



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

REMARKS BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON THE AIR DEFENSE ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE FOR SAUDI ARABIA

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I welcome this opportunity to present the Administration's case for selling AWACS aircraft and other air defense enhancements to Saudi Arabia. The President's decision to sell this equipment to the Saudi Government has stimulated deep emotions, and intense debate, which have obscured the core issues. It is time that the real issues be put before Congress and the American people so that they may be examined as dispassionately and fully as its importance requires.

The case for the sale of this air defense enhancement package to Saudi Arabia is simple: AWACS and the other air defense equipment will make a significant, necessary contribution to the security interests of the United States and all of our allies and friends, including the NATO Nations, Israel itself, Japan, and, of course, the mid-East countries, in a very volatile part of the world. The President's decision to proceed with this sale was based upon this central fact and was reached only after considerable review and agreement with the basic decision reached by prior Administrations.

As you are aware, the Saudi air defense enhancement package consists of four components: E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft, or AWACS, to provide necessary low-altitude surveillance and early warning of air attack, along with associated ground-based command, control, and communications equipment to

provide a complete air defense surveillance and control network; conformal fuel tanks to extend the range and mission endurance of Saudi Arabia's F-15 fighter aircraft; AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missiles to improve their F-15s' defensive aerial combat capability; and KC-707 aerial tankers to refuel both the F-15s and AWACS. The total cost of this equipment to Saudi Arabia will be some \$8.5 billion.

This Saudi equipment package is an important part of a comprehensive U.S. strategy for the Southwest Asia region designed to increase the security of friendly countries in an area of the world which is vital to both the United States and our Western allies. In this context, the proposed sale will directly serve U.S. national interests in the following ways:

- First, it will help the Saudis defend their vital oil facilities against surprise air attacks. In this manner, the sale responds to the legitimate security requirements of a country whose cooperation is central to the defense of the entire region's security -- and thus our own.

- It also will help to rebuild confidence in the U.S. as a reliable partner in the region. This sense of confidence and security is essential in encouraging countries in the area to take the political risks a durable peace in the Middle East demands.

- Further, it will advance our goal of increasing the security of states in the Gulf region by providing a foundation for closer U.S.-Saudi defense cooperation and for Saudi efforts to develop cooperation with all of her mid-East neighbors in other security related areas.

- Finally, it will increase the effectiveness of our own military capabilities if we were ever called upon to deploy U.S. forces to the area. The extensive logistics base and support infrastructure that will be a necessary part of this equipment package will be fully compatible with the defense needs of this whole vital area.

Saudi oil resources are vast and irreplaceable. We need them, and our allies need them. The flow of oil from Saudi Arabia and the region immediately bordering it in the Gulf is crucial to international finances, domestic production, employment around the globe, and world trade. In fact, the destruction of the oil gathering and loading facilities in Saudi Arabia, or their control by a hostile power, could tip the balance of power in the world.

Saudi oil resources are vulnerable and threatened. Virtually all of Saudi Arabia's oil production facilities are located in the East, near the Arabian Gulf coast, easily accessible to attack from across the Gulf. The conflict between Iran and Iraq disproved one widely held assumption: that oil-producing states acting in their

own self-interest would not threaten each other's oil fields, refineries, or transport facilities. But Iran and Iraq have done just that; each has been required to curtail oil exports vitally needed by the West. I might add at this point that Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production to accommodate that oil loss while keeping prices below those of its OPEC colleagues. This is simply another of many instances of Saudi assistance to our national interests.

As the anti-Communist leader of moderate Arab Gulf states and as the largest Free World oil producer, Saudi Arabia needs a strong defense against potential military threats from unstable, revolutionary Iran; from radical Iraq; and from Marxist South Yemen. The Saudi Kingdom also must increase its defense against Soviet or Soviet-inspired military threats from Ethiopia, Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and from the USSR itself. The new entente between Libya, Ethiopia, and South Yemen -- each of which has significant amounts of Soviet military equipment and increasing numbers of Soviet and Soviet bloc advisors -- introduces a new, most unwelcome dimension into the threat calculus of the region.

