

White House okays sale of F-22 Raptor fighters to Israel; UAE plans to buy F-35



U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor lands at Gwangju Air Base in South Korea. (Photo: AFP)

Washington, November 2 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump has approved the idea of selling the F-22 Raptor stealth aircraft to Israel to maintain Tel Aviv's alleged "military edge" in the Middle East as Washington plans to sell F-35s to the United Arab Emirates.

The London-based Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper cited senior sources in Tel Aviv as saying that US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper had told Israeli officials during a visit to Israel last week that the Trump administration had approved the sale of F-22s and precision-guided bombs to Israel.

Israeli officials asked to buy the F-22 to maintain Israel's alleged "military edge" in the region after the U.S. agreed to sell F-35 fighters to the United Arab Emirates, the Israeli daily Haaretz said.

Last month, the Trump administration notified Congress of its intent to sell F-35s to the UAE. The reports of the U.S. intention began after Israel and the UAE on August 13 agreed to a full normalization of diplomatic relations between the two sides.

The agreement sparked anger in the Middle East and elsewhere, with Palestinian leaders describing it as a "stab in the back" by an Arab country.

The New York Times reported on September 3 that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had privately gone along with a plan for the U.S. administration to sell advanced weapons, in particular US-made F-35 stealth fighter jets, to the UAE despite his public opposition. Netanyahu later denied the report.

The F-22 cannot be exported under U.S. federal law to protect its stealth technology and classified features. Customers for U.S. fighters are acquiring earlier designs such as the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon or the newer F-35 Lightning II, which contains technology from the F-22 but was designed to be cheaper, more flexible, and available for export. In September 2006, Congress upheld the ban on foreign F-22 sales.

According to antiwar.com, the timing might also not be on the side of this sale.

"President [Bill] Clinton approved the idea of such a sale in 2001, and by the time he left office it was ultimately forgotten. Israel has often sought to buy the F-22, but the U.S. hasn't even made them since 2011, so this seems a rare opportunity for them."

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