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THE AWACS SALE: PROSPECTS FOR U.S. POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The controversial proposal to sell the AWACS/F-15 enhancement package to Saudi Arabia currently faces an uncertain future in the Senate. The outcome of the congressional debate over this sale, the largest arms deal in history, will have a major impact on America's strategic position in the Middle East and the future course of American relations with key Middle Eastern states. It will not only influence the domestic politics and foreign policies of the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia, but also those of a wide circle of concerned states in the Middle East and beyond. The purpose of this paper is to briefly summarize the arguments for and against the proposed sale, analyze some of the major issues raised by the sale and assess the possible consequences of a congressional rejection or acceptance of the proposed sale.

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

In an attempt to strengthen its powers against the "imperial presidency," Congress in 1974 gave itself the authority to review any proposed arms sale valued at more than \$25 million. Under the terms of the Arms Export Control Act, originally enacted as part of the 1974 foreign aid bill, an arms sale proposal may be blocked by Congress if both Houses pass a concurrent resolution of disapproval within thirty days of being formally notified of the sale by the executive branch.

During the seven years since the enactment of the law, Congress has not vetoed a single arms sale, although congressional pressures have resulted in the modification of the terms of several arms sale proposals. In 1974, the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Jordan was approved only after the mode of deployment of the missiles was changed from mobile to stationary,

thereby limiting their effectiveness against Israel. In 1977, President Carter modified a proposal to sell seven AWACS planes to Iran due to congressional concern that the sale would escalate the arms race in the Persian Gulf and saddle the Iranians with a more sophisticated weapons system than they could effectively use. After the House International Relations Committee voted to reject the sale, the Carter Administration removed certain pieces of advanced equipment from the planes and promised closer American oversight of their operation. While this modification diluted congressional opposition and assured the completion of the sale, the AWACS planes never were delivered due to the fall of the Shah in 1979.

The only arms sale proposal to require a formal vote in the years since the congressional review procedure was established has been President Carter's \$2.5 billion sale of sixty F-15 fighters to Saudi Arabia in 1978. The warplanes were originally included in a \$4.8 billion package containing military aircraft for Israel and Egypt, but congressional opposition forced the Carter Administration to split the package and allow Congress to consider the Saudi sale separately. After President Carter made several concessions, including commitments to sell additional F-15s to Israel, restrictions on Saudi use of the F-15s, and assurances that the United States would not provide systems or armaments that would increase the range or the ground attack capabilities of the F-15s, the Senate approved the sale by a vote of 54 to 44. Of the fifty-nine senators still serving in 1981, thirty-one voted for the Saudi sale and twenty-eight opposed it.¹

After his 1980 election defeat, President Carter reversed himself on the pledge that his Administration would not enhance the capabilities of the F-15s sold to Saudi Arabia and made a decision in principle to do just that. The Reagan Administration, after reviewing the defense needs of Saudi Arabia, announced on March 6, 1981, that it intended to sell additional equipment that would upgrade the capabilities of the Saudi F-15s, and give the Saudis some unspecified aerial reconnaissance capabilities. On April 21, 1981, the White House formally announced that President Reagan had decided to sell the Saudis five AWACS aircraft as part of a package including conformal fuel tanks, AIM-9L Sidewinder missiles and KC-3 aerial tankers. On April 26, 1981, the Senate Majority Leader, Senator Howard Baker, Jr. (R-Tenn.), indicated that at his suggestion the Reagan Administration had agreed to delay submission of the Saudi arms package to Congress until mid-summer in order to allow extensive consultations between members of Congress and the State and Defense Departments.

¹ The first six F-15s are scheduled to be delivered to Saudi Arabia in January 1982. Deliveries will continue at regular intervals until all sixty are turned over by May 1983. Two F-15s will be held in the United States to replace losses sustained in training or routine operations.

There was considerable congressional opposition to the Saudi arms package even before it was announced that AWACS aircraft were to be included. While the Reagan Administration kept the arms sale on the back burner in order to focus congressional attention on the Administration's economic legislation, the opponents of the sale sought to build a coalition in Congress that would block the deal. On June 24, 1981, fifty-four senators, led by Senator Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), sent a letter to President Reagan expressing their "strong belief" that the proposed arms package was "not in the best interest of the United States" and urged that the President refrain from sending his proposal to Congress. On the same day, Representatives Clarence Long (D-Md.) and Norman Lent (R-N.Y.) introduced H. Con. Res. 118, a resolution co-sponsored by 224 House members, that would disapprove the Saudi arms proposal. The Senate followed suit on September 17 when Senator Packwood, along with forty-nine co-sponsors, introduced Sen. Con. Res. 37, a resolution that put them on record as disapproving the sale in the form that it was submitted in late August.

