



[The Biden Administration Elicits Concern Regarding the Approval of a Potential \\$650 Million Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia](#)

The U.S. State Department recently announced its plans to go forward with a potential \$650 million arms deal to Saudi Arabia. The deal, which still requires congressional approval, would be for 280 air-to-air missiles as well as rail launchers and logistical services. Rights advocates and bipartisan members of Congress have expressed concern over the intended use of the weapons, citing the destructive Saudi war in Yemen which has included indiscriminate airstrikes against civilians and resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in the world. In the past, there has sometimes been a legitimate reluctance to approve military sales to Saudi Arabia without definitive assurances that the equipment would not be deployed in the harming of civilians. While the State Department has argued that the arms will only be used for defensive purposes, there is a worry that the Saudis will adapt the weapons beyond these means.

During the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, Biden promised to make Saudi Arabia a “pariah,” calling the ruling regime out for its numerous human rights crimes, both domestically and outside the country in places like Yemen. However, while the verbal sentiment has been consistently disapproving of the abuses, little concrete action has been taken. Social justice activists point to this most recent arms deal as evidence that the Biden administration is reluctant to take strong measures. U.S. officials have claimed that the weapons will not be used in Saudi Arabia’s war efforts in Yemen, but advocates have their doubts about this. Air-to-air missiles have a considerable level of adaptability for a variety of potential military tactics, and they therefore can still hypothetically be used for offensive purposes. As the deal currently does not rely on Saudi Arabia to abide by the arms’ intended use, the manner in which the weapons are applied is not explicitly dictated by the United States’ government.

Arms deals with Saudi Arabia are nothing new. Since the conflict in Yemen began back in 2015, the United States has been supplying weapons that the Saudi-led coalition has often used in troubling airstrikes which have devastated civilian areas. As such, during the Trump administration, bipartisan outcry against the American supplying of weapons for Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen attempted to halt those sales but was rejected by the White House at that time. Due to the controversy surrounding this, then-candidate Biden stated that his administration would reverse the Trump White House position of selling arms that could be used in the Saudi war efforts in Yemen.

The decision by the Biden administration to sell arms has thus raised considerable concern. While the \$650 million deal for air-to-air missiles, rail launchers, and logistical services requires congressional approval and has been spoken out against by some members, it appears that ultimately, it will likely still go through. As rights advocates have highlighted, the biggest issue is that after the deal is finalized, the weapons will be used by Saudi Arabia for however they deem fit. Therefore, the sale of the arms with the lack of an undeniable set of parameters for their deployment is deeply unsettling, and opens the door for the possibility that the weapons will be used in military operations against civilians and non-combatants.