

Washington considers possible resumption of offensive weapons sales to Saudi Arabia

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A Yemeni boy walks past the rubble of destroyed houses in the village of Bani Matar, situated 70 kilometers (43 miles) west of the capital Sana'a, after it was reportedly hit by an airstrike by the

Saudi-led coalition. (Photo> AFP)

Washington, July 11 (RHC)-- The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden is reportedly engaged in talks over the possible removal of its ban on the sales of offensive weapons to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), despite Riyadh's devastating military aggression against neighboring Yemen.

Three sources familiar with the matter said senior Saudi officials have pressed their US counterparts in several meetings in Riyadh and Washington in recent months to scrap the policy of selling only defensive weapons to the kingdom.

However, the sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters that any final decision is expected to hinge on Riyadh's practical measures to end the Yemen war. Two sources said the internal U.S. deliberations are informal and at an early stage, with no decision imminent.

A U.S. official also told the news agency that there were no discussions "at this time" on offensive weapons underway with the Saudis. This is while any move to rescind restrictions on U.S. sales of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia is expected to draw opposition in Congress, including from both Biden's fellow Democrats and their Republican rivals, who have berated Saudi Arabia over the Yemen war and the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents inside the Arab country's consulate in Istanbul.

Biden, who called the kingdom a "pariah" as a presidential contender, declared in February 2021 a halt to U.S. support for the Saudi military onslaught against Yemen and "relevant arms sales." An American source familiar with the matter said the Biden administration had begun internal discussions about the possibility of lifting restrictions on U.S. sales of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia but emphasized that they had not reached a decision-making stage.

According to a second source, among the times when Saudi officials accommodated the request was during Deputy Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman's visit to Washington in May. The sources stressed, however, that no announcement was expected around Biden's upcoming trip, which will take him to the Israeli-occupied territories and Saudi Arabia, between July 13 and 16.

Any decision, they said, is expected to depend heavily on whether Riyadh is deemed to have done enough to find a political settlement to the Yemeni conflict.

Among the items the Saudis are expected to seek are precision-guided munitions (PGM) such as those approved under former US president Donald Trump in the face of objections from members of Congress.

Back in November last year, the United States approved a \$650-million sale of air-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia, marking the Biden administration's first major weapons deal with the kingdom. The Pentagon said at the time that Massachusetts-based firm Raytheon would be the "principal contractor" for the sale of AIM-120C-7/C-8 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) and related equipment.

"This has nothing to do with making the world a better place and everything to do with fueling our defense economy," Marianne Williamson, an American author and former presidential candidate, wrote on Twitter. "America's economy should not be built around merchandising death," she added.

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