

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE SUPPORTS AWACS SALE TO SAUDI ARABIA

WASHINGTON -- Senator Bob Dole (R.-Kan.) released the following statement today on the proposed sale of AWACS aircraft and F-15 enhancements to Saudi Arabia:

"I have reflected until a very later hour on the question of the proposed sale of AWACS aircraft and F-15 enhancements to Saudi Arabia. I have wanted to try to take into account all of the factors that should be weighed in our decision on a matter of this magnitude.

"In making our decision, I believe we need to keep clearly in view the fundamental interests and objectives of this nation as a world power-- a power not only determined to ensure our own security against a wide array of dangers but also responsible, in large measure, for creating the conditions in which other nations who are our friends can aspire to some degree of security for themselves.

"To achieve these ends-- and especially to provide leadership in a world where both military and political threats from the Soviet Union loom larger day by day, it is crucial that we restore, among our friends abroad, real confidence that we can conduct coherent and sustained policies that will fulfill our objectives over the long haul.

"It is also crucial that we restore abroad the certainty that the American system of separation of powers does not mean that the government of the United States is incapable of following through on negotiations and commitments that we have undertaken.

"In the Middle East, our leadership and our commitments must be directed toward increasing the chances of a peace settlement-- toward reinforcing the political stability of the region generally, and toward resisting the expansion of Soviet influence, whether it should come by way of Libya or by way of attempts to exploit the current chaos in Iran or the uncertainties that might enter Egypt's political future.

"These objectives are not so difficult for us to agree upon. But in trying to secure these objectives, our choice of means is a very difficult one. And the real world does not often offer us the choices we might wish we had.

"In the real world, our choice is not between selling AWACS and other equipment to Saudi Arabia or keeping such sophisticated equipment out of a region that we know is to some degree unstable. Our choice is between a United States sale, and the chance to enlarge our political influence in Saudi Arabia and in the region more broadly, or a sale of similar British or French weapons and the certainty that the influence of these countries would replace our own to an important degree.

"In the real world, our choice is not between trying to build a closer relationship with the Saudis or relying on some other country or government on the Arab side that would support our policies in the region more fully and openly. There is no such alternative. Moreover, no Arab nation can subordinate itself completely to the United States and still retain the kind of credibility in the region that we in turn hope our partners will have. The Saudis have given some evidence of moderation and good will, we do have the choice whether to try to encourage that tendency or to reject it.

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"In the real world, finally, our choice is not between this agreement with the Saudis and some other. We may have preferred that negotiations with the Saudis on the sale of AWACS and other equipment had taken a different turn-- in particular that the agreements had provided for United States participation in command and control arrangements that would have given us more explicit assurance that we could restrict the use of the AWACS aircraft.

"But we really cannot turn back the clock. To unravel the negotiations at this stage, imagining that we could achieve a more satisfactory agreement, would profoundly damage the very political relationship with the Saudis that we must try to strengthen. And it would deeply undermine the effort the United States has undertaken, to restore our reliability abroad, however slow and painful the task.

"If the real world confronts us with difficult choices--as it surely does on this issue--I believe that it also offers us a fair measure of the reassurance that we have been tempted to seek in formal agreements and written documents on the conditions for the AWACS sale.

"As a practical matter, we still have four years before these aircraft would be delivered to Saudi Arabia if the sale goes forward with our consent today. Those four years allow us to come to a firmer judgment, if need be, about the durability of the Saudi regime itself and about its support for movement toward a peace settlement in the Middle East. If events should take a turn that clearly warns against transferring the AWACS at that time, we would be able to take steps to prevent the transfer.

"As a practical matter too, it does not appear that the Soviets could gain much advantage by trying to exploit AWACS technology, even if in some unforeseen disaster they should gain access to the aircraft.

"As a practical matter, further, even without our formal participation in the Saudi command and control system for the AWACS, the United States will have control over the capabilities and the use of the aircraft because of our continuing participation in essential maintenance and repair activities for the life of the system.

"I have been especially concerned about the effect that this sale to Saudi Arabia might have on the security of the state of Israel. Yet here too, as a practical matter, the Saudis cannot use these aircraft close enough to Israel's borders to warn of Israeli air activity in a timely fashion--and protected from Israeli countermeasures--without risking loss of the aircraft to Israel's own fighters. And, an even graver risk, the Saudis cannot disregard their commitments to the United States about the use of AWACS--whether these commitments are formal or informal--without suffering much larger damage to their overall relationship with the United States and the West.

"Moreover, to confirm and to strengthen Israel's confidence in our commitment to Israeli security, the United States intends to take a number of concrete steps to strengthen security cooperation with Israel--steps like Joint strategic planning and joint air defense in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as joint military exercises. With this reassurance, I believe we can avoid dangerous consequences for Israel's security should we proceed with the sale of AWACS and other equipment to Saudi Arabia.

"I do support this sale, because I believe that we can protect ourselves adequately against the risks that may accompany it and because I believe that it makes a critical contribution to strengthening the influence and the political leadership of the United States not only in the Middle East but throughout the world."

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