

Shultz Testifies On U.S. Arms For Middle East

WASHINGTON (WNS) — Secretary of State George Shultz stressed that while the Reagan Administration has decided to defer the sale of any new arms to the Middle East, including F-15s and other equipment to Saudi Arabia, this does not mean it does not plan to sell weapons to Arab states in the near future. "I think our interests are arguably served by (the) strength of countries in the Middle East in addition to Israel," he said in response to questions in the opening session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's two months of hearings on American foreign policy.

Shultz confirmed the decision revealed by Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, while testifying to the House Foreign Affairs Committee's subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East.

Shultz's comments came after Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R. Minn.) noted that every four years the Administration presents Congress with a weapons package for Saudi Arabia despite the strong opposition to it in Congress. Boschwitz pointed out that Sen. Richard Lugar (R. Ind.), the Committee's chairman, said he has

scheduled the series of hearings in an attempt to achieve a consensus on foreign policy. Boschwitz said that proposing to sell arms to Saudi Arabia would not lead to that consensus.

But Shultz said "as we study this question, I don't have much doubt in my mind that we will find" that continued arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries are needed. "I can't say at this time specifically that," he added. "But I

certainly wouldn't sit here and say that you should expect no proposals introduced."

Sen. Alan Cranston (D. Cal.) said he believes weapons sales should be deferred as long as the Saudis act in ways that are damaging to both U.S. interests and Israel. He said Saudi "oil blackmail" has been used to enforce an Arab led boycott against Israel which he said has contributed to Israel's economic difficulties.

Shultz replied that he did not believe the boycott was responsible for Israel's economic problems. He said the U.S. is ready to help Israel and will "do what is necessary." But he said Israel has to take steps to improve its economy which he said it is now trying to do. "We are working very closely with the government of Israel and sympathetically," he said.

In his prepared statement, Shultz said the U.S. remains "committed" to President Reagan's September 1, 1982 Middle East peace initiative "as the most promising route to a solution of the Palestinian problem. We will be intensively engaged this year in consultations with our Arab and Israeli friends to explore opportunities for progress." But he also noted that "recent events have reminded us that the Arab-Israel conflict is far from the only source of tension in that part of the world."

Responding to questions, Shultz said he would press for Senate ratification of the UN convention against genocide. Reagan announced support for ratification last September in a speech to B'nai B'rith International. But the Senate failed to adopt it in its rush to adjourn for the elections. However, the Foreign Relations Committee promised that it will be reintroduced this year.

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