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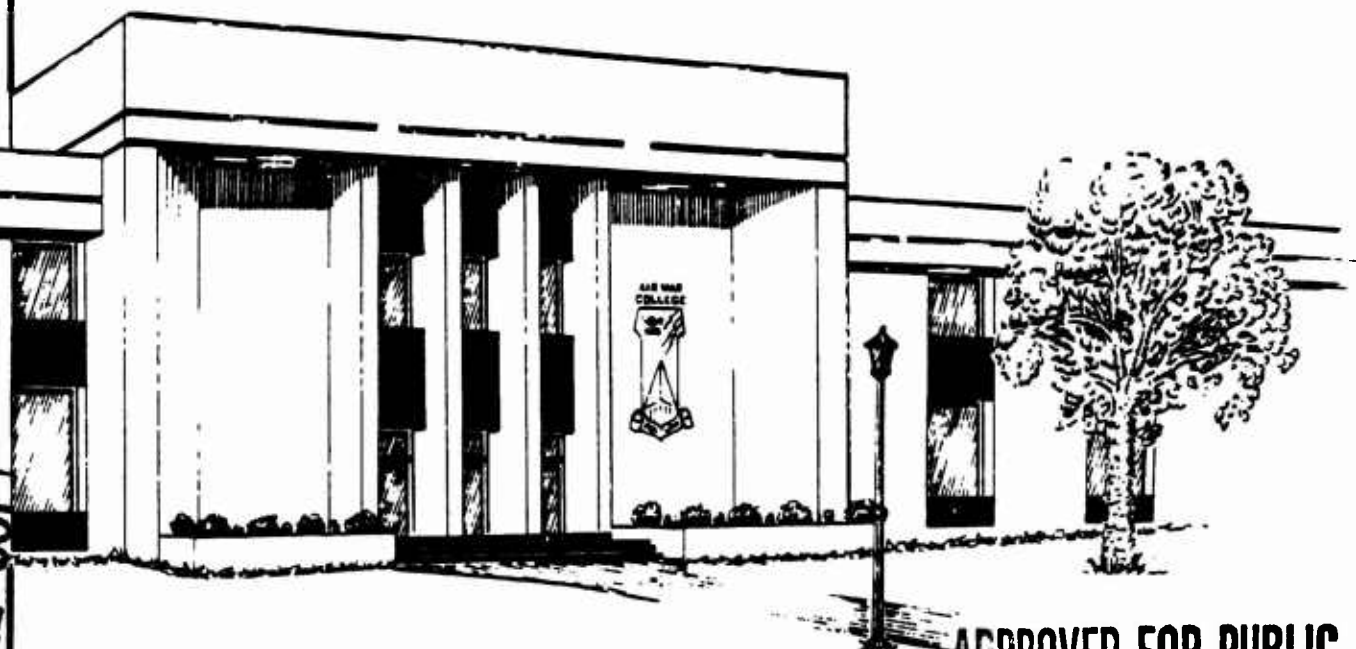
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SAUDI AWACS: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN CONFLICT

By LT COL WILLIAM F. DEEGAN, JR.

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by

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Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Colonel Raymond A. Hamilton, II

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AIR WAR COLLEGE REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: Saudi AWACS: American Foreign Policy in Conflict

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An analysis of the 1981 foreign military sale of AWACS and F-15 enhancement items to Saudi Arabia as an instrument of American foreign policy. Subject areas include a review of the political background and events leading up to the sale, a brief discussion of the major actors involved, and a more in-depth look at the congressional debate of the issue and resulting vote. Concluding remarks assess the congressional treatment of more recent and similar Middle East arms transfer proposals as well as the value of "arms sale diplomacy" as a realistic method of projecting U.S. influence into the Persian Gulf region.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel William F. Deegan Jr. (M.P.A., Auburn University) was assigned to the Deputy for Airborne Warning and Control System, Electronic Systems Division at Hanscom AFB, Massachusetts, from 1981 to 1984. A member of the Peace Sentinel (Saudi AWACS) Program Office initial cadre, he was Project Manager for the acquisition of cryptographic communication equipment to replace US COMSEC specifically excluded from the aircraft sold to Saudi Arabia. Later elevated to handle program management responsibilities for the eight KE-3 tanker aircraft built for Saudi Arabia as derivatives of the E-3, he also managed the mid-program decision to refit the Saudi AWACS and tanker aircraft with CFM-56 engines. He is a Command Pilot with extensive experience in KC-135 aircraft, including a tour as Commander of the 380th Air Refueling Squadron at Plattsburgh Air Force Base, New York. Colonel Deegan is a resident graduate of Squadron Officer School and Air Command and Staff College, a member of the National Political Science Honor Society, and a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1986.

SAUDI AWACS: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN CONFLICT

Early in 1981 and the infancy of his administration, Ronald Reagan proposed that the United States support an \$8.5 billion military arms sale agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This, the President's first major incursion into the Middle East foreign policy arena, represented the culmination of growing US interest in this particular country, which had begun in earnest some eight years earlier during the Nixon administration. The initiative stirred an immediate adverse reaction from Israel as well as opponents within our own government. The result was a protracted debate of the issue with extensive political maneuvering by the President to bring about required congressional approval of the sale through an extremely close vote in the Senate.

