

# WorldNews

## Israeli Brass Decry U.S. Arms Sales to Arab States

By BARBARA OPALL-ROME

**JERUSALEM** — Concerned about the long-term threats of advanced U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and other Mideast states, military leaders here are revising multiyear plans for the prospect of regime change and future combat against U.S.-trained and -equipped forces in the region.

In public and private discussions, Israeli officers say they are grappling with options for offsetting what they view as a proliferation of Western, particularly U.S., arms sales to a region roiled by unprecedented instability and strategic change.

Strategic planners here flagged the freshly signed \$29.4 billion fighter package to Saudi Arabia; last month's congressional notification of another 18 F-16s to Iraq; and billions of dollars in air, land, sea and air-defense systems now in the pipeline as potentially grave threats, should radical regimes replace moderate, U.S.-allied trade partners.

Sources here also singled out a proposed \$1.3 billion M1A1 tank co-production deal with Egypt, which would boost Cairo's indigenous industrial base and maneuvering capabilities at a time of mounting populist calls to abrogate the 32-year peace treaty with Israel.

"We can't gamble on our national security," Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) director of planning, told journalists and

diplomats at a Jan. 17 briefing of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. "We're trying to lay the infrastructure and enhance it to a degree that it will be capable to meet the tests that will be on the table in the near and long future."

In his address, "Planning for the Unknown: Israel's Ever-Changing Strategic Reality," Eshel characterized front-line capabilities making their way to the region as a serious, long-term concern.

"The region is unstable," he said. "Other countries can be changed in future. Other countries that have state-of-the-art Western technology [can] change; and we have to take this into consideration."

Eshel stressed that Israel does not consider Egypt an enemy. "Far from that. Things won't be changed tomorrow. But we're looking at a process that might lead to change."

As for the rest of the region, Israel foresees far more risk than opportunities in the popular "Arab spring" uprisings that ousted Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan leaders and continue to threaten the strategic status quo.

"The bottom line is that this is not even close to spring," Eshel said. "We all should identify with the core issues that started those revolutions, but unfortunately, our assessment a year ago that those revolutions would be hijacked by others came true.

"We're going to see in this decade

and maybe more the rise of [Islamic] brother and sister movements," Eshel added. "I don't see a kind of [new, radical Sunni] axis yet, as they are focused on internal issues. I don't want to say it's epidemic, but it's got its effects. We must face reality. There are risks here and right now, I don't think they are balanced."

### Not at Israel's Expense

Despite Israeli angst at the growing quantities and quality of U.S. arms to the region, Washington officials insist that all deals are assessed in terms of their impact to Israel's so-called Qualitative Military Edge (QME).

A long-standing U.S. commitment, enshrined in a 2008 law, defines QME as "Israel's ability to counter and defeat credible military threats from any individual state or coalition of state or non-state actors while sustaining minimal damage or casualties."

Since passage of that law, a bilateral QME working group was created which allows Israel to argue its case against proposed U.S. sales to the region. Michèle Flournoy, U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, and Andrew Shapiro, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs, lead the group on behalf of Washington. In Israel, such talks are led by Amos Gilad, the Ministry of Defense's policy chief, and Eshel.

Israeli officials here are near unan-



**U.S.-built Edge:** A Royal Saudi Air Force F-15 Eagle flies during an exercise with U.S. forces last year.

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imous in their praise of the working group and the extent to which the U.S. administration is willing to listen to Israeli concerns.

"At first, they used to read from a list of potential sales, but then they agreed to provide a detailed written account of everything contemplated for all 22 Arab countries. This marked a major change, and showed how serious they are in considering our views," an Israeli official said.

Nevertheless, Israeli sources said their ability to influence ultimate decisions is limited, particularly when such sales are aimed at bolstering Washington's so-called coalition of the moderates vis-à-vis Iran.

"They listen, but that doesn't mean they don't come back with counter-arguments," the Israeli official said. "It's hard to argue against a \$30 billion Saudi air power package when the Americans insist it's needed to defend against the common threat."

