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Washington, December 28 (RHC)-- The United States is moving forward with approving the sale of thousands of precision-guided "smart" bombs to Saudi Arabia, during the final days of Donald Trump in

the office. The U.S. State Department notified Congress this week that it is moving to issue a license for the sale of 7,500 air-to-ground munitions to the kingdom, Bloomberg reported.

The license would allow Raytheon Technologies Corp. to directly sell its Paveway “smart” bombs, at an estimated value of \$478 million, to Riyadh. The notice also suggests that Raytheon plans to expand its existing business relationship with the kingdom to include future manufacture of munitions overseas. The White House is trying to approve the license before Trump leaves office, according to the report.

Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have increasingly been opposed to arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which is responsible for thousands of civilian deaths in Yemen. Trump, however, has so far vetoed a series of measures that would have blocked the sale of billions of dollars of arms to the kingdom and its regional ally, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Trump has repeatedly dismissed concerns over the Yemen crisis, saying that Riyadh could just go spend its arms budget elsewhere. The president argued that blocking the arms sales “would weaken America’s global competitiveness and damage the important relationships we share with our allies and partners.”

Top Democratic senator Robert Menendez, who is among those lawmakers who had refused to support the sale when it was raised earlier this year, said that the White House “refused to answer our fundamental questions to justify this new sale.” He said that the administration was “trying to sell thousands more precision-guided bombs to the president’s ‘friend,’ Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.”

Last year, Trump’s administration sold \$1.5 billion of an unspecified number of “enhanced” Paveways to Saudi Arabia. Washington had sold about 8,000 earlier model Paveways as part of a 2015 deal that included about 5,000 other munitions to the kingdom. Saudi Arabia has been Washington’s number one weapons buyer.

Trump is also considering a Saudi request to grant bin Salman immunity from prosecution in an assassination plot case against a former high-level Saudi official, who worked with U.S. intelligence agencies. The case, which was filed in federal court in Washington in August, accuses the crown prince of deploying operatives in the U.S. to track down Saad Aljabri and then dispatching a team to murder him in Canada. The lawsuit says a team of Saudi hit men flew to Canada, but were stopped by border officials.

Citing familiar sources, Bloomberg said Riyadh wants Washington to act before Trump leaves office in January 20. Aljabri’s family, however, said the decision on granting bin Salman immunity “should take its due course even if that makes it fall into the hands of the Biden administration.”

“This should not be a rushed political favor,” Khalid Aljabri, Saad Aljabri’s son said, adding that granting such immunity to the crown prince “will result in absolute impunity and he will use it as a U.S. issued license to kill.”

Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have been critical of Trump’s support for bin Salman. The crown prince is already the prime suspect in the 2018 murder case of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

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