The purpose of the sale was to protect vital US national security interests in the Middle East, defined as the unrestrained flow of oil in the Persian Gulf region. The foundation of the plan would be the development of a state-of-the-art air defense system in Saudi Arabia, featuring a sophisticated ground radar and data collection network, significantly enhanced with airborne radar surveillance provided by the US-built E-3, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), aircraft. Also included in the package were six (with an option for two more) KC-707 aerial refueling tanker aircraft and enhancement equipment for the Saudi inventory of 60 F-15 fighter aircraft -- specifically, range extending conformal fuel tanks and AIM-9L all-aspect Sidewinder

air-to-air missiles. While opponents of the sale would agree with the vital nature of our interest in the area, their concerns stemmed from, among other things, the possibility that the Saudis would take advantage of the offensive capabilities inherent in these enhancements and turn them against Israel.

The first Saudi AWACS will be "rolled out" at The Boeing Company facility in Seattle and delivered to the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) in Riyadh later this year. While one might suggest that this event marks the end of yet another chapter in American diplomacy, it would seem more appropriate to review the issue as it occurred within the larger context of an evolving foreign policy process. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to place the sale of AWACS into the overall perspective of the events which brought Ronald Reagan to the decision he made and the results of his efforts. Only by analyzing the political background, the specific events leading up to the sale, the major actors involved and recent related events, can conclusions be drawn regarding the President's original decision and this country's ability to implement a long-term foreign policy program.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The sale of AWACS was a symptom of the dynamic shifts which are still taking place in the international power structure. For many years after the conclusion of World War II, the United States was in a position to more or less unilaterally determine the course of its foreign policy. Viewing the world as bi-polar, we tended to evaluate

the needs of third world nations pretty much in terms of their stated political alignment (i.e. East vs. West). Then, security assistance programs normally were gifts of dated weapon systems from our own inventories to third world nations which were developing into a much stronger force in the international arena than most could envision. The events in Vietnam would leave the rest of the world with serious questions regarding the ability of the United States to effectively project its national power. If that was not enough, the Oil Embargo of 1973 convinced everyone that the strength of the economic instrument, especially in the Middle East, was shifting foreign policy into a decidedly multi-polar arrangement.

Starting with the Nixon Administration, the Executive Branch faced a world comprised of smaller nations which were no longer very comfortable with total reliance upon the nuclear and conventional might of the United States for their own national security. In the Middle East, where oil-rich nations could now afford the best and most technologically advanced weapon systems available, the gift of a small fleet of phased-out US fighter planes was no longer viewed as a sufficient alternative for their needs. Accordingly, military grant programs would decline from a level of some \$2.2 billion in 1970 to just \$265,000 in 1976, while US arms sales, which included advanced systems such as the F-14s sold to the Shah of Iran, increased from something less than \$2 billion to almost \$15 billion over this same time frame (4:47). The Congress was already very wary of unilateral commitments made by the Executive Branch. President Nixon, on a visit to Iran, had

"promised the Shah any armaments short of nuclear", and the ubiquitous Henry Kissinger, as Secretary of State, had "indicated to the Israelis a willingness to sell the Pershing surface-to-surface missile, which could carry a nuclear war head...." (4:46-48)

Jimmy Carter took office in 1977 determined to erase the memories of Watergate and promising a fresh look at this country's foreign policy program. During the campaign, he spoke of the "almost unrestrained American arms sales in the past years as being a policy as cynical as it is dangerous." In Presidential Directive 13, unveiled in May of that year, he stated that arms transfers were to be viewed as an "exceptional foreign policy implement, to be used only in instances where it can be clearly demonstrated that the transfer contributes to our national security interests." (4:52) Among his guidelines were provisions which prohibited export-only US made weapon systems and promised that the US would not introduce advanced weaponry into a region which would create a significantly higher combat capability. Finally, these provisions made it clear that no sales would take place without government approval and that any agent of the government would require Department of State sanction prior to promoting any sale of US made weapons.(4:53) Major allies were excluded from these restrictions and specific reference was made to our continuing commitment to the security of Israel.

In practice, Carter did reject the sale of F-18L and F-4G Wild Weasels to Iran, A-7s to Pakistan, and F-4s to Taiwan. He also denied Israel and Sweden in their efforts to sell fighters to third countries

because they were built with major US components (e.g. General Electric Engines in the Israeli's Kfir fighter). On the other side of the ledger, however, approved sales included 50 F-5s to Egypt, 15 F-15s and 75 F-16s to Israel, A-10s to South Korea, as well as the provocative commitments of the AWACS to Iran and 60 F-15s to Saudi Arabia (4:55-56), a nation which had yet to acknowledge the existence of Israel. By the time Carter lost the election in November of 1980, it is fairly certain that he was ready to commit to the sale of AWACS, the F-15 enhancement package, and aerial refueling aircraft to Saudi Arabia.

Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 and forwarded the philosophy that we would "deal with the world as it is rather than as we would like it to be." (4:63) In a four page statement issued on July 9, 1981, the White House announced that arms sales would "complement American security commitments and serve important US objectives" by strengthening the military capabilities of our friends. (4:63) The President stressed flexibility in evaluating such sales on their "net contribution to enhanced deterrence and defense" in balancing out the recent increase in Soviet proliferation of advanced weaponry. (4:63)

Spanning this evolution of alliances based on foreign military sales, the Congress of this country was going through an upheaval of its own. Although the area of foreign policy was primarily a responsibility of the Executive Branch, the events of Watergate had created grave concern over the extent of Presidential power. As a result, several pieces of legislation were passed to create further Congressional checks on the Executive Branch and greatly expand congressional oversight in

many areas. One such bill was the International Security Assistance and Arms Control Act of 1976, the thrust of which was to "shift the focus of US arms sales policy from that of selling arms to controlling arms sales and exports,"(4:50) It required the President to formally notify Congress of his intent to implement any foreign military sale which would exceed \$25 million (he would also informally notify them 20 days prior to formal notification). The Congress would then have 30 days to pass, by simple majority, resolutions in both houses which disapproved the sale. If only one house passed the resolution or no action was taken, the sale would automatically be approved at the end of the thirty day period.

HISTORY OF THE AWACS SALE

From 1950 until 1973, the United States provided Saudi Arabia with a total of about \$230 million in military assistance. Since then, and more than coincidental with the Oil Embargo of 1973 and the Iranian Revolution, US interest in this country has increased significantly. By 1980, the Saudis had become the sixth leading nation in the world in military expenditures (first in expenditures per person), purchasing some \$34 billion in military related items from the United States alone since 1973. (4:179) In 1974, the Saudis requested that the US conduct a study of their air power capability as a foundation for a five to ten year plan to upgrade their Air Force. This study, which eventually surveyed Saudi land and naval forces as well, identified a near-term air defense requirement for up-to-date fighter aircraft. While the

Department of Defense publicly stated that it was recommending additional F-5 aircraft to meet this requirement, the Saudis were permitted to test fly state-of-the-art F-14 and F-15 aircraft. Not surprisingly, even after purchasing 100 F-5E aircraft, the Saudis requested that they be allowed to purchase F-15's, a proposal which was supported and implemented by President Carter in 1978. A close vote occurred in the Senate to support this sale under the first real test of the International Security and Arms Control Act, an event which would have great significance in the later debate over AWACS.

In April of 1979, responding to Saudi concern over the North-South Yemen conflict, the U.S. deployed two AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia. This opportunity for a close look at the capabilities of this advanced technology aircraft made a deep impression on the Saudis. In September of that same year, they requested the F-15 enhancement items as well as a feasibility study to analyze the worth of a Saudi-owned airborne surveillance system. While Dr. Brzezinski indicated that the US had a problem with making AWACS available to the Saudis, he did agree to a feasibility study "without prejudice" to the ultimate U.S. position on such a sale. Saudi officials began telling American reporters that they had received a commitment that the U.S. would sell the AWACS. (13:4)

In June of 1980, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown told Prince Sultan that we could make no commitments on the F-15 equipment, pointing out that Congress would have to be consulted. On the subject of AWACS, Secretary Brown stated that the U.S. would be willing to deploy the

aircraft to Saudi Arabia for joint training and also indicated that any further discussion of an AWACS sale would be dependent upon the results of the feasibility study. Soon thereafter, in October of 1980, four AWACS aircraft were again deployed to Riyadh, this time in response to the Iran-Iraq war. This only intensified the Saudi appetite to acquire an AWACS fleet of their own, and, as they awaited the results of the feasibility study, made further requests for the aircraft during a visit by General David C. Jones, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The results of this study, completed in December of 1980, were not surprising. Obviously, one of the highest priorities of any Saudi defense plan would be the security of the oil fields, the majority of which are located just a few minutes by air from the Persian Gulf. With the threat defined as Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf region and, therefore, an attack coming from that direction, it was clear that radar coverage would have to provide the earliest possible warning to provide an effective Saudi response in the already precious few minutes available. The study offered three alternatives, one based upon a network of 48 ground radar stations, and the remaining two featuring either 34 or 18 ground stations, respectively supplemented by 15 E-2C or 5 AWACS aircraft. With the ground system offering low-level surveillance of just 20-30 miles beyond Saudi borders and the AWACS boasting a radius some ten times greater, there was little doubt in anyone's mind how the Saudis would respond to the study.

President Jimmy Carter's last public statement on the issue of the AWACS/F-15 enhancements sale was that "we will not agree to provide

offensive capabilities for the planes that might be used against Israel and that obviously includes bomb racks" (13:4-5), referring to the MER 200 (multiple ejection racks) which had also appeared on somebody's wish list. Although the Carter Administration tentatively decided to proceed with the sale of the fuel tanks and AIM 9L missiles and were leaning favorably in the direction of AWACS, they decided to table the issue when Ronald Reagan won the election. The Reagan transition team elected to review the issue and make a final determination after Mr. Reagan took office. As early as February, 1981, they briefed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of their intention to sell the fuel tanks, missiles, an airborne surveillance capability and aerial tankers. The Saudis were given the results of the feasibility study on Mar 6 and the White House announced that the proposed package specifically included AWACS on April 21.