Although the Administration seems to be gaining support for the Saudi arms deal in the wake of President Sadat's assassination, it is clear that opponents of the sale maintain a narrow edge in the Senate, where the fate of the sale will ultimately be determined. The House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to reject the AWACS/F-15 enhancement package by a vote of 28 to 8 on October 7, with ten of the sixteen Republicans voting against the sale. On October 14, the House adopted a resolution of disapproval for the sale by a vote of 301 to 111. On October 15, two important Senate committees turned in conflicting verdicts about the sale. The Senate Armed Services Committee lined up 10 to 5 in favor of the sale (with one voting present and one absent), while the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to disapprove the sale by 9 to 8. The Senate floor vote, expected on October 20, has been postponed until sometime during the last week of October.

THE PROPOSED ARMS PACKAGE

The most controversial component of the \$8.5 billion Saudi air defense enhancement package is the proposed sale of five E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. The E-3A is simply a modified Boeing 707-320B with added radar surveillance, computer and communication equipment. It was designed to detect, identify and track hostile warplanes and coordinate the combat operations of friendly air forces. At its normal mission altitude of 30,000 feet, its powerful pulse doppler radar can detect high altitude bomber-size aircraft as far away as 360 nautical miles and low-flying (200 feet altitude) small fighter aircraft 175 nautical miles away. Only airborne targets moving at speeds greater than 80 knots can be seen, although a maritime surveillance capability is being developed, and could be retrofitted into operational U.S. E-3As.

AWACS aircraft were first flown in 1971 and first delivered to the U.S. Air Force in 1977. Fifty-two AWACS aircraft have been built or are on order, thirty-four for the U.S. Air Force and eighteen for NATO. At \$130 million per copy, the E-3A is one of the most expensive aircraft ever built. The estimated total cost for the five aircraft, three years of spare parts, support equipment, logistical support, maintenance training, and technical support is \$3.7 billion. The Saudi AWACS would be available forty-eight months after they are ordered, and are scheduled to be delivered over a ten-month period starting in August 1985.

The air defense enhancement package also provides for the upgrading of the existing Saudi radar network, which was built in the late 1960s. This ground environment improvements proposal, based on a two-year study conducted by the U.S. Air Force, encompasses the modernization of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) command, control and communication system and the acquisition of twenty-two new radar systems. The proposed upgrade would include new hardened command and control facilities, new data processing and display equipment for these facilities, and the replacement of existing radars. The addition of new sites to improve radar coverage and the establishment of ten Ground Entry Stations would integrate the surveillance capabilities of AWACS and the ground environment radar system. These improvements will take six years to complete, at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion.

The aerial tankers included in the arms package are KC-3s, modified versions of the Boeing 707-320B transport, that would be capable of providing in-flight refueling for F-5, F-15 and AWACS aircraft. The KC-3 would be produced on the same production line as the E-3A AWACS, with which it shares airframe, engines and other aircraft components. The Saudis have requested six KC-3s with an option to buy two additional aircraft. At an estimated cost of \$2.4 billion, the Saudis would be receiving the aircraft, three years of initial spare parts, support equipment, aircrew training, three years of contractor aircraft maintenance and maintenance training. The aircraft would be available for delivery in 40-44 months at the rate of one per month.

The F-15 enhancement portion of the package entails the provision of 1177 AIM-9L missiles at a cost of \$200 million and 101 sets of conformal fuel tanks (CFTs) at a cost of \$110 million. The AIM-9L is a sixth generation version of the Sidewinder short-range, air-to-air infrared (heat-seeking) missile that is widely regarded as the most advanced missile of its kind currently in use anywhere. Two such missiles were responsible for the recent downing of two Libyan SU-22 aircraft in the Gulf of Sidra. The AIM-9L is a major improvement over the AIM-9J and AIM-9P-3 missiles currently possessed by the Saudis because its "all aspect" guidance and control system allows head-on attacks against hostile aircraft and eliminates the need for time-consuming aerial maneuvers designed to enable warplanes to "lock on" to targets from behind.

