



[Peace and Human Rights Activists Express Concern over Indications that the Biden Administration is Weighing the Possibility of Lifting Restrictions on Offensive Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia](#)

As a supplement to an already controversial trip to Saudi Arabia, there are indications that the Biden administration has been considering lifting the ban on U.S. sales of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia. This is in direct contrast to Biden's previous statements vowing to make Saudi Arabia an international "pariah" over its multitude of human rights violations and the heinous 2018 murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. News that President Biden may lift the ban on "offensive" arms sales to Saudi Arabia has caused great concern among human rights and social justice activists. The Biden administration originally implemented restrictions early last year due to growing pressure over civilian casualties and the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has played a destructive role in the Yemeni conflict, where an estimated 377,000 people have been killed, including tens of thousands of civilians as a result of the devastating Saudi-led bombing campaign. A Saudi blockade has also heavily contributed to what is widely acknowledged as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands more dying from food insecurity and a lack of access to health services.

Many human rights activists are worried that the lifting of restrictions on offensive arms sales to Saudi Arabia will lead to increased death and draw out the conflict in Yemen. One of the weapons that would be allowed to be sold is the F-35, a U.S.-made state-of-the-art joint strike fighter. Opening the door for the sale of these types of weapons to Saudi Arabia could worsen an already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. There is currently a fragile ceasefire in the war-torn country, and even with attempts to make it a more permanent peace deal, the possibility still exists that armed conflict may break out again in the coming months.

Furthermore, a change of rhetoric would also signal to the Saudi government that torturing and killing dissidents has no longstanding repercussions, and indicates to an already repressive regime that the United States is willing to look the other way when it comes to grave human rights abuses – so long as Saudi Arabia has something to offer in return. This sets a dangerous precedent that would allow the government to continue to, and even escalate, its oppression of the population with the abetting of a nation that is supposed to be the shining example of freedom and democratic values.

Now as inflating gas prices put Biden in a tough spot domestically, some experts have outlined that the administration has been reaching out to Saudi Arabia, at least partly, in an effort to try and reset relations and help bring gas prices down. As a tough midterm for the Democratic Party closes in, lowering gas prices is an urgent need, something certain observers have argued the Saudis are keenly aware of and could use their means as a bargaining chip to secure concessions from the United States. The Biden administration has been signaling a possibility of resetting relations with Saudi Arabia for some time now, and it is also very imaginable that the lifting of offensive arms sales restrictions could be contingent on more concrete progress towards a lasting peace deal in Yemen. There are policy analysts who contend that, because the distinction between offensive and defensive weapons can be blurry at best, a potential modification on this issue could be difficult to assess. Ultimately, Biden administration officials have expressed that deliberations are currently informal and that no decision is imminent.