THE MAJOR ACTORS

Reaction to the announcement was immediate and, for the most part, negative. Israeli Prime Minister, Menachim Begin, formally protested the sale and several members of the Congress voiced concern over the sale, with opposition leaders in both houses predicting certain defeat if the President put it to a vote. It was very clear that the Reagan administration had a fight on its hands, but, prior to analyzing the debate, it is appropriate to first discuss the positions of the primary players and the major issues involved.

The Administration

President Jimmy Carter had declared the Security of the Persian Gulf region to be an interest vital to the national security of the United States. President Reagan had expressed agreement with this philosophy, echoing the concern for ensuring the unrestrained flow of oil from the region as the lifeline for many of our major allies. For many years, we had enjoyed the comfort of our friendship with the Shah of Iran, who represented a credible buffer against Soviet interest in the region. Not only was he a loyal and well-armed ally, but Iran was strategically located between the Soviet Union and the shores of the Persian Gulf. The fall of the Shah and subsequent Khomeini take-over drastically altered our ability to project US influence into the region and accelerated our diplomatic efforts to cultivate solid relations with other allies in the region. The "Nixon Doctrine", had forwarded Iran and Saudi Arabia as "Twin Pillar" guardians of the Persian Gulf region (10:70), so we quickly focused our attention on the remaining partner.

President Reagan stated that the sale would "ease Saudi apprehension about American willingness to bolster regional defenses and ... provide advanced equipment in case American forces have to be sent into the region to fight a war." (25:A11) Going even further, he stated that the sale "is essential to protect our interests in the region," based on "a serious deterioration over the last year or so of security conditions in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region and the growing threats there to our friends from the Soviets and other regions."

(25:A11) The threat was fundamentally defined as the Soviet Union, while the Iran-Iraq War was viewed more in terms of its potential for Soviet-sponsored attempts to spread this instability to neighboring countries. President Carter had already ordered US AWACS into Riyadh to protect our interest in the region and discourage air attacks on the Saudi oil fields. The Reagan Administration hoped that this growing military interdependence and show of US resolve would move the Saudis to expand the relationship to include US basing rights in Saudi Arabia.

Alexander Haig, as Secretary of State, also stressed the threat of Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf as the driving force behind the sale, stating in Congressional testimony that "the nations of the Middle East could be prevailed upon to subordinate their local problems to a larger Soviet danger to form a 'strategic consensus.'" (29:A4) He was also quite vocal in his assertion that the Carter Administration had informally made enough of a commitment to sell these items to the Saudis that a renege by the Reagan administration would result in a very serious setback to US-Saudi relations.

The Congress

They were bound by the International Security and Arms Control Act to either disapprove or sanction the sale as they had in 1978 when President Carter had proposed the sale of the 60 F-15s to Saudi Arabia, an initiative which had generated extensive hearings and debate within the Congress. Then, as now, a major concern was the security of Israel in the event that the Saudis employed these aircraft in an offensive

rather than defensive role. The Senate voted 52-44 to support the sale after receiving the following assurances from our own Department of Defense regarding the offensive capabilities of the aircraft. (13:3)

a. A letter from Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, to Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator John Sparkman, stated that: "The F-15 we plan to sell to Saudi Arabia will have the same configuration as the interceptor model approved for the United States Air Force" (i.e. defensive). Also, "the plane requested by Saudi Arabia will not be equipped with the special features that could give it additional range. Specifically...conformal fuel tanks...and the Saudi Arabian KC-130 tankers do not have equipment for air refueling of the F-15." Furthermore, that "Saudi Arabia has not requested that the plane be outfitted with multiple ejection racks (MER 200) which would allow the plane to carry a substantial bomb load. The United States will not furnish such MERs." And, finally, "Saudi Arabia has not requested nor do we intend to sell any other systems or armaments that could increase the range or enhance the ground attack capability of the F-15."

b. In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Secretary Brown was asked whether or not the United States would provide the Saudis with an aerial refueling capability. In response, he said that "the F-15 does have a receptacle, but the Saudis don't have an aerial refueling capability with a probe, so they will not be able to refuel the F-15."

c. A letter from Assistant Secretary of Defense Bennet to Congressman Lee Hamilton, which stated that: "the Saudi Air Force is

not scheduled to get the AIM-9L all-aspect Sidewinder missile, which will be carried on the United States Air Force F-15s", and that "an F-15 will not lead to the sale of an E-2C or E-3A (AWACS). The F-15 has an excellent radar. Were the Saudis to purchase an aircraft with less effective radar than the F-15, they would be more than likely to seek an airborne radar system."

Now the Congress was being asked to vote again on a new sale which would provide the Saudis with all of those same range-extending, offense related items as well as the AIM-9L missiles and the AWACS, which were specifically excluded from the earlier sale. Understandably, several feathers were ruffled over this turn of events. Furthermore, pro-Israeli lobbying power was immediately brought to bear in an attempt to move the Congress to vote against the sale. (6:329) The issue seemed to become polarized with the perception that a vote for the sale was the same as a vote against Israel -- something that does not normally occur in this country.

