

May 24, 2018

The Honorable Bob Corker
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Menendez
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ed Royce
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel:

Saudi Arabia plays a key role in the Middle East and is a nuclear wildcard given its concerns about Iran. Saudi officials have said since 2011 they would match Iran's nuclear capabilities and most recently suggested this also applies to nuclear weapons. The United States has never entered into a nuclear cooperation agreement with a country that has publicly announced it will pursue nuclear weapons under certain circumstances, abrogating its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The answer to Saudi security, however, is not to pour fuel on the flames of its nuclear ambitions. The United States has always set the standards worldwide for nuclear cooperation, slowly ratcheting up requirements, particularly in regions of concern. In the Middle East, the United States has written its agreements for three decades to pre-empt acquisition of domestic enrichment and reprocessing, the two technologies that can be used to make fissile material for a bomb.

Keeping the lid on Saudi nuclear weapons ambitions is essential if we do not wish to see a proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Some of us believe that there is no economic justification or rationale for a civilian Saudi nuclear program. However, if a nuclear cooperation agreement is concluded, lawmakers should closely scrutinize any agreement with Saudi Arabia to ensure that it contains adequate safeguards. And if it does not, Congress should use its authority to put conditions on the agreement to ensure it does not leave the door open to further proliferation of nuclear fuel-making technologies in the Middle East.

Congress should not buy the argument, however, that it would be better – in nonproliferation terms – if Saudi Arabia bought nuclear equipment from the United States than from other countries, even if that meant relaxing our nonproliferation standards. That's not how it would work. If Saudi Arabia diversifies its suppliers, watering down U.S. nonproliferation requirements will simply lower them for all states.

For that reason, we urge you to make sure that with any cooperative agreement with Saudi Arabia our government does what is necessary to ensure that Saudi Arabia does not reprocess spent fuel or enrich uranium whether it buys reactors or reactor components from U.S.-based firms or not.

Sincerely,

Peter Bradford
Former NRC Commissioner

Thomas Countryman
Former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

Jamie Fly
German Marshall Fund of the United States
Former Department of Defense, National Security Council and Senate staffer

Richard L. Garwin
Presidential Medal of Freedom

Victor Gilinsky
Former NRC Commissioner

Ambassador Laura Kennedy (retired)
Former U.S. Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Daryl Kimball
Executive Director, Arms Control Association

Susan J. Koch
Former Director for Proliferation Strategy
National Security Council staff

Valerie Lincy
Executive Director, Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control

William J. Perry
Former Secretary of Defense

Henry Sokolski
Former Deputy for Nonproliferation Policy
Department of Defense

Sharon Squassoni
Research Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs
George Washington University

William Tobey
Former Deputy Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration

Frank N. von Hippel
Senior Research Scientist and Professor emeritus,
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