CFTs, also known as "Fast Packs" (Fuel and Sensor Tactical Packages), are streamlined fuel tanks that attach to the sides of F-15 fuselages; they can be provided with rails for external carriage of air-to-air ordnance such as the AIM-7 Sparrow air-to-air missile (which has already been approved for sale to Saudi Arabia). With normal weapons loadings, the CFTs increase the combat radius and loitering time of F-15s by 70-80 percent. Although the CFTs are endowed with an optional capability to carry air-to-surface munitions, the Saudis could not perform such a modification without American approval and assistance.

The Saudi air defense enhancement package will be subject to the standard conditions placed on U.S. arms sales: the equipment is to be used for defensive purposes only, classified items are to be protected by security procedures that meet American standards, and no transfers of equipment will be allowed to third countries without prior U.S. approval. According to Secretary of State Haig's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 5, the Saudis have also agreed to a number of additional restrictions. No AWACS flights outside of Saudi Arabia's borders are to be allowed without prior U.S. consent. Third country personnel will be forbidden to perform maintenance on AWACS and third country modifications to equipment will be prohibited. AWACS data are to be exchanged between the United States and Saudi Arabia at all times and no AWACS data will be supplied to other countries without the prior and mutual consent of both countries. The computer software that is indispensable in the operation of AWACS will remain the sole property of the United States and only American or Saudi personnel will have access to AWACS equipment and documentation. Finally, a U.S.-approved security plan will be developed to provide for secure facilities for AWACS equipment and periodic American security inspections of the AWACS facilities.

THE AWACS PACKAGE AND SAUDI DEFENSE NEEDS

Saudi Arabia is a country as large as the continental United States east of the Mississippi River, although its population is smaller than that of New York City. Because the Saudis must defend a vast area against widely dispersed threats with a limited manpower base (less than three million men), they have come to rely on advanced western military technology to deter attacks and safeguard their national security. Their chief concern is protecting their vital oil production, refining, storage and shipping facilities, the bulk of which are located within forty miles of the Persian Gulf coast in the Dhahran-Ras Tanura area. If these complexes were to be destroyed in an attack, the world would be deprived of six million barrels of oil per day for up to two years and the Saudis would be deprived of their chief economic and political asset.

The ongoing Iran-Iraq war has vividly demonstrated the vulnerability of oil production facilities to aerial and naval

attacks. The recent Iranian air attack on a Kuwaiti oil installation has underscored the possibility that the war could be expanded to include Saudi Arabia's oilfields as well. It was the threat of just such an attack that led Saudi Arabia to request the dispatch of four U.S. Air Force AWACS aircraft in October 1980 and which keeps them there on-station today.

Saudi ground-based radar stations in the Dhahran area can detect small low-flying aircraft only within a radius of thirty miles and even this is not completely certain because of the frequent performance degradations that ground-based radars experience due to the temperature gradient between the hot air masses over the desert and the cooler air masses over the Persian Gulf. This means that without AWACS, Saudi fighters would only have a two- to four-minute advance warning of an attack and could not intercept Iranian fighter bombers until after they had attacked Ras Tanura. With AWACS, which could actually "see" Iranian warplanes taking off at Bushehr airbase along the Iranian coast, Saudi fighters would have up to fifteen minutes warning, ample time to intercept the attacking planes over the Gulf, particularly if the Saudi planes are equipped with AIM-9L missiles that would reduce their need to maneuver in combat. AWACS could also transmit target data to the Saudi Hawk anti-aircraft missile batteries along the coast, thereby improving their effectiveness against attacking aircraft.

If the Saudis were to lose the use of Dhahran airbase in the initial attack, they would be forced to protect the oilfields from bases in the interior and the western part of the country by flying missions of 600 to 800 miles. This is like defending Chicago from an airbase near Dallas. Given such distances and the small size of the RSAF, the Saudis would require the promised KC-3 aerial tankers to extend the range of their F-15s, which are considered to be relatively short-legged air-superiority fighters. Saudi Arabia's current KC-130 tankers lack the mission flexibility to refuel both F-15 and F-5 aircraft as well as an adequate capability to refuel "over the horizon" reinforcements from U.S. carriers or elsewhere.