Israel

In 1968, they had fought the Arab states and achieved a decisive victory in just six days. In 1973, after a surprise attack on Yom Kippur, they fought the Arabs again in a war that they came very close to losing. (7:28) No one was more aware than they that their continued existence would depend upon their ability to maintain a qualitative edge both in weaponry and operational skill to defeat their more numerous Arab neighbors. Like our own Congress, they were very upset with the

1978 F-15 sale. Again, this latest initiative had negated all of the assurances and added the further enhancement of AWACS, a system which would make them naked to the Arab world (51:A1).

Israel was already being forced to allocate a large portion of their budget for defense. In testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations (6:329), Mr. Thomas Dine, Executive Director of the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), spoke to the detrimental effect that a US-supported arms race in the Middle East would have on an already struggling Israeli economy. Citing an inflation rate of 134%, a balance of payments deficit of \$2.4 billion as well as a \$3.2 billion expenditure for debt servicing in 1979, he suggested that Israel would not be able to maintain its qualitative edge because more debt was out of the question. He echoed Menachim Begin's sentiments in his initial protest of the sale, in which he had asked for military aid (i.e. gifts), including F-15 aircraft and direct access to US spy satellite information, to offset the Saudi enhancements. He argued that further "military credits", which the administration had suggested as compensation, would serve only to increase an already seriously inflated Israeli debt. (28:A1)

Saudi Arabia

While the US had been an ally since the 1930's, it was the Shah of Iran who had received the bulk of US interest in recent years -- most significantly in the form of sophisticated arms transfers, including the proposed sale of AWACS. The revolt in Iran had heightened US interest

In the remaining "Persian Gulf Pillar", but the Shah's fall from power had also made a lasting impression upon the Saudis as well. First, there seemed to be a real and present danger in courting "the West" too closely, creating the perception that Islamic traditions were being subjugated to diplomatic endeavors and modernization. Furthermore, the US had either been unwilling or unable to save the Shah, a factor which certainly had to be considered prior to entering into any alliances which would involve significant dependence upon the United States for security options.

To their credit, the Saudis moved cautiously, approaching the sale almost in a "put your weapons where your mouth is" fashion. Making no promises of anything specific in return, they were very forthright in their position that they perceived "the military relationship with the United States to be the principal test of US reliability and political commitment to the Kingdom" (10:70), or, as quoted in several newspaper articles and congressional testimony, a "litmus test" of US resolve. On the subject of US basing rights in the kingdom as evidence of some form of quid-pro-quo, they declined on such specifics, indicating a willingness to allow US access in a crisis but opposed to a permanent presence of US forces. In the report on his 1981 visit to Saudi Arabia, Senator Howard Baker offered the following assessment of the Saudi position: (16:12)

If the United States cannot or will not deliver on this sale, which the Saudis regard as a firm commitment, the Saudis will question the larger security commitment. 'Business will go on,' said one official, 'but it would change the nature of the relationship; it is

a question of your commitment. We would prefer...a growing relationship, in which we do not have to fight every single issue.'

In discussing the question of Israel, they offered their own perspective of the problem in this additional quote from Senator Baker's report:

'The United States,' it was said, 'should have a position, it might be different from the Israeli and Arab position, but at least it would be a position.' 'As it is,' one said 'the Arab world believes your position to be the position of Israel and the arena is left wide open to the Soviet Union.' (16:11)

Accordingly, the Saudis were very interested in testing the Israeli veto over US regional policy. In response to Alexander Haig's theory that the Arab States could "subordinate regional problems to the greater Soviet threat," Saudi Oil Minister, Shiek Yamani, suggested that Saudi Arabia faced two threats, "international communism and Israel...The first threat bolsters ties with the United States, but the second was a threat to that friendship." In explanation, he stated that "'Russia stands to gain from the present situation'... because 'when the United States, due to internal political pressures, refrains from performing its duty in bringing peace to the area, it serves the interests of the Russians...'" (41:A1) Obviously referring to the Soviet penchant for exacerbating regional unrest (i.e. that caused by Israel) to serve their own expansionist goals, he reminds the United States of how the regional dispute fits into the larger "bi-polar" issue.

THE DEBATE

Given this background and rather disparate group of actors, the legislative branch found itself faced with the difficult task of fighting what would become a very public debate over President Reagan's decision to sell the AWACS/F-15 Enhancement package to Saudi Arabia. Media coverage was extensive, AIPAC was working overtime, and the new President had already flexed his muscles in winning congressional support for his domestic economic policies. In searching through the many pages of testimony given before both House and Senate sub-committees, the seven major issues discussed below emerged as key points of discussion.

1. The unrestricted flow of oil in the Persian Gulf is an interest vital to the national security of the United States. There was little disagreement with the interest itself, but there was great discussion over the actual threat to that interest. The Administration voiced concern over the growing Soviet influence in the region, especially in view of the Afghanistan invasion and continuing arms transfers to Libya, Syria, South Yemen and Iraq. Of more immediate concern was the Iran-Iraq war and the fear that one of the combatants might attempt preemptive strikes against the Saudi oil fields. The President had specifically mentioned these recent hostilities as his rationale for picking up on a sale which was a product of the previous Administration. Opponents argued that the Saudis could only counter a Soviet invasion with significant US assistance, and that any problem with Saudi

neighbors could easily be handled by our own AWACS working in concert with the RSAF F-15s. The conflict of interest with Israel could, therefore, be avoided by disapproving the sale and pursuing a larger presence of our own in the Kingdom as a more realistic form of Soviet deterrence.

