

The arms deal: More weapons for the Middle East

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [September 4, 2007](#) issue

When Congress returns from its month-long vacation in September, President Bush will ask members to agree to a package of more than \$63 billion in military aid and weapons to our “allies” in the Middle East. Why such generosity? Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explains that the money will “bolster forces of moderation and support a broader strategy to counter the negative influences of al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Syria and Iran.”

Anthony DiMaggio, professor of Middle East politics at Illinois State University, finds this a spurious argument. He writes that although “the aid initiative has been billed in the media as a major effort to stem terrorism, promote stability, and further cement American power in the region, . . . there is no available evidence suggesting that states like Iran or Syria have plans to attack any American allies in the region” (*Counterpunch*, August 5).

It is wrong to claim that Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia face an immediate threat from Iran; they do not, except in the minds of the people who brought us the Iraq war. Nor could Hamas and Hezbollah be described as regional threats. Their quarrels with Israel are as political factions fighting for their share of political power.

Through this aid package the U.S. seeks to extend hegemony over the oil-rich region and benefit loyal U.S. allies. *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Jackson (August 1) reports that in addition to the \$30 billion scheduled for Israel over the next decade, the Bush administration wants to give \$20 billion to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as \$13 billion to Egypt. None of these Arab states are paragons of democratic virtue.

The cash flow to U.S. supporters in the region indicates “a bipartisan craziness that never ended despite the end of the Cold War,” says Jackson. In fact, he adds, both the first President Bush and Bill Clinton aggressively promoted U.S. arms sales and raised these sales to more than twice the level of the last years of the cold war.

Why should Congress supply arms to oil-rich Saudi Arabia when the country already has more munitions than it can handle? Israeli historian and political activist Uri Avnery answers this question in his blog post “White elephants” (see www.avnery-news.co.il):

The Saudis are selling oil to the Americans for dollars. A lot of oil, a lot of dollars. The United States, with a huge gap in its balance of trade, cannot afford to lose these billions. So, in order to make it possible for the U.S. to carry this burden, the Saudis must give back at least a part of the money. How? Quite simple: they buy American arms that they don't need.

Avnery has lived in Israel since 1933 and knows the Israel/U.S. “two-nation dance” well: “Every arms deal made by the White House needs the assent of Congress, which is in the hands of the ‘friends of Israel’—the Jewish and the Evangelical lobbies. Any senator or congressman can forget about being reelected if he offends one of these lobbies.”

When Congress takes up the aid package in September, the White House will promise Congress that the deal will bring “regional stability.” Then, when Israel's political supporters protest, the *New York Times* and other media will explain that in order to maintain “the balance of power” and Israel's “qualitative superiority over all the Arab armies combined,” the aid package should be accepted as good for Israel.

Avnery knows the script. “Together with the \$20 billion deal with the Saudis, President Bush decreed that the American yearly grant of military assistance to Israel should be raised from 2.4 billion to 3 billion. This means that in the coming ten years, Israel will receive arms to the value of 30 billion dollars,” nearly a 43 percent increase over what that nation received during the past ten years. With a few exceptions, Israel's purchases will be in the U.S.

When aid package makes it through Congress, U.S. arms merchants will show their gratitude by making additional political contributions to presidential and congressional candidates. And as an added bonus, they will see their products tested in actual conflict.

Avnery reports that in a recent television interview, an Israeli general said that “under an American-Israeli agreement, the Israeli army is obliged to report to the American military establishment on the effectiveness of all kinds of arms. For

example: the accuracy of 'smart' bombs and the performance of airplanes, missiles, drones, tanks and all the other instruments of destruction in [Israel's] wars."

Even the results of a "targeted killing" in Gaza or the effectiveness of fragmentation bombs in Lebanon can be relayed back to the U.S. arms producers. This information, in turn, allows the manufacturers to improve the effectiveness of their weapons. It is all there in a \$63 billion aid package, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.