

Dear Colleagues:

I hope you are all well and keeping healthy and safe.

With Senate action expected this week, I wanted to take a final opportunity to reinforce the compelling case for the UAE's proposed F-35 defense modernization package.

**As Ambassador Al Otaiba has emphasized, this package is much more than just about equipment. It is the UAE doubling down with the US as its long-term security partner of choice. It is the UAE taking on more of the burden for collective security – for the UAE, for the US and for our partners. It is the UAE being there when and where the US needs it, just as it has countless times before.**

The UAE needs the most-advanced US defense equipment because US-UAE interoperability enables it to fight smarter and better together with the US. The UAE needs US equipment because it is a dangerous neighborhood. It needs US equipment because as an open and dynamic country, it has a lot to protect.

I want to highlight the comments that Ambassador Al Otaiba made during [his interview on MSNBC's Morning Joe](#) yesterday:

“The UAE has been a traditional American partner for the last 30 years. We are the only Arab country that has proudly fought alongside the United States in six military coalitions since 1990, from Kosovo to Somalia to the campaign against ISIS. This is not just about the sale of F-35s. It is about a much bigger message: we are doubling down on this relationship. **We want to be an even stronger partner.**”

Ambassador Al Otaiba also highlighted [Major Mariam Al Mansouri](#), the first UAE woman fighter pilot, who led the UAE's first strike against ISIS in 2014 in a US-made F-16. It was a joint mission with US and UAE pilots and planes, flown from a UAE air base, using US refueling.

Ron Dermer, Israel's ambassador to the United States, [joined](#) Ambassador Al Otaiba on *Morning Joe* to share Israel's view of the proposed sale:

“We do not believe that this arms package will violate the US commitment to maintain Israel's Qualitative Military Edge, which is one of the most sacrosanct commitments that the United States makes to Israel. **So, we're very comfortable with this moving forward.**”

For more details on all of this, see also Ambassador Al Otaiba's series of [tweets](#) in response to Senator Murphy earlier this week or follow this [link](#) to the UAE's F-35 paper. Let me also take the chance to address a few more points in the “Dear Colleague” letter from December 2, 2020.

First, to be clear, the UAE is **not** financing and has never financed the Wagner Group as suggested by a recent DoD Inspector General report and *Foreign Policy* story. The key sentence in the 80-page report that was not included in the FP story but speaks for itself: “The DIA said that reporting on who is financing the Wagner Group's continued presence in Libya is ‘ambiguous.’” The FP story only reinforces the ambiguity, describing the UAE's unsubstantiated link to Wagner in a series of vague words and phrases such as “apparently,” “may,” “may have been,” “thought to be,” “overall impression,” “long-harbored suspicions,” “likely,” “would indicate,” and “was likely.” No current Pentagon or other sources are cited as presenting any factual information to confirm the otherwise unsupported claim. But the UAE will try, the Embassy has asked the Pentagon to share its analysis, so it can refute it in detail.

Second, Yemen is a difficult topic for all. But the UAE role in Yemen was decisive before it ended its military involvement in Yemen in October of 2019. The UAE liberated large parts of the country from Iranian-backed

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Houthi control in the West and, working with the US, diminished the AQAP threat in the East. The UAE protected international shipping and maritime routes around the Red Sea, facilitated the distribution of humanitarian aid and prompted the Houthis to enter a political dialogue. Like other responsible nations and multilateral organizations, the UAE is eager to see the war end and is supporting initiatives to restart a political process. And the UAE continues to provide massive aid to the Yemeni people in collaboration with the World Food Program, international aid groups, and UAE relief organizations.

During its role in the conflict, the UAE Air Force mission in Yemen focused on hostile Houthi forces, terrorist cells and FON operations. In fact, UAE targeting procedures, pilot training and precision weapons greatly limited civilian casualties to rates below or comparable to those of US/NATO air forces involved in combat in Afghanistan, Iraq and other theaters. With respect to the transfer of US-origin equipment, the UAE provided local anti-Houthi forces working in the Coalition with a limited number of US-manufactured protected mobility vehicles. These were not terrorist organizations or “individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations” as the letter claims. The UAE has also provided a full accounting of this equipment to the Pentagon.

Finally, the UAE will not waver in its long-term and staunch alliance with the United States. It will protect critical and sensitive US defense technology as it has with the F-16s, Patriots and THAAD, among others. The UAE will protect and secure the F-35s just as it has US Air Force F-35 squadrons hosted at Abu Dhabi’s Al Dhafra Air Base.

Increased alignment and cooperation between the two countries serves joint national security interests to the benefit of the region.

**Again, with a vote expected this week on the JRDs introduced by Senators Menendez, Murphy and Paul, I urge you to send a strong message of support to the US’ closest partners and allies in the region. Enable the UAE to help defend shared interests. Equip it with what it needs to take on more of the burden. Your vote will send a message both to the US’ allies and to adversaries who will be watching closely.**

As always, please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

Best,  
~Hagir

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