2. Saudi Arabia is a strong ally and moderate voice among Arab States. Opponents took issue here, asking what, if anything, we had received in return from the Saudis in recent years. Had they supported the peace process with Israel or were oil prices lower as a result of the F-15 sale? What could we expect in the future? Hadn't the Saudis already indicated that we should not expect basing rights? None of these questions could be answered to the satisfaction of the critics, but, on the other hand, the President had already stated that we would deal with "the world as it is rather than as we would like it to be". Did this mean that the key to attaining our objectives in the region was to first pass this "litmus test" being demanded by the Saudis?

3. Saudi Arabia is a stable nation-state. Ironically, testimony offered very little in regard to the reality of our loss in regional security when the Shah fell from power. But, when considering Saudi Arabia as heir apparent to the surrogate policeman role, great concern was raised over the probability that the Royal Family might encounter a similar demise in the wake of Islamic fundamentalism. Often mentioned was the terrorist attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca as evidence that these weapons would one day fall into the hands of another Khomeini.

4. The threat to US technology. This issue is possibly a subset of Saudi stability, but its treatment deserves further discussion. The AWACS had been employed a few years earlier, heralded as a triumph for American technology and a breakthrough in modern-day battlefield management. Critics argued that it was unwise to risk such a valuable asset in the hands of a somewhat questionable ally. Supporters of the sale noted that many of the more critical systems would not be included in the Saudi aircraft, and, in reality, the AWACS radar was 1960's technology. As the argument went on, it almost began to sound as if the Saudis were being sold something comparable to an F-86. Possibly unrelated, but a reality, is the fact that the US has ordered none of the additional 12 AWACS which had been proposed as a follow-on US buy.

5. The security of Israel. Congressmen faced a definite conflict of interest here. Even though the Administration claimed that the equipment would be used solely for Saudi defense, they were being constantly reminded by lobbyist that Israel's continued existence would depend upon maintaining a qualitative technological edge. The Administration candidly admitted that the Saudis could find offensive advantage in these weapons, but felt that it was not enough to overcome the Israeli advantage and that they "probably" would not use it. This same advanced system which would protect world oil resources on the shores of the Persian Gulf, could, it was suggested, be easily jammed or shot down if employed in a Pan-Arab attack against Israel.

6. The Saudis will buy advanced equipment from other nations. The British had already been engaged in conversations with the Saudis

regarding the possibility of purchasing their Nimrod aircraft, which allegedly offered capabilities comparable to AWACS and even more modern technology. Supporters argued this point to their advantage from two directions. First, as the seller, the US Government could exercise greater control over the conditions of the sale, including limits on further offensive components and agreements upon the manner in which the weapons would be used. Secondly, they felt that Israel would be less likely to take preemptive action against the delivered weapons if it involved the destruction of equipment sold by the United States.

7. The credibility of the Executive Branch. Supporters pointed out that the "new" President had inherited a foreign policy initiative which the previous Administration had led the Saudis to believe would become a reality. After reviewing the proposal, as well as the deteriorating situation in the region, President Reagan had agreed and decided to proceed with the plan as an instrument of his own foreign policy. To renege at this late date, they argued, would undermine his credibility as this country's Chief of State and seriously inhibit his effectiveness in future diplomatic endeavors in the Middle East as well as other regions of the world.

THE VOTE

President Reagan delayed formal notification to the Congress until 1 October, which meant that they had until the 30th to either approve or disapprove the sale. By the 7th, the House Foreign Relations Committee had voted to recommend that the full House vote for the

resolution to disapprove the sale. On the 15th the House, as expected, voted quite overwhelmingly, 301-111, to defeat the arms transfer. The next day, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee also voted by narrow margin, 9-8, to disapprove the sale. Due to particular membership of that committee, this had also been expected, but the Administration was surprised that the vote was so close.

The real drama was in the Senate and the Administration was banking on this body voting for the sale, in which case, the initiative would be approved under the rules of the Security assistance and Arms Control Act. Three retired Presidents, several former Secretaries of Defense and State, National Security Advisors and JCS chairmen voiced public support for the sale (21:13), and the President spoke personally with several Senators who were either uncommitted or felt to be soft in their stance. By 27 October, the day before the sale, the Administration could count only 48 votes, far more than they had just a few weeks earlier but still short of a majority.

On the day of the vote, the President sent a letter to Senator Baker outlining specific arrangements which the Saudis would have to agree to prior to consummating the Letter of Offer and Acceptance. The six major areas are briefly discussed below. (22:A7)

1. Security of technology would receive high level attention, and be supported by a written plan, featuring no less stringent measures than those employed by the US for protection and control of classified material. Also, the US would have the right of continual on-site

inspection and the highly sensitive computer software would remain the property of the US Government.

2. Saudi Arabia would share continuously and completely all information it acquires through the use of AWACS.

3. Third country nationals would be denied access to AWACS equipment, technology and documentation.

4. Saudi AWACS would be operated only within the boundaries of Saudi Arabia unless otherwise authorized by the United States.

