

Arms Sales: Our Heads Are in the Sand

Huge Shipments to Saudi Arabia and Iran Would Endanger U.S. Security

BY HENRY A. WAXMAN

On Sept. 1, the Ford Administration submitted to Congress two proposals for \$4.6 billion in U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Iran. These would include 160 F-16s for Iran at a staggering \$3.4 billion, along with \$600 million worth of Sparrow, Sidewinder and Phoenix missiles. As for Saudi Arabia, it would buy 850 Sidewinder and 650 Maverick missiles for \$575 million.

In my view, these sales would be excessive, unjustified and dangerous because:

—Rather than take into account legitimate criticisms of our arms-sales program, the most recently proposed sales would exacerbate the dangerous trends which have clearly emerged.

—Rather than promote strategic stability in the Persian Gulf area, they would continue to fuel the outrageous arms race in the Mideast, and thus heighten the instability in that already troubled area.

—Rather than assure the security of any of the recipient countries, the sales would invite a transfer of these sophisticated weapons to the hostile states which ring Israel.

—Rather than resolve the questions about how deeply U.S. citizens are enmeshed in running the armed forces of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the sales would raise new questions about the size of our long-range commitment, as they also would about who is actually controlling the nature and scope of U.S. involvement.

No satisfactory answers to these questions are evident. No acceptable rationale for new arms sales has been offered. Therefore, Congress would be irresponsible to permit these transactions to proceed any further.

Accordingly, I have written the chairman of the House International Relations Committee, Rep. Thomas E. Morgan (D-Pa.) and asked him to introduce resolutions of disapproval for both proposals. In addition, I have urged him to hold prompt hearings on all related issues.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, our sale of Sidewinders remains fraught with the same doubts raised in mid-June when the Administration first proposed selling 2,000 U.S. missiles to that nation. The Sidewinder is a heat-seeking missile which is fired by an F-5 fight-

er. The Saudis already have 400 Sidewinders, and by 1978 their arsenal will include 110 F-5s, each of which can carry only two missiles at a time.

The conventional missile-to-plane ratio for the Sidewinder—maintained by both the United States and Israel—is 4 to 1. If we sell the Saudis 850 Sidewinders, that would give them almost a 12-to-1 ratio—three times the deterrent level considered sufficient by the Pentagon. This is why the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency labeled the original 2,000-missile sale excessive.

Then there are those 650 television-guided Mavericks. Only last year, the Saudis bought 1,000 of these air-to-surface missiles. Reports from Saudi Arabia and inside the Administration indicate that the Saudis are having difficulty absorbing them into their air force because it lacks the technical capability to do so. Why, then, do we want to sell them even

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more of these missiles this year? Once again, the Administration gives no satisfactory answer.

—Nor does it explain the role of U.S. citizens after such sales are made. It is estimated that more than 20,000 Americans are currently in Saudi Arabia training its forces to use weapons they already possess, but no one knows how many more U.S. citizens will be required if this latest arms deal goes through.

Moreover, there are indications that the Americans in Saudi Arabia are not simply filling training or advisory roles—they are actually manning that country's sophisticated air defense system. That, in turn, raises questions about the duration of U.S. involvement. Are there any constraints on the role Americans may play? What would occur if hostilities erupted? Again, no answers from the Administration.

With respect to Iran, such questions are even more ominous. Last month, the Senate's foreign assistance subcommittee, headed by Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) issued a devastating report on U.S. arms sales there. It

concluded that our policies are out of control, that overly sophisticated equipment has been sold to the Iranians, that thousands of Americans will be needed in Iran over the next several years to operate this equipment, and that, indeed, Iran could not wage a war without day-to-day U.S. support.

Yet, without rebutting these charges, the Administration now proposes to sell Iran 160 F-16 warplanes—the most sophisticated supersonic fighter we have—even though only a fraction of the F-14s previously sold to Iran have even been delivered.

As in Saudi Arabia, the cadre of U.S. technicians in Iran is growing—27,000 of them are there now to train personnel and operate equipment, and by 1980 this number may almost double. Again, as in Saudi Arabia, if war broke out they would become directly and heavily involved.

The tragic murder last month of three U.S. technicians by Iranian radicals only underscores the precarious position of Americans there. Before any more are committed to service in Iran, we must carefully reevaluate our role as that nation's major arms supplier.

For too long our answer to the energy crisis, as to the unchecked flow of petrodollars and the power these give the OPEC nations, has been to curry their favor through the sale of U.S. weapons—with utter disregard for strategic implications.

The result has been to jeopardize our own security and that of our allies. The shah of Iran said as much earlier this year when he warned us: "If you try to take an unfriendly attitude toward my country, we can hurt you as badly, if not more so, than you can hurt us." And, again, with Secretary of State Kissinger by his side this summer, the shah said: "Can the United States or the non-Communist world afford to lose Iran? What will you do if one day Iran will be in danger of collapsing? Do you have any choice?"

So it is imperative that Congress disapprove these further military sales and begin a comprehensive reformulation of our arms policies in the Persian Gulf. Even now the sales have reached a point where they are not so much friendly agreements among allies as they are our response to extortion demands—and the United States will be the weaker if the latest sales go through.