

ARMS TO SAUDI

The White House has "notified" Congress that it intends to sell 7000 of its most advanced missiles and bombs to Saudi Arabia.

Now, *there* are a couple of dilemmas for you. Saudi Arabia will get about 900 Maverick air-to-air surface missiles, 700 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, 3500 laser-guided bombs and 1500 cluster bombs. Such armament in the hands of a country which officially considers Israel its enemy, is enough to make Israelis reasonably nervous.

But there is more to it than that. There is the "Iranian Syndrome": America sells sophisticated arms to a friendly Middle Eastern government; that government collapses internally; the new government, which inherits all those arms, considers the United States its chief enemy in the world.

Saudi Arabia seems ripe for the Iranian syndrome. There was not only the matter of the Great Mosque takeover in Mecca. There were also large pro-Iranian and anti-American demonstrations in the oil-soaked eastern provinces of Saudi a couple of weeks ago. The Saudi government had to send about 20 thousand troops to contain these demonstrations. The usual combination of fundamentalist Moslems and left-wing types, united at least in their anti-Americanism, are waiting to topple the inch-deep Saudi family.

Why send sophisticated arms into such a situation? There is only one possible rationale: *Saudi Arabia is more critical to the United States than Iran; the United States will "send in the marines" if the Saudi family is threatened by revolution.*

All future energy considerations aside, it is predictable that the American enterprise -- industry, economy and defense -- will depend upon an adequate supply of oil through the 1980s. Saudi Arabia sits on about a third of the total oil resources of OPEC. The cut-off of that supply would be crippling.

The West did not just discover the oil; it made a use for that oil, not by accident but by industry and ingenuity. That technological use is related to an increased standard of living for the common people. It is proper for the countries which accidentally sit on that oil, to own it, and highly profit from it. But for them to choke off that oil and the Western economy would seem to be neither morally nor historically justifiable, nor practically tolerable. There seems to be no middle-ground alternative at this time between the Saudi family and the anti-American spoilers. Thus, the marines. Thus the arms, on grounds that if we didn't send them, it would be a signal that it's open season on the Saudis.

Of course, there is an Israeli consideration. If Saudi is taken over by a hard-line anti-American force, then Israel's regional position becomes even more difficult, not to mention America's diminished capacity to help. Israel has requested almost three and a half billion from the U.S. in military and economic aid for 1981, certainly unlikely if America's economy is cut off from Saudi oil.

On the other hand, the marines may not be able to land soon enough. Or stay long enough. Or we may finally lack the will to send them. Or the Soviet Union may threaten World War III if we do. Or we may just be able to make other oil arrangements in the world, not visible at the moment. In all these cases, it would make no sense for us to send Saudi Arabia these advanced arms, which are more designed to express our symbolic support than to be a practical defense against revolution.

However, we are not likely to take that chance. Congress has until about mid-January to pass "resolutions of disapproval" to deter the sale. No one expects them to pass such resolutions, no matter what pressure is mounted. However, it would be good for every Congressman and Senator to receive comments from each of their constituents. The comments, at the very least, might suggest a *prior* understanding to the sales, binding Saudi Arabia more closely to American foreign policy, which includes the Camp David peace treaty.