship between such trends and our arms sales policies to friendly Arab states such as Saudi Arabia.

## U.S. POLICY OVER 40 YEARS

Since the 1940s, the United States has been the crucial external force in the effort to establish and maintain peace and security in the Middle East. The depth of our political, economic, and strategic concerns in the region, which eight Administrations, both Democratic and Republican, have consistently sought to protect, reflects this fact.

A fundamental commitment to Israel's security and well-being has long been a constant in our Middle East policy. Simultaneously, since the post-World War II period we have maintained close ties with pro-Western Arab states. We have worked hard to build these links to promote these important U.S. strategic objectives: to deny opportunities to the Soviet Union in this critical geographic region; to protect free world access to the world's largest reserves of oil--a long-term interest, I might note, that is in no way diminished by the current surplus of oil; to check the growth of radical anti-Western movements; and to promote the process of building peace between Israel and its neighbors by relying on our relations with both sides.

Friendship with one party to the Arab-Israeli dispute has not diminished the reliability of U.S. ties to the other. There are those on both sides of the Arab-Israeli dispute who assert that U.S. policy is a zero-sum game; that ties with one side preclude friendship with the other; that by aligning ourselves exclusively with one side, we can compel the other to make concessions. These notions are wrong, and our experience proves that they are.

We have sought to maintain close ties to both Israel and the Arab states. For this reason, we are the only superpower trusted by both Israel and the Arabs. By establishing friendship and confidence on both sides, we have made it possible to help move Arabs and Israelis toward greater peace and security. We have brokered six peace agreements serving Israeli, Arab, and Western interests.

In recent years there has been a growing sense of realism and pragmatism in the Arab world concerning Israel. The [1979] peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was the first breakthrough on

this. The political and diplomatic initiative by King Hussein, which continues, is further evidence. This sense of realism is based in part on recognition of the strength of our relationship with Israel, but it is also based on our close relations in the Arab world and the interest we have shown in Arab security and welfare. Our influence as a mediator in the peace process is based on the trust, confidence, and friendship we have on both sides, as well as our ability to help support their needs.

In contrast to the role the United States has played, the Soviet Union, without diplomatic relations with Israel and with limited diplomatic ties and bilateral relations with the Arab world, has had only a peripheral role to play.

Military security is a major element in our relationship with both Israel and the Arab states. Israel is, of course, the largest recipient of U.S. security assistance in the world. Egypt is the second largest. Both of those programs have been well understood and strongly supported by the Congress as major elements in our strategy of peace in the Middle East.

I am concerned, however, about less understanding of the importance of our military programs--including training, assistance, U.S. personnel, and sales of major equipment--elsewhere in the region. There is not enough understanding of the strategic importance of such sales to the United States. Our close military ties with Saudi Arabia and other gulf states, for example, have been a key factor in guaranteeing that our friends have the means to protect their own security, containing threats posed by the Iran-Iraq war and Iranian extremism, guarding against Soviet inroads, and cooperating with the United States in ensuring free international access to oil supplies.

These points merit elaboration. Security assistance, arms, and technology transfers have been an important instrument in constructing bridges to both parties of the Arab-Israeli dispute. We all take pride in the economic and military assistance we have provided to Israel over the years. We must not forget the great value of the support we have given to the Arab states over the years. For 30 years Arab states friendly to the United States have turned chiefly to us as a source of arms and technology--to the near exclusion of the Soviet Union. Arab intelligentsia are schooled in American universities; their technicians are skilled in our systems. Perhaps most important, members of their military learn our doctrine, train on our systems, and develop lasting professional and personal ties with American counterparts that they carry back to their own countries.

These relationships have worked to our mutual interest. "Mutual interest" is a two-way street. We make choices regarding our security partners and the commitments we make to them. They, too, make choices--based on their perceptions of the long-term advantages of ties to the United States and the alternatives, including closer relations with the Soviet Union.

## **IMPACT OF TRENDS AND EVENTS ON THE SITUATION TODAY**

For the first time in three decades, recent events threaten to undermine our balanced approach, challenging the long-standing policy that has worked so well for advancing U.S., Israeli, and Western interests. I am deeply concerned that the impact of these events and trends could cost us dearly in the region. During my recent visits there, I have been increasingly challenged by questions about American motives and credibility.

For example, and allow me to speak frankly, our inability to gain congressional support for the Jordan arms sale is perceived in the region as a sign that the United States has unilaterally terminated a 30-year arms supply relationship with an Arab state with which we have a close and friendly relationship. The perception of withdrawal of U.S. support for King Hussein at a delicate moment in the King's effort to move the peace process forward was especially troubling. Opponents of the peace process are citing the withdrawal as proof that the King cannot count on the United States politically or militarily.

At the same time that some Arab states are moving to a more realistic view of Israel's place in the Middle East, it would be a great irony if the United States did not take advantage of this trend in Arab thinking to maintain and develop our overall relations with the Arabs. The history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East affirms the wisdom of our policy of maintaining close ties with both Israel and the friendly Arab states.

