

As Yemen assault continues, US announces billion-dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia

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The Pentagon is in the process of finalizing a \$1 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia for the delivery of a cache of weapons, consisting primarily of missiles to arm the fleet of F-15 fighter jets it had previously purchased from the US.

While this latest weapons transfer, first reported by the *New York Times*, is being presented in the media as part of a bid by the administration of President Barack Obama to assuage the Saudi monarchy's concerns over the US-Iran nuclear deal, it also facilitates the continuation and escalation of the bloody assault on Yemen that Saudi Arabia has been carrying out along with its allies since March.

The deal serves as a green light from the Obama administration for an escalation of the brutal military offensive against the Houthi militias that took control over much of Yemen's western provinces earlier this year.

According to UN estimates, more than 4,300 people have been killed since the anti-Houthi offensive began in March, with more than half of these being civilians, including many women and children. Nearly 1.5 million people have been internally displaced by the fighting, with tens of thousands more fleeing the country.

With American military intelligence and logistical support, Saudi Arabia and its allies have used US-supplied F-15s to drop US-supplied bombs on residential neighborhoods, markets, schools, factories and ports. The Saudi-led forces have repeatedly dropped internationally outlawed cluster bombs, munitions also supplied by the US government.

After months of punishing airstrikes against targets throughout Yemen, thousands of troops from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other Gulf state monarchies have entered the country and are

preparing for a ground offensive to retake the capital of Sanaa.

Fifty soldiers from the UAE and Bahrain were killed on Friday in the northern province of Marib after a rocket reportedly fired by Houthi forces struck a weapons depot, setting off a massive explosion.

The US weapons transfer, which awaits almost certain approval by Congress, was announced as Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud made his first state visit to the United States since ascending to the throne in January.

For the three-day visit to Washington, DC, the Saudi monarch rented out all 222 rooms at the Four Seasons Hotel in the posh Georgetown neighborhood to accommodate his highness and an entourage of several hundred.

The Four Seasons staff laid out a red carpet in the parking garage and hotel hallways to keep the royal feet of the king and his courtiers from touching the ground. And to further ensure ultimate comfort the hotel's furniture was replaced with gilded equivalents.

"Everything is gold," a regular hotel patron told Politico. "Gold mirrors, gold end tables, gold lamps, even gold hat racks."

King Salman and President Obama's agenda reportedly included discussions on the Iran nuclear deal, the war in Yemen, the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and energy policy. They also discussed escalating US military training programs for the Saudi armed forces.

On Friday, in a joint press briefing with King Salman held in the White House's Oval Office, President Obama extended a warm welcome to his "personal friend" whose executioners have beheaded at least 130 people so far this year.

Obama also expressed his "concern" over the

situation in Yemen, facetiously calling for the restoration of “a functioning government that is inclusive and that can relieve the humanitarian situation there.”

The President also used the public briefing to press for a “political transfer process” in Syria, where the United States and Saudi Arabia have worked together to stoke a four-year civil war aimed at ousting President Bashar al-Assad. Saudi Arabia has been one of the key supporters of Islamic fundamentalist jihadist groups fighting in Syria, including the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, as well as ISIS.

The conflict, fueled by the weapons and fighters funneled into Syria by the Obama administration and its Saudi partners, has killed more than 220,000 Syrians and displaced millions, contributing to the flood of refugees now attempting the perilous trek through Europe.

The deal reported by the *Times* on Friday is only one of a number of pending arms sales to Saudi Arabia being negotiated by the Pentagon. In 2010 the Obama administration announced a \$60 billion, 20-year agreement, the largest-ever US arms deal, which will provide Saudi Arabia with, among other things, 84 new F-15 fighter jets and 70 new Apache attack helicopters.

The Saudi government is currently in discussions with the Pentagon to purchase two frigates being built by Lockheed Martin for more than \$1 billion. The US-supplied warships will serve as the cornerstone of the Royal Saudi navy’s upgrade of its eastern fleet. A deal worth \$1.9 billion for 10 MH-60R Seahawk helicopters to shore up the Saudi navy’s antisubmarine capabilities is also expected to be signed before the end of the year.

The Pentagon approved a number of weapons sales to Saudi Arabia at the end of July, including a \$5.4 billion deal for 600 Patriot Missiles and a \$500 million deal for more than a million rounds of ammunition as well as land mines and hand grenades for the Saudi Arabian Army.

Supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia has undertaken a massive effort to upgrade and expand its military forces over the last ten years with military expenditures increasing 112 percent between 2005 and 2014. In 2014, the Saudi monarchy committed approximately \$80.8 billion, a whopping 10.4 percent of the country’s GDP, to military expenditures.



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