



Ambassador Al Otaiba Comments on UAE Defense Modernization Package

December 3, 2020

UAE Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba made the following comments regarding the UAE's defense modernization package, including the F-35. The comments can also be viewed on [Twitter](#).

The proposed sale of US defense equipment to the UAE is important to both of our countries. Senator Chris Murphy is right – this sale is different. So, Congress should have all the facts and understand how it is critical for the UAE and US.

As the most open and tolerant society in the Middle East, the UAE has a lot to protect at home and in the region. This includes our shared interests and values with the US.

Together, we need to maintain a strong deterrent to aggression and an effective response to extremism even as we pursue de-escalation and new regional dialogue.

The UAE F-35 package is much more than selling military hardware. It is about advancing a more stable and secure Middle East. It enables the UAE to take on more of the regional burden for collective security, freeing US assets for other global challenges – a bipartisan US priority.

The UAE has always fought alongside the US. And through hundreds of joint missions and participation in six US-led Coalition efforts, we have learned that the key to military coordination is interoperability.

With the same equipment and training, US and UAE forces are more effective together when and where it matters. You can read what US military leaders and defense experts say: uae-embassy.org/f-35

Let me address the concerns raised by Senator Murphy and others, beginning with the Qualitative Military Edge. In their first joint statement on any issue, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced that Israel did not object to the sale of the F-35 to the UAE.

Just last week, Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's Foreign Minister, reinforced the point: "Israel has no concerns, as the US government has a very long and strong commitment to preserving the Israeli Defense Forces' qualitative military edge. It is a commitment that still exists."

Second, on Yemen, Senator Murphy is aware that the UAE ended its military involvement in Yemen in October of last year. We are eager to see the war end, are supporting initiatives to restart a political process and continue to provide massive humanitarian aid to the Yemeni people.

The UAE's intervention liberated large parts of the country from Iranian-backed Houthi control in the West and, working with the US, diminished the AQAP threat in the East. It helped to protect international shipping in the Red Sea, facilitated the distribution of humanitarian aid and prompted the Houthis to enter a political dialogue. You can read The Washington Institute for Near East Policy commentary for context: <https://bit.ly/2JA7ryC>



The UAE Air Force mission in Yemen focused on hostile Houthi forces, terrorist cells and FON operations. UAE targeting procedures and precision weapons greatly limited civilian casualties to rates below or comparable to those of US and NATO air forces involved in combat in Afghanistan.

The UAE provided local anti-Houthi forces working in the Coalition with a limited number of US-manufactured protected mobility vehicles. The UAE has provided a full accounting of this equipment to the Pentagon.

To clarify another key issue, there has never been a report of US-technology being diverted to an adversary by the UAE.

The US confidence in the UAE is obvious at the Al Dhafra air base in Abu Dhabi where the UAE has based US F-35 squadrons and just about everything else the US Air Force flies.

Further to the point, for more than 20 years, the US has entrusted the UAE to purchase and operate F-16s, Patriots, THAAD and many other of the most advanced US-supplied defense systems.

The description of the UAE as having “very close, active defense partnerships with both China and Russia” is a gross overstatement. The UAE has economic and diplomatic relationships with both and has only made purchases from each when the US could not supply critical equipment.

The UAE need for advanced drones is a response to their growing sophistication and deployment by adversaries across the region, including Iran and non-state actors. They are critical to the UAE’s defense just as they are to the US and other partners.

We would rather have the best US-equipment or we will reluctantly find it from other sources, even if less capable.

Finally, this is also an investment in the US. The UAE is already the largest buyer of US goods in the Middle East, and the defense sale will support tens of thousands of US jobs, sustain the US defense industrial base, and lower future US research and development costs. The domestic impact of F-35 sales is available here: <https://bit.ly/39zQaQV>

To sum up, the US is the UAE’s security partner of choice. We want US defense equipment, training and coordination. In the world’s most dangerous neighborhood, it is critical for our protection and for our shared interests and values with the US. It allows us to take up more of the burden from the US.

To get all the facts, visit uae-embassy.org/f-35