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## President Biden's \$650 Million Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia

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On November 4, 2021, the Biden Administration notified Congress of a [\\$650 million](#) arms sale to Saudi Arabia, which includes 280 air-to-air missiles, 596 missile launchers, support equipment, spare parts, and technical support. The State Department said that the missiles are for air defense and cannot be used in ground attacks.

### U.S. Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia and the War in Yemen

Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has led a war in Yemen against Houthi rebel groups. During the six years of fighting, the Saudi-led war in Yemen has claimed [233,000 lives](#), at least 3,000 of which are children, and displaced more than [4 million](#) people. Saudi Arabia also imposed a draconian blockade around Yemen, which has prevented its people from receiving food, medicine, fuel, and water. In February 2021, the UN stated that [400,000](#) children under the age of five could die by the end of the year if the blockade was not lifted. As 2021 comes to an end, the blockade still remains in place.

Between 2015 and 2020, the U.S. sold [\\$64.1 billion](#) worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia. These weapons, along with intelligence sharing that the U.S. also provided to the Saudi coalition, have helped the coalition wage war in Yemen. In February 2021, President Biden committed to ending the sale of offensive weapons to countries in the Saudi-led coalition. However, as some experts have [noted](#), the definition of what classifies as offensive and defensive weapons are left to the discretion of the administration and President Biden has not clarified to Congress or the American people, which weapons are considered offensive.

In addition to the deadly war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia also commits multiple human rights violations such as torture, extrajudicial killings, violently cracking down on free speech and protests, imprisoning and harassing women, and targeting journalists and activists. Notably, in 2018, Saudi Arabia murdered Washington Post journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, whose writings were critical of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin-Salman, as well as the Saudi government's infringement on civil rights such as freedom of speech and press.

## Joint Resolution of Disapproval and the Arms Sale Process

Democratic lawmakers [criticized](#) President Biden's \$650 million arms sale to Saudi Arabia and [Rep. Ilhan Omar](#) introduced a Joint Resolution of Disapproval ([H.J.Res.63](#)) to block the arms sale on November 12, 2021. Rep. Omar stated that "it is simply unconscionable to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia while they continue to slaughter innocent people and starve millions in Yemen, kill and torture dissidents, and support modern-day slavery." Additionally, a bipartisan group of Senators (Sens. Mike Lee, Rand Paul, and Bernie Sanders) introduced a similar joint resolution in the Senate ([S.J.Res.31](#)). Sen. Paul stated that "By participating in this sale, we would not only be rewarding reprehensible behavior, but also exacerbating a humanitarian crisis in Yemen." If this arms sale continues, it would be the second to Saudi Arabia under the Biden Administration. The first was for [\\$500 million](#) which assisted Saudi Arabia's military with maintenance, specifically its attack helicopters.

The president has the power to negotiate arms sales with foreign governments and is required to inform Congress at least 30-days in advance of the date when the sale will be completed. During these [30-days](#), Congress can vote to reject the sale, but this must pass with a veto-proof majority in both chambers. Because of the high threshold needed to block an arms sale, most sales continue without any input from Congress. A bipartisan group of Senators (Sens. Mike Lee, Chris Murphy, and Bernie Sanders) have introduced legislation that would expand Congress' role in reviewing arms sales. The [National Security Powers Act](#) would revise the Arms Export Control Act to require Congress to provide an affirmative vote for the sale of certain sophisticated weapons systems or arms sales greater than a certain monetary amount. The bill would also require Congress to approve a national emergency declaration and outline specific emergency powers within 30 days. If neither of these requirements are met, funding for arms sales would automatically be cut by a specific deadline.

## Conclusion

Saudi Arabia and its coalition have been waging a deadly and brutal war in Yemen for six years. There is clear evidence that U.S. weapons and support to the Saudi coalition have been used in apparent war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is imperative that Congress take action by blocking weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and ending U.S. complicity in the war in Yemen. Additionally, Congress must expand its role in reviewing arms sales and ensure that sales negotiated by the president cannot occur unless Congress has provided clear authorization.