5. The command and control structure devised for AWACS operations would guarantee compliance with the first four agreements.

6. Finally, an assurance that the sale would contribute "directly to the stability and security of the region," enhance "the atmosphere and prospects for progress towards peace," and "the peaceful resolution of disputes in the region...with the substantial assistance of Saudi Arabia."

The President's personal participation was not without effect. The Administration prevailed with a 52-48 vote to support the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia.

WAR OR BATTLE WON?

The media proclaimed the vote as an upset, another impressive victory for the Administration, and further evidence of Ronald Reagan's ability to command the forces of the government. Given the benefit of reviewing subsequent and related events, however, this particular triumph begins to resemble a "Bull Run" more than it does an "Appomattox

Court House". In 1984, the Administration proposed the sale of Stinger surface-to-air missiles to both Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Congressional opposition to the sale grew so swiftly that the President, in order to avoid certain defeat, actually withdrew the initiative after giving formal notification to the Congress. The Jordanians took their business elsewhere, purchasing 1,000 SA-14 missiles from the Soviet Union. In the Fall of 1985, the Saudis, noting the level of opposition in the Congress, purchased British Tornado fighter planes rather than endure "another bitter conflict" over their request for additional F-15s (32:A1). Most recently, in October of 1985, the Administration accepted a compromise on the sale of F-16s or F-20s and other military equipment to Jordan. Just three days after formally notifying the Congress of his intent to proceed with the sale, Ronald Reagan had to agree to table the issue until March of 1986 in the face of three to one opposition within a Senate body controlled by his own Republican party.

How does one explain this dramatic shift in momentum which took place after the Administration's equally dramatic "victory" in the "battle" for AWACS? Five possible explanations are discussed below.

1. Opponents to the sale of AWACS were very sure they would win. This package negated all of the assurances given in the hotly contested 1978 sale of F-15s. Furthermore, a solid majority of Senators were publicly opposed to the sale throughout the debate, and the House vote was decidedly lopsided. All of the ingredients for over-confidence were there, and, by the time the President started his last-minute assault, it was too late to recover. In view of the lobbying effort and the

ability of the opposition to mobilize support in fighting the later sales, it seems reasonable to assume that they could have done better.

2. The cost of the debate was quite high. The battle generated extensive media coverage. The President put his credibility on the line and expended great personal effort in securing just enough support. Saudi Arabia's loyalty and motivation were seriously questioned, and Israel's reaction raised concern among Senators regarding a "resurgence of anti-semitism" and "the perception that there's been undue pressure from the the American Jewish community." (57:A7) At one point in the debate, the President had proclaimed "in an unmistakable warning to Israel, 'It is not the business of other nations to make American foreign policy.'" (60:706) In spite of all this, it seems likely that many congressmen were sensitive to the position of Israel, whose supporters in this country are both influential and many.

3. Supporters voted with the President rather than for the sale. Interviews with Senators who voted for approval indicated that they believed "the policy of selling arms to the Saudis was flawed and had been poorly presented and guided through Congress", but that they had also been reluctant to undermine the credibility of the new President.(44:A1) While they praised the President and his ability to generate political support, it seems evident that, as a body, the Congress had not been able to accept the validity of arms sales as an acceptable instrument of foreign policy, especially in the Middle East.

4. Increased influence of pro-Israel lobbies. AIPAC now boasts a membership of 51,000, an annual budget of \$5 million, and a staff of 80.

Its Executive Director, Thomas Dine, enjoys extensive political influence and has been candid in stating that "we are single minded about a single issue," (i.e. American support for Israel) (48:A8). On the subject of the AWACS surprise loss, he admits that they (AIPAC) made a concerted effort to "broaden its base" by "recruiting new members in places that have not been bastions of pro-Israeli sentiment." (49:A8) This is a significant statement, because supporters of AIPAC (i.e. not AIPAC itself) have allegedly made it known to representatives that the wrong vote on an Israel-related issue could lead to a flow of out-of-state funds "into their opponents campaign coffers." Charles Percy, a senior Senator from Illinois who was perceived to be "pro-Arab", is believed to have fallen victim to these tactics when he lost his bid for re-election. Hill-watchers believe that the "Percy syndrome" has led congressmen "whose own constituency might not feel strongly one way or the other about issues in the Middle East" must still weigh their votes very carefully. (40:28)

5. New tactics by the opposition. More recent debates have not followed the same agenda as that of the AWACS sale. Opponents have almost conceded that Israel's military edge is not in jeopardy, and, especially in the case of the Jordanian sale, that the defense requirements of the specific country are both legitimate and valid. Regarding the sale of Stinger missiles, they argued that the weapons might fall into the hands of terrorist -- certainly an emotional issue at the time due to the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon. The sale of F-16s to Jordan was linked directly to King Hussein's

performance in promoting the peace process between Arab States and Israel. The current delay in affecting final Congressional resolution of that issue is contingent upon his ability to get the "peace talks" with Israel started.

