

Sale of the F-35 to the UAE Supports U.S. National Security

THE ISSUE

The Trump Administration initiated the sale of 50 F-35A stealth fighters to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as part of the peace deal it brokered between Israel and the UAE. On November 10, 2020, the State Department notified Congress that it had approved the sale of the \$23.4 billion defense package. The sale sparked limited opposition among congressional critics who cited concerns about Israel's security, doubts about the security of the advanced technologies to be sold, and concerns about triggering a regional arms race. On December 9, a bill intended to thwart that sale was defeated in the Senate, and it will go forward.

The UAE is a longstanding U.S. ally and the F-35 will boost its defense capabilities, enhance the interoperability of UAE and U.S. armed forces, sustain Israel's qualitative military advantage, and help to maintain a favorable balance of power in the oil-rich Arabian Gulf.

THE UAE IS A TRUSTED, LONGSTANDING U.S. ALLY

- In 1994, the U.S. and the UAE signed a defense pact, permitting the U.S. Defense Department to base troops and equipment within its borders. Today, roughly 3,500 American military personnel are stationed or deployed in the UAE.
- Successive U.S. Administrations have trusted the UAE with America's most sophisticated weapons.
- In 2002, the Bush Administration sold the Emiratis the F-16E/F, the most advanced operational F-16 in the world, before either the F-22A or the F-35 fighters were fielded.

- In 2008, the Obama Administration sold the UAE the Patriot air defense missile system, and in 2012, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system, making the UAE the first foreign country to purchase the most advanced Western missile system in the world.

BOOSTING UAE DEFENSE, WHILE ENHANCING U.S. INTEROPERABILITY

- The F-35 stealth fighter is the most advanced multirole fighter in the world. The aircraft provides the U.S. and its allies a significant competitive advantage over peer competitors.
- The jet's suite of integrated sensors can detect air-to-air threats at ranges well beyond the capability of fourth-generation fighters, such as the F-15.
- It can detect, identify, precisely fix, engage, and destroy the world's most advanced and mobile surface-to-air missile systems (SAMs), such as the Russian S-400.
- The F-35's stealth is undetectable to fourth-generation fighter radars, and minimizes enemy SAM engagement ranges, enabling the F-35 Lightning II to destroy them before they can engage.
- The jet's radar and sensors link seamlessly with other allied fighters, particularly so with U.S. F-35s that deploy to the region, making this sale a force multiplier.

SUSTAINING ISRAEL'S QUALITATIVE MILITARY ADVANTAGE

- The need to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge in the region was codified in U.S.

law in 2008, and the sale of F-35s to the UAE will not infringe on Israel's ability to defeat any credible conventional military threat.

- Israel has purchased 50 F-35 aircraft, taken delivery of about half of them, and deployed them in combat operations.
- Israeli F-35Is, like the F-16Is before them, are modified in-country to enhance their electronic combat capabilities—modifications that give these fighters a significant advantage over those that the U.S. will sell to any other nation, including the UAE.
- The U.S. is upgrading Israel's military capability and maintaining its qualitative military edge, prompting Israel's prime minister and defense minister to state in October 2020 that they would not oppose the sale of F-35 to the UAE.

MAINTAINING A FAVORABLE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ARABIAN GULF

- Iran has been the prime driver of regional instability in the Gulf for the past 20 years.

- In October 2020, the U.N. Security Council allowed the arms embargo on Iran to lapse, and the regional bully is now free to import advanced arms from China, Russia, and North Korea.
- Selling F-35s to the UAE will help the Emirates to maintain an airpower advantage over Iran and, should war break out, will provide this important ally with combat power that is not just interoperable with the U.S. Air Force—but will enable Emirati soldiers to fight alongside U.S. Airmen.

BOTTOM LINE

The UAE can be counted on to protect F-35 technology. Selling F-35s to the Emirates will increase UAE security, enhance interoperability and the Allied military position in the Gulf, increase regional stability, and sustain Israel's competitive military advantage. All the while, it will send a clear signal to adversaries that the United States stands staunchly behind, and beside, its allies.