## **U.S.-SAUDI RELATIONS: MILITARY SALES**

We now face a time of testing whether this successful policy of 30 years is relevant, or if we will turn around and pursue a more parochial, narrow, and, in my view, extremist policy. Such a test now faces us with our current intention to sell Saudi Arabia a limited quantity of defense articles.

U.S. interests in the region are best served by continued strong, open, and credible relations with moderate Arabs. In the business of diplomacy I am often struck by what is sometimes called the law of unintended consequences. Specific decisions and actions perceived as good and just causes in one context sometimes produce undesired results in a broader arena, decisions which come back to damage even the original limited concern. It is, therefore, essential that both the Administration and the Congress be sensitive to the overall security system which is affected by U.S. actions--and inactions. Otherwise, we cannot guard against negative consequences to U.S. interests, and to those of our Israeli and Arab friends, caused by decisions made for discrete purposes.

A case in point is the Administration proposal to sell arms to Saudi Arabia, which was formally notified to the Congress on April 8. The proposal consists of some standard follow-on items for support and upgrade of systems already existing in the Saudi inventory. These arms would be part of an ongoing arms supply relationship which we have maintained with the Saudis for over 30 years. They represent no major enhancement of Saudi capability.

Our reasons for supporting this important friend are simple and cannot be overemphasized. They bear repeating. Maintenance of our longstanding arms supply relationship with Saudi Arabia strengthens defense of the gulf, an area vital to U.S. interests. I would remind you that two Administrations have pledged to use force, if necessary, to protect the free flow of Persian Gulf oil. We still stand by that policy. The Saudis have taken the lead, with other Gulf Cooperation Council states, in protecting the shipping and oil installations of the upper gulf. It is important that we not lose sight of the fact that Saudi self-defense reduces the probability of direct U.S. military involvement to defend our interests. Further, our support for Saudi self-defense has been an important element of deterrence--Iran has clearly had to take into account the fact that the Saudis have significant U.S. backing. If that perception is called into doubt, if it appears empty rhetoric, the costs to the United States could be substantial.

Since the 1940s our mutual security ties with Saudi Arabia have been the foundation of the overall bilateral relationship--a relationship now under attack by radical and extremist forces in the region, some of whom exploit religion for political purposes. The continued sale of U.S. equipment to replenish and update Saudi forces strengthens our relationship and responds to a clear need for the continuing defense of Saudi Arabia.

Iran remains a formidable threat to the gulf states. It is clearly in U.S. and our friends' interests to see that Saudi Arabia and other moderate states are adequately equipped to counter potential Iranian aggression. The evidence is clear. Royal Saudi Air Force pilots flying F-15s and using American-made equipment downed intruding Iranian aircraft in the Spring of 1984. This single act of vigorous defense deterred further Iranian attacks on gulf states. It was far preferable

that this defense of the gulf was undertaken by Saudi pilots in Saudi planes rather than U.S. pilots in U.S. planes

Saudi Arabia is a major anti-communist power on the peninsula. Strengthening Saudi defensive forces, especially with equipment that is interoperable with our own, is a significant strategic advantage. The Saudis are, for example, the major deterrent against any adventurism on the part of the new and even more radical South Yemen regime. As I noted in the beginning of my testimony, our arms supply relationship with important strategic partners like Saudi Arabia are longstanding and mutually beneficial. Severance of this key linkage would cause unintended and harmful costs to U.S. security.

Continued U.S. supply of arms to Arab states is in Israel's interest. Israel not only retains but is increasing its qualitative military edge over any combination of Arab forces. We are committed to the maintenance of the Israeli advantage and ensure that it is kept by carefully reviewing all arms transfers to the region and obtaining appropriate safeguards whenever required.

If the United States will not continue this carefully calibrated arms supply relationship, Arab states like Jordan and Saudi Arabia will seek other sources of arms. Whenever our friends seek alternative sources there are costs: security costs for Israel and political, strategic, and financial costs for the United States. The recent Saudi purchase of long-range Tornado fighter aircraft, which we believe has not served any discernible U.S. interest, is a good example. Unlike the F-15s, an air defense aircraft we supplied to the kingdom in 1979, there are no restrictive understandings on basing the Tornados close to Israel's borders. Additionally, some independent academics estimate that the Saudi purchase of Tornados, a ground attack aircraft, rather than the additional F-15s they preferred, cost the American economy from \$12 to \$20 billion.

In short, the reasons for continuing our arms supply links with moderate Arab states are compelling and numerous. The United States provides arms to Saudi Arabia based on its defense requirements and because a defensively sound Saudi Arabia is in the best interest of the United States. [For a report of recent Congressional action on the sale of missiles to Saudi Arabia, see pp. 16-17 of this *Journal*.]

I am disturbed by assertions now circulating that would attempt to tie a formal and direct linkage between our routine arms supply to Saudi Arabia and peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. This is a narrow approach to a complex set of issues. If followed, it would bring into action the "law of unintended consequences" I noted earlier. We, Israel, and the moderate Arabs would lose. In the final analysis, the Soviets would be the winners.