Given this situation, the Saudis face several difficulties in deploying an adequate air defense. This large country has widely scattered, concentrated population centers, military installations, ports, airfields, and oil facilities to protect. Most of these valuable targets are on or near the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea coasts,

which means that it is not possible to place early warning radars and air defenses far forward -- say between the oil facilities and potential threats from across the Gulf -- to provide adequate protection. With current Saudi capabilities, an attack by low-flying aircraft could not be detected by ground-based radar until it was within two to four minutes of the oil fields. Even under the best conditions, no air force could respond to this threat in time.

AWACS would allow the Saudi Air Force to detect low level attacking enemy aircraft up to 200 miles from the oil fields. The Saudi Air Force would then have enough time to scramble and intercept enemy aircraft before they reach the oil fields. Without AWACS, this early warning capability would not exist, no matter how many ground radars might be employed.

AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missiles would give the Saudi Air Force the capability to intercept attacking aircraft head-on. This capability would greatly improve the chances of shooting them down before they are able to bomb the oil facilities or other Saudi targets. Without the AIM-9L, Saudi interceptors would have to maneuver behind attacking aircraft to fire their older, less capable Sidewinder missile, virtually assuring that hostile aircraft could reach vital coastal targets before being engaged and shot down.

Conformal fuel tanks and KC-707 tankers would allow Saudi F-15s to be based in west central and southwestern Saudi Arabia where they

would not be vulnerable to a surprise enemy attack and from which they could sustain combat over the oil facilities even if bases in eastern Saudi Arabia were put out of action. KC-707 tankers also would allow AWACS to remain on-station for extended periods of time.

Consequently, we believe that Saudi Arabia has a legitimate defense requirement for the AWACS and the other air defense enhancement equipment. The air defense package would improve Saudi capabilities to deter and, if necessary, defend against air attacks. The result would be a more secure Saudi Arabia which would be an anchor of stability within the region (and the region, of course, includes Israel) and a bulwark against challenges and coercion from outside the region. Such a stable and secure Saudi Arabia clearly serves the security interests of the United States, and certainly serves the security interests of Israel, the NATO countries, and Japan.

Last fall, soon after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, the United States Government responded to an urgent Saudi request for assistance by deploying four U.S. Air Force AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia to augment Saudi air defenses. They are still there today, providing the surveillance and early warning capability necessary to defend the oil facilities. This continuing response by the United States has helped in the process of rebuilding Saudi -- and regional -- confidence in the United States as a reliable security partner. However, the Saudi government, like any sovereign state,

recognizes its right and responsibility to provide for its own legitimate defense requirements. It is in this spirit that the request to purchase AWACS and the other air defense items was made by Saudi Arabia. Consummation of the sale of this equipment, which both we and they agree they need urgently for their security requirements, will further reinforce the military-to-military relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. This in turn will strengthen the security of the entire region, and it will permit us to work with the Saudis toward a more peaceful and stable situation in the whole region, specifically including Israel.

On the other hand, there can be little doubt that future U.S.-Saudi relations would be very adversely affected by rejection of this proposed sale. Such a rejection would cause the Saudis to doubt the reliability of U.S. commitment and the ability of American Presidents to conduct foreign policy. Such an impression will also make it far less likely that Saudi Arabia and others will agree to the kinds of security cooperation, joint planning, combined exercises, and advanced preparation for sharing of facilities and support which we feel are needed if the United States is to defend shared security interests in Southwest Asia. Furthermore, rejection of the sale would confirm a too widely held opinion in the mid-East that the United States is solely concerned with the wishes of the Israeli government to the exclusion of all other interests.