CONCLUSIONS

By placing the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia into the larger perspective of a decade of American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf, it becomes quite obvious that the United States will continue to face a very "challenging" diplomatic environment in this particular arena. There are realities in the Middle East which cannot be ignored -- the Arab states want to buy weapons, they have the financial resources to work with any supplier, and they attach great significance to the security assistance relationship. We can ignore those realities, but it would seem ill-advised to do so. As a result of opposition to the sale of additional F-15's to Saudi Arabia, Israel may well see advanced offensive fighter aircraft (Toronados) stationed at Tabuk Air Base in northwest Saudi Arabia, a situation which had been specifically prohibited in past sales of F-15 aircraft. In response to our delay in acting upon his request for F-16s, King Hussein had the following reaction when asked about the impact upon US-Jordanian relations:

To be very frank, I think it would definitely cause us to come to one conclusion: that the term 'even-handed policies' used so many times in the past in the United States in terms of US attitude toward the needs of its friends in this area has ceased...I think that it's not a way of dealing with problems among friends. (37:A3)

The Jordanian leader's words speak candidly to a symptom of a fundamental problem within the American foreign policy process -- specifically, the breadth and diversity of our overall involvement makes it extremely difficult to bring an acceptable balance to our many relationships. There are no quick answers to this problem, but a few aspects of the AWACS sale would appear to shed light on the issue.

As a general statement, attempts to formulate Middle East policy and achieve a consensus on the merits of "arms sale diplomacy" resulted in the linkage of such complex problems as ensuring unrestrained oil flow, the security of Israel and the burgeoning arms race in the region. It is doubtful that one could find three issues which complement each other less than these, and here lies the source of the conflict. More specifically, several Senators, even those who voted for the AWACS sale, indicated their displeasure with the way things were handled by the Administration. In reviewing the history of the sale, there is, in fact, little evidence to indicate that any Administration, past or present, has been very forthright in providing the Congress with either an overall objective of the Middle East arms sale program or assessment of just how much "defense" these countries would ultimately require. The Saudi studies began during the Ford years, and Jimmy Carter felt that he had inherited a commitment for the 1978 sale of F-15s. In defending the sale, his Administration had provided assurances which disappeared with the subsequent AWACS/F-15 Enhancement sale engineered toward the end of his term and "inherited" by Ronald Reagan. In the end, many congressmen felt that they been given the choice of voting

against the President or against Israel -- hardly a desirable decision. The real issue, arms sale diplomacy, was almost lost in the political shuffle.

On the legislative side, there is the growing role of the Congress to consider. Since Watergate, this body has, somewhat understandably, interjected itself even more directly into the overall government process through legislation and the resources of a growing staff. Special interest groups, such as AIPAC, have both stimulated activity and exerted great influence in determining the outcome of the later arms sale proposals. The Director of AIPAC, Thomas Dine, actually participated in direct negotiations with National Security Advisor McFarlane in effectively killing the Sale of Stinger missiles. (40:29) The only point here is that the power of those who speak for "the judgement of the people" has increased significantly. In the case of arms sales to the Middle East, this voice is very effectively saying no.

Finally, the sale itself has produced neither a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict nor an invitation to establish US bases in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In view of the realities of the Islamic world, however, one must certainly wonder if such expectations were ever achievable in the short term. Perhaps, as a more valid conclusion, it is best to look at the more positive aspects. First, the Saudi Arabian government has not crumbled nor is there any indication that it will. Secondly, the sale has increased US presence and influence in the region through the influx of US contractor personnel required to support this and other sales of US-produced military equipment. As a means of

comparison, Lockheed is still there to support the relatively uncomplicated C-130 aircraft, a sale made twenty years ago which called for a phase-out of US maintenance support over a six year period. Support of the more complex AWACS and F-15 weapons systems will be far more extensive and certainly be required for quite some time to come. Entry into a somewhat closed society as exists in Saudi Arabia is, to say the least, difficult, but, through military sales, we have achieved that objective on a long term basis. In spite of the Saudi's expressed desire for independent self-defense capability, support functions have made them very dependent upon the nations supplying their arms.

President Reagan took office in 1981 and was quick to demonstrate a proclivity for diplomacy based upon security assistance through the sale of arms. At that time, a senior Department of State official was quoted as saying that this "is the currency in which foreign policy now deals. We can't sign treaties anymore, we can't deploy forces abroad -- so how the hell else do you do it?" (4:65) Yet, in his 1987 Annual Report to the Congress, Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger reminds us that "our government is founded on the proposition that the informed judgement of the people will be a wiser guide than the view of the President alone, or of the President and his advisors, or of any self-appointed elite." Going even further, he also states that the "single most critical element of a successful democracy is a strong consensus of support and agreement on its basic purposes." (59:81) By its very nature, this fundamental strength of our democratic form of government makes our work in the international arena most difficult.

creating both frustration and conflict among our Executive and Legislative leaders. The painful process of gaining support for Saudi AWACS alone, not to mention the fate of more recent arms transfer initiatives, indicates a clear lack of such consensus, a factor which has created a serious air of inconsistency within our foreign policy program for the Middle East. With the security of the Persian Gulf presumably in the balance, it would appear that it is time for both "sides" to seek some level of consistency through consensus on a policy which features a "workable" approach to the sale of arms.

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