Opponents of the arms package doubt the capacity of the Saudis to utilize the E-3A AWACS effectively and question whether a less capable system such as the E-2C Hawkeye would have been more appropriate. However, they do not deny that Saudi Arabia's air defenses need a significant upgrading.

Proponents of the sale acknowledge that the Saudis will not be as proficient with the AWACS as Americans but insist that they will be capable of operating the AWACS successfully against most regional threats. They maintain that the relatively limited range and endurance of the E-2C would mean that two to three times as many E-2Cs as AWACS would be required to cover the same area, and much more manpower would be required to operate, support and maintain the radar surveillance program.

THE AWACS PACKAGE AND U.S. INTERESTS

Proponents of the sale argue that the proposed sale directly serves U.S. interests by enhancing the security of the vital Saudi oilfields against regional threats, by establishing an extensive logistics base and support structure that will improve the ability of U.S. armed forces to reinforce the Saudis in a crisis, by laying the groundwork for greater U.S.-Saudi defense cooperation and by rebuilding confidence in the United States by demonstrating the value and reliability of American security commitments.² These are all strong arguments that opponents of the sale have not attempted to refute.

Instead, opponents charge that the deal risks the compromise of advanced American weapons technology by ignoring the potential for political instability in Saudi Arabia and that it rewards Riyadh's rejection of the Camp David accords. Instead of focusing on the international credibility of U.S. foreign policy, they focus on the domestic credibility of the executive branch's 1978 commitments to Congress that the Saudi F-15s would not have their range or offensive capabilities enhanced.³

Perhaps the strongest argument against the Saudi arms package is the fear of technology compromise, a fear heightened by the compromise of the electronics systems and AIM-54A Phoenix missiles of the F-14 fighter, as well as other less sophisticated weapons systems, in the aftermath of the fall of the Shah of Iran. Opponents of the sale have hinted darkly that Saudi Arabia is "another Iran" and cite the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the 1979-1980 Shiite disturbances in the Eastern Province as evidence of internal tensions that could eventually topple the royal family.

Fears that Saudi Arabia is "another Iran" are overstated and oversimplified. The Saudis, with a much smaller population and much larger oil revenues than Iran, have been able to spread their oil wealth among a larger portion of the population and have given their people more of an economic stake in the political stability of the Kingdom than the Shah was able to do. Unlike the Shah, who grew increasingly isolated from his people, the 4,000 princes of the Saudi royal family permeate all levels of Saudi institutions and have an intimate knowledge of the needs and concerns of their subjects. Unlike the Shah, who was seen as the enemy of the Islamic clergy, the Saudi royal family historically has been closely identified with the leaders of the fundamentalist Wahhabi sect. Although the 1979 disorders have shaken confidence in the stability of the Kingdom, they have also prompted

² See: Richard Allen, "Why the AWACS is Good for Us," Washington Post, September 20, 1981.

³ See: AIPAC, "The Saudi Sale: A Dangerous Sale, A Dangerous Policy," August 24, 1981.

the Saudis to reorganize their intelligence and security organizations as well as to move to remedy some of the economic ills that caused Shiite unrest. The real internal threat to Saudi stability is not a revolution but a military coup -- a difficult and doubtful enterprise as long as the royal family remains united and retains the loyalty of the National Guard.

Without a major political upheaval in Saudi Arabia, the compromise of U.S. military technology is unlikely in view of the security measures attached to the sale. Because Saudi Arabia does not have diplomatic relations with any Soviet bloc country, Soviet intelligence operations in the country are limited. AWACS based in Iceland, Okinawa and in Europe (starting in 1982) will be at least as vulnerable to compromise as those in a stable Saudi Arabia. The AIM-9L missile, which is produced under license in Germany, has already been sold to Israel, the United Kingdom, Norway, Italy, Japan, Greece and Australia. The Defense Department is reportedly more concerned about the compromise of technological secrets in some of these countries than in Saudi Arabia.

Even under the "worst-case" assumption that the House of Saud is overthrown, and AWACS fall into Soviet hands, there is little danger that the Soviets could devise techniques of jamming AWACS or of copying any technology that they would not already possess by the time that the AWACS are delivered in 1985. The AWACS that will be sent to Saudi Arabia will be stripped of its U.S. encipherment gear, the Joint Tactical Information Distribution System (JTIDS), the HAVE QUICK and SEEK TALK anti-jamming devices, Mode 4 of the Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) system, TADIL C encrypted air-to-air data links or computer data related to U.S. battle tactics.

