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Washington, November 11 (RHC)-- The Donald Trump administration notified Congress it has approved the sale of more than \$23 billion in advanced weapons systems, including F-35 fighter jets and armed

drones, to the United Arab Emirates, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced.

The formal notification to legislators follows a U.S.-brokered agreement in September in which the UAE agreed to normalise relations with Israel, becoming the first of three Arab states to make such a move in recent months.

“This is in recognition of our deepening relationship and the UAE’s need for advanced defense capabilities to deter and defend itself against heightened threats from Iran,” Pompeo said in a statement. The \$23.37 billion package includes up to 50 F-35 Lightning II aircraft, up to 18 MQ-9B Unmanned Aerial Systems and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions, the State Department said.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations and House of Representatives Foreign Affairs committees – whose members have criticised UAE’s role in civilian deaths in Yemen’s civil war – review major weapons sales before the State Department sends its formal notification to the legislative branch.

Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, criticised the arms sale to the UAE, saying it would constrain the options of President-elect Joe Biden who has signalled he will return the US to the Iran nuclear agreement.

Any deal the United States makes to sell weapons in the Middle East must satisfy decades of agreement with Israel that the U.S.-made equipment must not impair Israel’s “qualitative military edge,” guaranteeing U.S. weapons furnished to Israel are “superior in capability” to those sold to its neighbors.

The announcement came just days after Biden won enough states needed to take the presidency from Trump, who made pro-Israel policies part of his re-election campaign. Israel initially balked at the prospective sale of F-35 warplanes, valued at \$10.4 billion, but dropped its opposition after what it described as U.S. guarantees that Israel’s regional military superiority would be preserved.

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