### Security and Stability

In a State Department briefing Dec. 29, Shapiro hailed the Saudi deal as important, historic and a boost to U.S. national security and economic interests.

"This sale will send a strong message to countries in the region that the United States is committed to stability in the [Arabian] Gulf and broader Middle East," Shapiro said.

Signed Dec. 24, the package includes up to 84 F-15SA fighters with

electronically scanned array radar (AESAs), upgrades of another 70 F-15s to the advanced SA configuration, weaponry, and multiyear training and technical support.

"It will be one of the most capable aircraft in the world," said James Miller, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy.

Speaking at the same Dec. 29 briefing, Miller said some 5,500 Saudi personnel would be trained through 2019.

"The F-15SA will have the latest generation of computing power, radar technology, infrared sensors and electronic warfare systems," he said. "[It] will be able to strike targets day or night in all weather with a variety of precision-guided munitions. The air-to-ground weapon capability includes laser-guided and GPS-guided weapons, along with missiles that can attack ground-based radars and missiles — the Harpoon, in particular — specialized for maritime attack."

Economically, Shapiro said the deal would support more than 50,000 U.S. jobs, engage 600 suppliers in 44 states and provide \$3.5 billion in annual impact to the U.S. economy.

As for its implications on Israel, Shapiro said, "We are satisfied that this sale to Saudi Arabia will not decrement Israel's qualitative military edge." □

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## U.S. Contractors Mull ITAR-Free Programs

By ZACHARY FRYER-BIGGS

U.S. defense contractors are eyeing a way around the limitations imposed by Washington's export restrictions: developing, manufacturing and selling products overseas, all without components or expertise setting foot on American soil.

Long bemoaned as onerous by defense companies, the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) that prevent the sale of some military technology to international customers has been more nuisance than terror for years. But as the non-U.S. market grows, and U.S. dollars are squeezed, U.S. companies are finding the trade restrictions a hurdle to growth.

While trade reform is being widely discussed in the Pentagon, companies are hedging their bets and looking at ITAR-free product devel-

opment — programs that sometimes start from scratch, avoiding restricted technology and not relying on production in the U.S. — as a means to bring products to the international market without all the red tape.

"The reason ... is not because the export control rules are any more restrictive, but because the export markets are more important to defense companies than they have been in the past," said Steve Grundman of Grundman Advisory.

Northrop Grumman is working on ITAR-free Direct Infrared Countermeasures, expected to be tested in early 2013, and Lockheed Martin is testing the ITAR-free waters in Canada and Spain with work on naval systems. Both companies have taken on foreign partners as part of the development process.

But while companies look overseas, the Pen-

tagon is looking closely at ITAR reform. Brett Lambert, deputy assistant secretary of defense manufacturing and industrial base policy, told a conference of investors in December he is hopeful that change is on the way.

"One thing I want to do is to go to a trade show internationally and never again see a brochure that says 'ITAR-free' from one of our competitors internationally," he said.

David Berteau, director of the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that growth in the ITAR-free market will rest largely on whether export reform is effective.

"There's pressure on the companies to move forward, but that pressure may be short-lived if there's a change in the ITAR environment," he said.

One impediment to ITAR-free products —

an international stigma — may be disappearing, Berteau said.

"We're not yet at the point where the ITAR-free piece is as good as or better than the option that is subject to U.S. export controls," he said. "I don't know when we get to that point, but we will get to that point. That's what companies have to prepare for."

That companies are seeking alternatives is a sign of problems with existing export law, said Remy Nathan, vice president for international affairs at the Aerospace Industries Association.

"If a U.S. company decides to develop an ITAR-free solution, I would expect that they're not trying to break the law in the sense of doing something that contravenes U.S. national security or foreign policy; if anything, they're saying that other countries have more nuanced systems than we do, and are capable of controlling technology without using a hammer to control it," he said □

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