U.S. policy has succeeded in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East when it has differentiated between cases where linkages are appropriate and effective, and cases where they are neither. Some arrangements, such as the U.S. contribution to peace between Israel and Egypt, have clearly benefited from explicit U.S. willingness to provide security assistance to the parties in the settlement. Such a relationship was fully consistent with U.S. interests and, in fact, inherent in the development of the agreement itself. In other cases, including Saudi Arabia, our security relationship is based on considerations of regional peace and stability that go beyond the specific Arab-Israeli issue. Neither we, nor the cause of peace, would achieve anything from an effort to compress U.S.-Saudi security ties into an Arab-Israeli mold.

In 1981 when the Administration notified Congress of its intention to sell AWACS (airborne warning and control system) aircraft to Saudi Arabia, President Reagan sent a letter to the congressional leadership. In it, he provided assurance that certain conditions would be met before transfer of the AWACS. The required technical assurances either have or will shortly be completed. Additionally, the letter assured:

... that the sale contributes directly to the stability and security of the area, enhances the atmosphere and prospects for progress toward peace, and that initiatives toward the peaceful resolution of disputes in the region have either been successfully completed or that significant progress toward that goal has been accomplished with the substantial assistance of Saudi Arabia.

There is a good deal that can be said about Saudi Arabia's contribution to peace in the region.

**Iran-Iraq War.** The Saudis have supported every major diplomatic effort over the past five years to end the Iran-Iraq war, including mediation missions by the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and individual third governments. The Saudis seek a just and quick resolution of the bloodshed. They have made clear their preference that the war end without effect on the sovereignty of either Iran or Iraq.

**Lebanon.** Saudi Arabia has made major, and often highly visible, efforts to bring peace to war-torn Lebanon. For example, they played a major role in arranging the cease-fire in the Shuf Mountains in September 1983 when Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Bandar engaged in high-profile shuttle diplomacy. Saudi observers were present at the Geneva and Lausanne talks and worked with the Lebanese and Syrians to encourage the development of national reconciliation. Furthermore, they were supportive of Lebanese Government efforts to negotiate with Israel on security arrangements in southern Lebanon. The Saudis supported Lebanese efforts to win Syrian consent to proposed compromises and were active in exploring additional proposals for compromise between the parties.

**Arab-Israeli Peace.** Although the Saudis have only occasionally played a high-profile role in working toward resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute, private Saudi efforts have had a significant effect at critical periods. Notable Saudi initiatives are the Fahd peace plan and its successor, the Fez communique. These declarations may not have gone far enough, but they are, indeed, a substantial assistance in the search for peace. Let me explain.

The Arab desire for consensus has been a central reality in the peacemaking effort--even though that consensus has so often proven elusive. Prior to the Fahd plan and Fez communique, the Arab consensus was the three "NOs" of Khartoum which rejected recognition, negotiation, or conciliation with Israel.

Saudi advancement of the Fahd proposal in November 1981, followed by 10 months of active Saudi diplomatic effort, achieved a significant new Arab consensus--one that permitted negotiation. It turned the discussion from a rejection of peace to a debate on how to achieve peace. It is the largest step toward peace that the Arabs have taken as a group. Its existence provided an essential context for King Hussein's initiative. It was and remains a major and constructive step forward for the Arabs. Indeed, the Fahd proposal reflects language drawn from UN Security Council Resolution 242, that all states in the region should be able to live in peace.

We have often cautioned all who support peace in the Middle East not to expect dramatic progress in the peace process. Advance is made in incremental steps. Only through steady, dogged effort will the parties collectively move toward peace and security. Positive Saudi efforts must not be belittled. There are other examples.

Saudi Arabia's support for King Hussein's efforts have been substantial. The Saudis have assured Jordan that they would back any arrangement to which both Jordan and the Palestinians could agree. Over strong Syrian objection, the Saudis sent official observers to the Amman Palestine National Council meeting where they publicly stated their support for Hussein's decision to host it.

Political reintegration into the Arab world of Egypt--the only Arab state to share a peace agreement with Israel--is symbolically important to moderate Arab states. The Saudis have felt that an Arab summit decision is required formally to reestablish Arab-wide relations with Egypt. Meanwhile, they have taken a number of positive steps toward integration. For instance, by supporting the essential motion for a secret ballot, they helped make possible Egypt's reintegration into the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Peace is still in the making. The parties have made a good deal of progress already, but there is undeniably a long way to go. Achievement of our shared goal, Israeli-Arab peace, requires risk-taking, good will, and hard work from all the parties. We are all hopeful we will succeed. But I am certain that any campaign to denigrate the genuine efforts of one or some of the parties is counterproductive to achieving our objective.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as you consider Middle East issues over the next several months, I ask that you examine them from the perspective of the overall political and strategic context of the region. In our system of government, decisions are perforce taken on discrete issues. But if we are to avoid unintended consequences for U.S., Israel, and Arab interests, we must keep the overall context in view as we make those decisions. We must return to a policy of proven success. We must avoid moving down a road which excludes important security partners and which, however inadvertently, plays into the hands of Middle Eastern radicals--the Cassandras who say real peace is not possible, that our interests are limited to the peace process, and that the United States cannot be friends with Israel and friendly with Arab states alike.