This Saudi air defense enhancement package has been designed to meet the significant Saudi defense requirements I have discussed while improving the security of Israeli and all the other states in the region. Israel has increased its margin of military superiority over its Arab adversaries since the 1973 war. With or without the AWACS and F-15 enhancements, the Saudi Air Force realistically poses no significant threat to the security of Israel. This is true even in the context of a general regional conflict. This assessment is supported by the U.S. intelligence community.

These are the technical facts: AWACS is an unarmed flying radar platform which has no intelligence collection capabilities. It cannot detect ground targets such as tanks and it cannot operate effectively with air forces of other countries without extensive joint training and a sophisticated communications network which only the United States could provide. The five AWACS aircraft which would be sold to Saudi Arabia are sufficient to maintain only one continuous 24 hours per day, surveillance orbit.

Israel's air defense system makes all these arguments against the AWACS academic. The Saudis fully recognize that Israel's air defense is extraordinarily capable. Saudi missions into Israeli airspace, either to engage Israeli aircraft or to strike Israeli targets, would be prohibitively costly and would leave Saudi Arabia vulnerable to air attack from every direction.

The simple fact is that this sale will not alter the Arab-Israeli balance of power materially nor jeopardize Israel's security. President Reagan is committed to protecting Israel's security and to preserving Israel's qualitative edge and its ability to defeat any combination of hostile forces in the region. The proposed Saudi sale neither casts doubt on that commitment nor compromises Israeli capabilities.

There is also an additional point which is related to the issue of Israeli security. The Saudis do not face a choice between U.S. AWACS or nothing. The British NIMROD airborne early warning aircraft, currently under advanced development, has capabilities comparable to the AWACS, and which could be enhanced. NIMRODs will be operationally deployed shortly and the Saudis would turn to the British to purchase these aircraft should AWACS be denied.

Therefore, the issue is not whether the Saudis will obtain an enhanced air defense capability; rather it is whether we lose all credibility with the Saudis, their moderate neighbors, and many other countries and the ability to develop a mid-East policy by refusing to sell. We have the choice of benefiting from the closer security cooperation (and the economic benefits, including jobs) which would flow from the sale of the U.S. equipment package to Saudi Arabia, or of yielding the friendship of valuable allies. For the Israelis, the question is whether their long-term security interests are better served by a continuing and strengthened U.S.

role in Saudi Arabia, or by a Saudi Arabia with all the increased military capabilities the AWACS would bring, through the NIMROD purchase, but far less friendly to the U.S. and with continuing, perhaps unneeded hostility of Israel.

Before I conclude, let me address one other point. The AWACS is a very capable system, but selling it to Saudi Arabia does not pose serious risks that sensitive technology will be compromised. The AWACS does not represent the ultimate in U.S. radar and computer technology. The radar is mid-1960s Pulse Doppler textbook technology. A comparable computer is available commercially. While these systems are superior to anything the Soviets currently have in their operational inventory, a new Soviet airborne early warning aircraft has been under development for some time and is expected to have a capability quite similar to our own AWACS. This new Soviet system should be in the operational inventory quite soon, before the AWACS is delivered to Saudi Arabia in late 1985.

In any event, the Saudis have an outstanding record of protecting sensitive U.S. equipment and information, and the Saudis recognize and accept the need for special safeguards in this case. Consequently, they have agreed to extensive, jointly planned and monitored security arrangements that satisfy stringent U.S. requirements for the safeguarding of our equipment.

Let me conclude by saying that we are convinced -- and the President is convinced -- that detailed and dispassionate analysis shows that the proposed air defense enhancement package for Saudi Arabia will make an important contribution to the security of all states in the region -- Israel as well as Saudi Arabia -- and that it will promote our efforts to create a strategic consensus in the Southwest Asia region, and thereby further our national security interests.

The proposed sale successfully balances the imperative of Israeli security with the need to respond to threats to essential natural resources and regional stability. It provides equipment which meets the defensive requirements of a close friend and key state in the region in a way which also protects sensitive technology and makes a tangible contribution to U.S. military capabilities.