Only ten of the more than one thousand technical manuals required to operate AWACS are classified secret and all have been widely circulated within NATO. The computers involved in the operation of the Saudi AWACS are commercially available and with the exception of the radar, all system elements will be "off the shelf" items that represent the technology of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The radar itself is not highly sensitive; the equipment used to manufacture it is sensitive but it cannot be technically compromised by reverse engineering. The radar technology is eleven years old and it is likely that by the time AWACS is delivered to Saudi Arabia in 1985, the Soviets will have already deployed their new AWACS variant, the IL-76 Candid, which is currently under development.

Only the computer software, the heart of the system, is highly sensitive. If it should fall into Soviet hands, the Soviets would have to launch a massive multi-year effort in order to decipher the tapes and reconstruct the logic of the system. The United States could easily nullify these efforts within a matter of days by reprogramming the remaining AWACS computers.

The AIM-9L poses a more serious risk of technology compromise due to the advanced seeker and fuse elements that permit its "all aspect" firing capability. The physical security of the missiles would be more difficult to assure than that of the AWACS since the missiles will be stored in several locations; the AWACS will operate from a single common base. However, the extensive security precautions that will be enforced under the General Security of Information Agreement, to be signed before the arms are delivered, will greatly reduce this risk.

In summary, there is a slight risk that the American military technology provided to Saudi Arabia may be compromised. However, such a risk exists anywhere in the world that American military equipment is deployed and also exists here in the United States. This risk can be minimized by taking stringent security precautions and by stepping up research efforts to create a new generation of hardware and software that would enhance the capabilities of AWACS aircraft and maintain the U.S. technological lead in this area, even in the unlikely event that early AWACS technology was technically compromised.

THE AWACS PACKAGE AND THREATS TO ISRAEL

Proponents of the AWACS sale argue that the impact of the sale on Israel security would be negligible given the constraints on the AWACS aircraft, the superiority of the Israeli Air Force, the topography of terrain between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the technical limits of AWACS capabilities, and the restraining influence of American ground personnel who will be needed to maintain key elements over the entire life of the system. They point out that Saudi Arabia performed only token military roles in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars and would be reluctant to become involved in another such war. Even if the Saudis did join an attack on Israel, their AWACS are seen as scarce, expensive and vulnerable aircraft that would not be put at risk by the Saudis to gain short-lived minor advantages on the battlefield.

Opponents of the sale argue that in spite of minimal Saudi participation in previous Arab-Israeli wars, the Saudis would be put under heavy pressure by other Arab states to participate in a future war given the increased capabilities and mobility of the weapons at their disposal. They point out that the Israelis would have to base their defense plans on Saudi capabilities, not on Saudi intentions, and that this would require the Israelis to devote a portion of their air force to the task of defending against the potential threat of Saudi aircraft. They fear also that AWACS would deprive Israel of the ability to launch pre-emptive surprise attacks and that the AWACS would gather peacetime intelligence about Israeli air activities.

It should be noted that AWACS was designed for defensive fighter operations and that the stripped-down AWACS that the Saudis have been promised will be of limited value in offensive

air operations. Due to the topography of the Israeli-Jordanian border, which would "mask" AWACS radar coverage of parts of Israel, existing Syrian and Jordanian radar stations in the hills east of Israel can already monitor Israeli air activity almost as closely and much more efficiently than could the Saudi AWACS. In order to cover the low altitude corridors in Israel, the Saudi AWACS would have to move into a forward position which would leave it extremely vulnerable to Israeli air attack and to Israeli communications jamming. To maintain such an AWACS presence, Saudi Arabia would have to forgo AWACS coverage of the approaches to its oilfields, the assets that would benefit most from the improved early warning capabilities that AWACS could provide.

The RSAF operating alone would hardly be a threat to Israel's air defenses. It would only be a factor when operating in conjunction with other Arab air forces, and even then AWACS would prove to be of extremely limited effectiveness. The information that AWACS could gather would be of a highly perishable nature and could not effectively be utilized by other Arab air forces in time for it to be any help, given the lack of automated data links (which only the U.S. could provide) in the other Arab air forces. Moreover, any Saudi attempt to attack Israel or share its AWACS information with other Arab states would immediately cause the U.S. to withdraw the indispensable services of its technical support personnel, an action that would result in the AWACS becoming inoperable in a matter of days and unflyable in a matter of weeks. The Saudis are very unlikely to risk an \$8.5 billion investment to gain a marginal advantage in a war that they could not win.

