

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

2213 Dirksen Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

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CONTACT: BILL KATS
(202) 224-6521

F-15 EQUIPMENT SALE ENDANGERS ISRAELI SECURITY, DOLE SAYS

WASHINGTON -- The United States should not sell enhanced F-15 aircraft equipment to Saudi Arabia if it increases Israeli insecurity and vulnerability, Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.) said today.

In a colloquy on the F-15 sale on the Senate floor, Dole said he questioned whether enhancing the firepower and range of the 62 F-15s the United States previously sold the Saudis over strong congressional opposition will significantly contribute to either American or Saudi security. Eleven Republicans and seven Democrats made up the colloquy.

"Congress originally agreed to the sale on the specific condition that such offensive upgrade equipment not be included in the transfer," he said. "There are no threats to Saudi Arabia and its crucial oil fields that the United States would not view with extreme alarm, and U.S. intervention then would be a likely possibility. The enhanced capability of the F-15s would be superfluous to any other minor threat to Saudi internal security.

"In only one direction, it seems to me, does the new firepower and range of the F-15s make a noticeable and significant difference, and that is towards our longtime ally, Israel.

"Unless the United States is willing to abandon its long and faithful ally Israel, it appears that selling this equipment does not get us anywhere. It does nothing to make a real increase in Saudi security. It only contributes to Israeli insecurity and vulnerability, and enhances nothing except the instability of the region.

"If the F-15 sale is intended to 'buy' some kind of goodwill or influence in Riyadh, then the United States must provide a counter-capability to Israel so that at least the F-15s do not pose an increased hazard to our allies. Perhaps some kind of sense can be made from supplying both sides in an escalating arms race if we could point to real gains or concessions that will result from the transaction. But ultimately we must ask what are the prospects of any gains to America or the West by making this addition to the Saudi arsenal?"

Dole also spoke to the need to fill the strategic petroleum reserve as quickly as possible.

"Such a reserve would diminish the threat of an OPEC oil embargo. Saudi Arabia has taken the lead in threatening the United States with reduced production of daily oil supplies if Washington attempts to fill the reserve. Without a specific quid pro quo on this sensitive political and economic issue, is there yet any indication that Saudi policy will be any less threatening to U.S. interests if we follow through on our plan on SPRO?"

"I opposed the sale of the F-15s to Saudi Arabia in the first place, and have argued from the beginning they had no need for offensive weapons like these. I have difficulty endorsing a transaction that endangers Israeli security, Mideast peace and stability and apparently only buys a bag full of empty Saudi goodwill. If there is more to it than that, there are plenty of areas open to the Saudis to demonstrate in deeds what their goodwill toward the United States is claimed to mean."