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The Wall Street Journal

U.S.-Saudi Arms Plan Grows to Record Size Addition of Apaches, Black Hawks Swells Deal to \$60 Billion

ADAM ENTOUS

8/14/2010 By

The Obama administration plans to include attack helicopters in an expanded arms package for Saudi Arabia, swelling the size of the proposed deal to as much as \$60 billion over 10 years, according to officials familiar with the matter.

The deal would be the largest overseas U.S. arms sale, the officials said, though the size could change as the package is finalized, one official said.

A proposed U.S. arms sale to Saudi Arabia would include about 70 UH-60 Black Hawk attack helicopters, shown in Iraq in November 2009. The deal would also include up to 60 Longbow Apache attack helicopters.

Negotiated largely in secret because of the sensitivities in the region, the sale is part of a strategy spearheaded by the George W. Bush administration and expanded by President Barack Obama to beef up the militaries of Arab allies as a counterweight to Iran. Saudi Arabia, home to the birthplace of Islam, claims leadership of the Sunni world, making it a rival of Iran, which is predominantly Shia.

The size and scope of the Saudi deal has stoked concerns in Israel that Washington risks undercutting Jerusalem's military edge. Officials said some weapons systems strongly

opposed by the Jewish states won't be included in the package, assuaging some of the Jewish state's concerns.

Israel considers Iran its archenemy but also views Saudi Arabia as a potential future threat to the Jewish state. Israeli and Saudi embassy officials in Washington had no immediate comment on the proposed helicopter sales.

New details about the deal include plans to sell the Saudis about 70 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and up to 60 Longbow Apache attack helicopters together worth about \$30 billion. That comes on top of a previously disclosed \$30 billion tranche that includes 84 Boeing Co. F-15s and upgrades to older fighters in the Saudis fleet.

Boeing makes the Apache. The Black Hawk is manufactured by United Technologies unit Sikorsky.

The package will also include flight simulators, spare parts and long-term support for the planes and helicopters, the officials said.

The Obama administration is expected to formally notify Congress next month about the deal. Lawmakers close to Israel could hold up parts of the sale or seek assurances of their own that Israel's military edge won't be compromised.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the details of the package.

U.S. officials said weapons systems were excluded from the sale if they were deemed not conducive to regional stability, or if they were objectionable to Israel or Congress. A senior U.S. defense official said of the Israeli response to the Saudi package: "There is a heightened anxiousness about their security situation, and it is not just because of Iran."

Officials said the Saudi F-15s wouldn't be equipped with so-called standoff systems, advanced long-range weapons that can be attached to the fighter for use in offensive operations against land- and sea-based targets. Giving standoff systems to the Saudis would have crossed Israel's red line, an official in the region said.

The Apache sale would also exclude certain weapons opposed by Israel, said officials, who declined to provide further details.

The Saudi deal could increase pressure on Israel to quickly commit to buying the F-35, also known as the Joint Strike Fighter, which [Lockheed Martin Corp.](#) could start delivering as early as 2015, around the same time the Saudis would begin to get new F-15s.

A senior U.S. defense official said the Joint Strike Fighter would be "the most stealthy, sophisticated and lethal tactical fighter in the sky," adding: "Quite simply, the F-15 will be no match for the F-35."

Israel has been seeking assurances that it could customize the new fighter with Israeli technology, a request that has received a cool reception in Washington. The F-35 is already the costliest and most technically challenging weapons program the Pentagon has ever attempted.

"We've had enough experience with these things that it's possible to come up with a package that reassures the Saudis but doesn't alarm the Israelis. But if we don't succeed, the Saudis are perfectly capable of taking their business elsewhere," said John Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, which tracks such deals.

Saudi officials, in private, chafe over the leverage Israel has over its weapons purchases from U.S. suppliers, from its purchases of its first AWACs planes in the 1980s to the F-15 fighter jet purchases in the early 1990s.

As a way to counter Israeli pressure or vetoes over such purchases, the Saudis in recent years have sought more European- and Russian-made weaponry. That thinking was partially behind the 2007 deal to purchase dozens of Eurofighter fighter planes from [BAE Systems](#), according to Saudi officials.

Flush with oil cash, Saudi Arabia has become a top weapons buyer. It spent \$36.7 billion worldwide on arms between 2001 and 2008, according to a Congressional Research Service report.

In addition to Saudi Arabia, the Obama administration has moved aggressively to sell sophisticated arms to the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf states, as well as to provide support on a much smaller scale to the Lebanese Army.