The Saudi AWACS would not totally deny Israel the ability to launch a surprise attack because the AWACS could only discern the initial vector of an Israeli strike force and not its ultimate target. Israel could disguise an attack by continuing its present policy of engaging in constant air exercises. The Israelis could also passively detect whether or not the AWACS was operating and attack the moment it returned to its base. Since the power level of the AWACS radar would make it impossible for the Saudis to monitor Israeli airspace without Israeli knowledge of such activity, the Saudis would be strongly deterred from doing so in peacetime by Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir's recent threat that Israel would launch an attack on AWACS if the Saudis use them to spy on Israel.

In summary, the Saudi arms sale marginally increases the potential threat that the Saudi armed forces pose to Israel. However, the risks to Israel would be entirely manageable, especially if the United States were to strengthen Israel's air force to compensate for the additional resources that the Israelis would have to commit to neutralize the minor advantages that AWACS would give the Saudis.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE SALE

Approval of the AWACS sale would help create a long-term strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia that eventually might be extended to the other conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf. It would increase Saudi reliance on American technical and military support and reduce the chances that Saudi arms would be used against Israel. The sale would pave the way for greater Saudi-American defense cooperation and provide the basis for an extensive command, control and communications network, logistical infrastructure, and support facilities that would be compatible with the requirements of American military forces. In the event of a crisis, the components of the AWACS package would facilitate the deployment and supply of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force. Pre-positioned maintenance equipment, repair facilities and technical support personnel would simplify the logistical needs of the advance elements of the Rapid Deployment Force.

The sale would also politically strengthen the pro-western faction within the Saudi royal family and encourage Saudi moderation. It would underline the value of an American military connection to moderate regimes throughout the Middle East and encourage crystallization of a "strategic consensus" among Middle Eastern states that would help check the growth of Soviet and radical Arab influence. Finally, it would lengthen the production run of the E-3A and lower its average unit cost because the Saudis will be paying a portion of the research and development costs for the first fifty-two units in addition to their basic purchase price.

The sale of AWACS will probably be a psychological blow to Israel given the considerable efforts the Begin government has made to influence American public opinion on the sale. The AWACS issue evokes the Israeli nightmare that the technological margin of superiority on which Israel's security depends is gradually being undermined by the transfer of western military technology to the Arab world. In Israeli eyes the AWACS sale is not so much a threat to Israel's medium-term military security as it is a symbolic threat to its long-term technological superiority. According to an Israeli general interviewed by the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, his concerns were not related to the AWACS package itself but to the next sale after AWACS.⁴

The Reagan Administration should address these understandable Israeli concerns by reaffirming the American commitment to the maintenance of Israel's qualitative military superiority over potential Arab adversaries and by manifesting this commitment in a concrete fashion. Such actions would go far in relieving Israeli anxieties, resolving tension in Israeli-American relations, and convincing Arab hardliners that a just and lasting resolution to the Arab-Israeli dispute can only be reached through negotiations -- not violence.

⁴ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "The Proposed AWACS/F-15 Enhancement Sale to Saudi Arabia," Staff Report, September 1981, p. 32.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF THE SALE

If Congress blocks the Saudi arms deal, it will in effect destroy the "strategic consensus" strategy that the Reagan Administration has announced for the Middle East. An anti-Soviet consensus can only be built if the United States demonstrates the will and capability to protect the interests it shares with friendly regimes in the region. The congressional rejection of the arms package would undermine President Reagan's credibility in foreign policy and place in doubt the value of close relations with the United States. In the aftermath of the Sadat assassination, it would be a strong signal to moderate regimes throughout the Middle East that the United States is an unreliable security partner incapable of taking care of its friends.

Rejection of the arms package would also place a tremendous strain on American relations with Saudi Arabia. It would be a humiliating vote of no confidence in the Saudi royal family that would discredit them in the eyes of their own people as well as the Arab world. Pro-western elements of the House of Saud, such as the Defense Minister, Prince Sultan, would lose face and influence within family councils. Embittered and frustrated by empty American promises, the Saudis could be expected to distance themselves from Washington, just as did the Pakistanis after the 1965 U.S. arms embargo of Pakistan and the Turks after the 1974 U.S. arms embargo of Turkey.

