



## [Human Rights Organizations and a Bipartisan Group of Lawmakers Urge Congress to Oppose Arms Sales to the United Arab Emirates](#)

Nearly 30 human rights organizations have signed a letter urging Congress to block the sale of missiles, fighter jets, and drones to the United Arab Emirates due to concerns regarding the Gulf nation's role in the Yemen and Libya conflicts. The regime in the United Arab Emirates has served as a destabilizing force in the two aforementioned countries and been credibly accused of engaging in war crimes and serious abuses against the respective civilian populations. As a result, there is a legitimate fear that the arms sales would exacerbate the humanitarian crises in Yemen and Libya. A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers in both the Senate and House, including Republican Senator Rand Paul and Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, have also previously expressed opposition to the weapons sales. To stop the sale from moving forward however, the resolutions introduced against them would need to pass both chambers of Congress and also require a two-third majority in order to survive a veto from lame-duck President Trump. Regardless, opponents of the arms sales argue that their efforts at least send an important signal to the incoming Biden administration which highlights the diverse array of unease over the issue.

The rights groups have called on the United States to reconsider the arms sales to the UAE in light of evidence of civilian casualties in Yemen and Libya – where the UAE has been identified as one of the major perpetrators. Since March of 2015, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and others have been involved in a devastating military campaign in Yemen which has carried out attacks that have indiscriminately targeted civilian sites such as schools and hospitals. The ongoing conflict there has seen over 100,000 people killed, around 4 million more displaced, and resulted in approximately 80% of the country becoming dependent on aid for survival, in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile in Libya, the UAE has been accused of using armed drones to target civilian areas and health facilities in support of renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar and his forces. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in these attacks, and hundreds of thousands more have been forced to flee their homes and take refuge elsewhere.

The letter penned by the 29 human rights organizations expresses opposition to the sale of the around \$23 billion worth of aircraft and weaponry because of the fear that it would fuel continued harm to civilians in conflict zones like Yemen and Libya. Some of the signatories include the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Project on Middle East Democracy. According to the latter's advocacy officer Seth Binder, "the hope is to stop these sales altogether...but if that is not possible in the short term, this sends an important signal to the incoming Biden administration that there is a diverse group of organizations that oppose delivery of these weapons." The arms sales to the United Arab Emirates were an aspect of the recent accord between the UAE and Israel, brokered by the outgoing Trump administration and heavily criticized for ignoring widely-accepted and longstanding regional positions regarding the terms for normalizing ties with Israel, which should include fair concessions to the Palestinians.

Bipartisan Senate and House lawmakers have also come out against the arms sales. Senators Bob Menendez, Chris Murphy, and Rand Paul introduced multiple resolutions in opposition to the sale of the particular pieces of military equipment. They criticized the potential move, stating that the weaponry could end up being used by groups and in ways which violate standards of international law. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Ilhan Omar introduced resolutions to block the sales and argued that the United States should not be selling weapons to "help dictators commit human rights abuses." Lastly, in recent days, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has also joined the chorus of voices speaking out against the arms sales by urging Congress to block the deal as well.