

## **FUELING CONFLICT: U.S. Arms Sales to the United Arab Emirates and the U.S./UAE Military Alliance**

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Late last year, the Trump administration notified Congress of offers of F-35 combat aircraft, MQ-9 armed drones, and bombs and missiles to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) worth a total of over \$23 billion – the largest U.S. arms package ever offered to the Emirates. These deals threaten to increase violence and fuel conflict at a time when the Biden administration should prioritize ending conflicts in the greater Middle East.

The Biden administration should rescind the arms offers to the UAE and reconsider the nature of the U.S.-UAE alliance to align it with emerging U.S. security objectives in the Middle East and North Africa. The issue is the subject of a new report by the Center for International Policy's Arms and Security Program, *Fueling Conflict: U.S. Arms Sales to the United Arab Emirates and the U.S./UAE Military Alliance*.<sup>1</sup>

This is no time to be offering a flood of new weaponry to the UAE, given its role in fueling the wars in Yemen and Libya, its diversion of past U.S.-supplied arms to extremist groups, and its record of internal repression. The UAE, along with the militias it arms and trains, has also engaged in torture and detention-related abuses in Yemen, and its arms transfers and drone strikes on behalf of Gen. Khalifa Haftar's forces in Libya are a blatant violation of a United Nations arms embargo on that nation.



*Image of a Boeing Apache AH-64D, a type of attack helicopter the U.S. supplies to the United Arab Emirates. Source: Jakob Schröck/Flickr*

The U.S. has substantial leverage over the UAE. More than half of the UAE's fighter aircraft, along with most of its transport aircraft, bombs, and missiles, are of U.S. origin. Without maintenance, support, and re-supply of these weapons the UAE's military would be hard pressed to operate at current levels. And it would be extremely difficult for it to switch suppliers on major systems given its level of dependence on U.S. arms.

1. William D. Hartung, *Fueling Conflict: U.S. Arms Sales to the United Arab Emirates and the U.S./UAE Military Alliance*, Center for International Policy, January 2021.

## Major findings of the report include the following:

- The \$23 billion arms package to the UAE is one of the largest deals offered during the four years of the Trump administration, rivaled only by a \$23 billion offer to Japan as part of its program of purchasing U.S. F-35 combat aircraft.
- Prior to the \$23 billion deal offered in November 2020, the United States made offers of over \$36 billion worth of weaponry to the UAE under the Pentagon's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program from 2009 to 2019, in 38 separate deals. This brings total U.S. arms offers to the UAE to \$59 billion since 2009.
- The United States is by far the largest arms supplier to the UAE, accounting for over 68% of all weapons delivered to that nation from 2015 to 2019, according to statistics compiled from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's arms transfer database.
- The United States has also been a major supplier of training to the UAE military. U.S. training has been provided to over 5,000 UAE troops since 2009, including personnel from the UAE Navy, Army, Air Force and Special Forces.
- The UAE is responsible for large numbers of civilian deaths as a result of its central role in the war in Yemen, where it has deployed ground forces and taken part in the coalition's aerial campaign and naval blockade. In February 2020, the UAE announced that it had pulled back most of its troops in Yemen, but it continues to arm, train and back militias involved in the war, which total 90,000 members in all, and continue to be implicated in abuses ranging from indiscriminate artillery shelling to torture to recruitment of child soldiers.
- The UAE has intervened in the civil war in Libya in violation of a United Nations arms embargo by supplying weapons to the forces of Gen. Khalifa Haftar and carrying out air and drone strikes in support of his military campaigns in the country, which are contrary to the objectives of the U.S. policy of supporting the U.N.-recognized government (the GNA, or Government of National Accord). Haftar's forces have engaged in extensive human rights abuses in the war, including killing scores of civilians.
- The UAE has a record of severe human rights abuses at home. As Human Rights Watch has noted: "UAE residents who have spoken about human rights issues are at serious risk of arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and torture. Many are serving long prison terms or have left the country under pressure."<sup>2</sup>

2. Human Rights Watch, "UAE: Events of 2018," Human Rights Watch World Report, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>. See also Human Rights Watch, "UAE: Reality of Abuses Contradicts Tolerance Rhetoric – Human Rights Violations at Home, Abroad," January 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/13/uae-reality-abuses-contradicts-tolerance-rhetoric>