The Saudis may express their displeasure with Washington's unreliability by pointedly opening up diplomatic relations with Moscow in the near future. The American business community in Saudi Arabia fears that the Saudis will increasingly freeze American companies out of their market -- the ninth largest market in the world for U.S. exports, accounting for \$6.8 billion of American goods and services in 1980. Saudi displeasure might also be reflected in the world oil market, perhaps at the OPEC meeting in December. According to some oil experts, the demise of the AWACS package might lead to a drop in Saudi oil production of up to two million barrels per day in the next year.⁵

If the Saudis loosen their close bonds to the U.S., they will also be depriving themselves of a counterweight against the pressures of radical Arab states. This could lead them to seek accommodation with the Arab radicals and probably would result in an increase of Saudi aid to the PLO and Syria, two of Israel's most implacable enemies. The rejection of the Saudi AWACS package would also adversely affect Israel's national security by leading the Saudis to buy the British Nimrod radar surveillance aircraft. This aircraft would be more of a threat to Israel than the stripped-down Saudi AWACS because of its greater intelligence gathering capabilities and the ease with

⁵ Wall Street Journal, October 2, 1981, p. 1.

which it could be made inter-operable with other Arab air forces. Also, London would not be as willing as Washington to attach strings to an arms sale, or as inclined to "pull the plug" on the aircraft if Saudi Arabia should employ the system against Israel.

Finally, the rejection of the Saudi arms deal would reduce Saudi reliance on American weapons systems, thereby reducing American leverage over Riyadh and reducing the ability of the United States to provide over-the-horizon air reinforcements in the event of a crisis in the Persian Gulf. By denying the package to the Saudis, Congress would also be denying pre-positioned KC-3 tankers, AIM-9L missiles, CFTs and the associated logistical support infrastructure to the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force, if it should ever be called in to defend the Saudi oilfields. Such a shortsighted policy jeopardizes the strength and timeliness of an American military response and raises the odds against a successful American military intervention in a future crisis in the Persian Gulf.

CONCLUSION

The world is a risky place. The task of foreign policy is to minimize these risks in a realistic fashion, not to attempt the impossible by seeking to eliminate risk altogether. The proposed AWACS sale was designed to reduce the risk that Saudi oilfields, the largest in the world, would be attacked and disrupted by a regional power, particularly the unpredictable Iranian revolutionary regime across the Gulf. In reducing this risk, the AWACS proposal has created other, much more limited, much more manageable risks to the national security of Israel and to the technological integrity of American weapon systems. The solution is not to block the sale, since that would create a whole new set of risks for American relations with moderate Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, and for the American strategic position in the Middle East. Instead, the sale should be consummated and steps should be taken to reduce the accompanying marginal risks to Israeli security and to the maintenance of the U.S. technological lead over the Soviets.

Such steps would include:

- o A commitment by the Administration to study the limited additional security needs that the Saudi AWACS would impose on Israel.
- o A pledge by the Administration to supply Israel with the means of blunting the potential threat of the Saudi AWACS before the AWACS are delivered in 1985.

A congressional rejection of the AWACS/F-15 enhancement package would have an adverse impact on the interests of many countries. It would embarrass the pro-western faction of the Saudi royal family and could lead them to turn away from the

United States. Since the Saudis would therefore be more vulnerable to the pressures of radical Arab states, they could be inclined to step up their support for the PLO and even might be enticed into joining the so-called Rejectionist Front. This, along with the probable acquisition of the British Nimrod, would make Saudi Arabia a much more dangerous threat to Israel than it is today. Pro-western regimes in other moderate Arab states such as Egypt, the Sudan and Jordan would also have their confidence in the United States shaken.

Ultimately, the biggest loser of all probably would be the United States itself. By blocking the Saudi arms deal, Congress would be aborting the Reagan Administration's embryonic policy of molding a "strategic consensus" among moderate Middle Eastern states that would serve to constrain and restrain the expansion of Soviet influence in this critical region. It is the impact on this policy that Congress must consider, above all, if it plans to block the Saudi arms deal.

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