

*MSC 68th Student Conference on National Affairs*

***“Hanging In the Balance: American Leadership in Global Crises”***

*Texas A&M University*

## ***Policy Proposal***

***“The Gun Show: Reviewing U.S. Foreign Military Sales”***

***Facilitator: Colonel Scantlin***

TO: The Honorable Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara A. Leaf

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SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political Military Affairs

FACILITATOR: Colonel Straus Scantlin

SUBJECT: Ensuring the future of the U.S. national security and geopolitical interests in the Gulf region via US - Saudi Arabia foreign military sales

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Foreign Military Sales (FMS) are key to U.S. foreign policy aims. FMS allows the U.S. to use economic soft-power coupled with military hard-power to achieve policy goals. In return, partner nations wish to deter their adversaries by equipping their military with potent, capable U.S. military matériel. Specifically, a hard-power goal of the U.S. is to fight insurgent terrorist groups. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is the top purchaser of U.S. military equipment for the past 10-years. The Cato Institute’s annual Arms Sales Risk Index ranks KSA as one of the riskiest customers for weapons.

U.S. is the largest provider of FMS and dominates with 41% of all international arms sales. Sales to KSA are crucial for U.S. foreign policy aims in the Gulf region. KSA relies heavily on the U.S. for military armaments, KSA purchases most of their military equipment from the U.S. The U.S. has an indirect role in KSA’s conflict in Yemen, e.g., around 80% of Saudi pilots conducted civilian casualty-causing airstrikes in Yemen received U.S. training. Two countries are seeking greater influence in KSA. PRC encroachment in the Gulf region and Iranian efforts to reduce U.S. presence in the KSA and support to Houthi rebels are problematic.

First, a loss of U.S. influence in KSA, replaced by that of China, may lead to increased human rights violations. China has already surpassed the U.S. as KSA’s main trading partner making this issue pressing. Second, greater Chinese influence may lead to increased prices or reduced access to oil by a KSA-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); KSA has an essential role in oil prices and availability. Increased Chinese influence in the KSA could lead to a reduction of global oil

resources. Third, Iran's continued development of nuclear weapons creates a need for a U.S. stabilizing presence in the region that could deter further Iranian nuclear development.

Both KSA and Houthi rebels are accused of human rights violations in Yemen. U.S. training of Saudi Arabian Armed Forces (SAAF) appears insufficient as many U.S. trained Saudi pilots have been accused of civilian casualties. A lack of KSA geospatial technologies and strategic planning opportunities contributes to increased civilian deaths.

Iran's continued development of a nuclear weapons program presents a global threat which may be deterred by our continued support of KSA through FMS. Without our support, KSA may not be a sufficient deterrence to Iran. Houthi rebels, backed by Iran, in Yemen are also strengthened if the SAAF does not have improved support from the U.S.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs recommends the following four actions to protect our national interests in the Gulf region:

1. Continue U.S. FMS to KSA. The U.S. can address three main geopolitical issues in the surrounding region by strategically employing FMS.
2. Sharing U.S. best practices with KSA. KSA needs geospatial intelligence systems and technologies, training, and education for the SAAF to achieve greater accuracy and planning capacity to reduce civilian casualties and prevent civilian harm.
3. Periodically assess the improvement of KSA's respect for human rights. Periodic assessment could indicate modification of U.S. strategies towards a conditionally based KSA FMS geared towards lessening KSA's growing ties with PRC and conduct of regional military operations to accomplish their missions with a reduction of human rights violations.
4. Further research on methods to increase U.S. influence in KSA and alleviation of human rights transgressions.

The U.S. has a continued interest in decreasing human rights violations, the threat of an Iranian nuclear program, and reducing civilian harm. These aims are supported by the regional strength of KSA. KSA has an immediate need for military support. PRC is eager to claim the title of "leader of the world stage." A complete halt in FMS could allow the PRC to fill the gap that the U.S. leaves behind. Although PRC is a cheaper alternative, their relationships are not as strong and lack trust. Continued FMS also eases KSA tensions with Iran. By providing matériel to KSA, KSA is better able to deter nuclear proliferation in Iran.

Overall, members of Congress are questioning the validity of sending weapons to KSA and are concerned by its implications. Evidence shows that risky clients, like KSA, could have dangerous consequences. However, we cannot afford to ignore the Middle East theater in any way. We are tied to the global energy market through economics and geopolitics, as our allies also rely on the Gulf's petroleum. We are also invested in the region to deter the threat of Iran, regional terrorist groups, and PRC incursions affecting the stability of the Gulf.

These factors lead us to conclude that we must continue FMS but take a new approach to our implementation strategy. Keeping in mind the crisis in Yemen, we can strengthen our partnership with KSA to ensure we counter extremists in the Middle East. We can mitigate human rights violations and contribute to a better region by training our partners to a defensive extent. Although avoiding further entanglement would be preferable, there are too many critical factors that

America must address. We must provide our partners and allies, who share strategic objectives, with the necessary arms they need to defend themselves.

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