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Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajewski; reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

1. (C) Summary. Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs Lincoln P. Bloomfield Jr. discussed proposed U.S. MANPADS buyback and destruction initiative with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh on September 1. Saleh not only agreed to move forward with the modalities of the buyback, but pledged to A/S that the ROYG would not seek to buy any new systems. **Despite Saleh's attempt to extract more money out of the buyback offer, Post expects/hopes to conclude an agreement in the next two weeks.** A/S Bloomfield's August 31 meeting with Minister of Interior al-Alimi, Chief of Military Staff al Qassem, and National Security Bureau Saleh covered septel. End Summary.



Saleh -- "We Have to Get Them Off the Market"

2. (C) A/S Lincoln P. Bloomfield Jr. and Ambassador met with Yemeni President Saleh on September 1 to discuss the proposed U.S. MANPADS buyback initiative. Saleh welcomed A/S Bloomfield's visit and the MANPADS initiative, describing it as part of continuing U.S. - Yemeni joint security efforts in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East. A/S Bloomfield thanked the President for his country's cooperation and partnership in the GWOT, emphasizing that MANPADS in particular pose a grave threat to U.S. and Yemeni global security interests should they fall into terrorist hands. Saleh readily agreed, adding "these weapons in the hands of al Qa'ida or Jihadists threaten Yemen's security forces. We have to get them off the market."

3. (C) A/S Bloomfield outlined the MANPADS buyback initiative, explaining it was a very specific proposal to purchase and destroy systems collected by the ROYG. In addition to compensation for each system, U.S. technical training and assistance would be provided to ensure the safety of MANPADS collection and transportation, and to conduct destruction. A/S Bloomfield stressed that there was a 90-day window in which to buy and destroy current ROYG illicit stocks, and that while the program did not have a time limit -- the funding was, indeed, finite.

4. (S) Saleh told A/S Bloomfield that the ROYG was currently in possession of 1435 MANPADS including 500 he had recently collected from "private people" just prior to his departure to London for an official visit on September 25. The President made clear that these systems would be offered up for sale and destruction according to the proposed initiative, adding that he estimated there were another 150 - 200 still in private hands which the ROYG is targeted for collection. (Note: On August 31 A/S Bloomfield viewed 79 recovered MANPADS stored in a MOD facility. The 1435 appear to be some combination of these 79, plus the other 1029 emboffs observed in the same facility in 2003, and a number of other illicit systems we were unaware had been collected. We will seek clarification on these numbers from NSB Deputy Director Ammar Saleh. End Note.)

5. (C) President Saleh assured A/S he was serious about cutting off the possibility of MANPADS leakage from official stocks. He said he had given the order to collect all systems from the Yemeni Armed Forces in the field and return them to storage immediately. A/S commended the President's actions to get "these dangerous missiles out of dangerous hands," emphasizing that Yemeni MANPADS must remain under the lock and key of the authorities. "Actually," Saleh responded, "we don't need them."



Saleh Promises No New MANPADS...

6. (C) Saleh pledged to A/S Bloomfield that Yemen's national defense did not require MANPADS; to the contrary, the current crisis in Sa'da proves "it was a big mistake" to allow such weapons to fall into the hands of our enemies where they can be used against our own forces. "I assure you," said the President, "there will be no new deals, we will not trade in them." Bloomfield responded, "you have made a very important statement, that MANPADS are more useful to terrorists than to your military."

7. (S) A/S told Saleh he is engaged in ongoing discussions with source country governments in Eastern Europe to stop exporting MANPADS, but that we have indications arms dealers claiming to represent Yemen continue to shop in these markets for advanced MANPADS. Saleh advised, "You cannot prevent (North) Korea, China, Ukraine, Russia, or Belarus from producing or selling weapons. I do not believe you will be successful." "Although," he continued, "maybe you can convince them to sell through official government contracts and not through brokers." A/S Bloomfield agreed that controlling weapons production was not easy, but explained that arms firms in nations working with the U.S. to limit production of MANPADS report that Yemen remains a potential client. "No," replied Saleh, we do not need them."

8. (S) A/S Bloomfield asked the President "if our friends in Eastern Europe tell me they have a contract with Yemen, may I tell them 'no, you do not'". Saleh replied. "yes, tell them the contract is canceled -- stop it -- no one has a deal to sell such weapons to Yemen unless they talk to me." A/S replied that Saleh's pledge not to acquire new MANPADS should not be underestimated, as it would enhance Yemen's reputation in Washington and the international community.

...In Exchange for One Million Dollars

9. (C) "Rest assured," Saleh continued, "Yemen will not have such weapons anymore, but everything has a price. You will have to pay...one million dollars for each strela!" (Note: After an awkward silence, Saleh laughed, indicated he was exaggerating, and promised the price would come down. In fear some uncertainty remained, the Palace translator turned to A/S saying, "I feel it is my duty to make sure you understand this is a joke." End Note.) "How much are you willing to pay?" pressed the President. A/S responded that that the price for each MANPAD was fixed and not negotiable. "Fixed, but well above what we believe to be the market price."



Al-Houthi - Lessons Learned

10. (S) Saleh told A/S that the recent events in Sa'da, (where ROYG forces are embroiled in an increasingly bloody fight against the well-equipped supporters of rebel Shi'ite cleric al-Houthi) has proven that it was a "big mistake" to allow these weapons to reach enemy hands. Saleh reported to A/S that 250 soldiers had been killed and 1000-1500 injured in addition to 300-350 rebels. (Note: Post believes the number of ROYG casualties to be much higher. End Note.)

11. (S) A/S Bloomfield replied that the U.S. was aware of the cost to Yemen of the recent fighting and that "this hurts us too." A/S told Saleh that the Embassy is looking to see how else we can help.

...And the Kitchen Sink

12. (S) As expected, Saleh raised extending the buyback to include other types of weapons. He reported that the ROYG has been buying back all types from the grey market since 9/11, including SA-2 and SA-3 surface-to-air missiles, machine-guns, anti-tank missiles, mines, RPGs, and explosives. "We have already paid 9 billion rials (approximately 49 million USD) to keep these weapons out of al Qa'ida hands," claimed the President we are ready to destroy them. We hope you will not limit the program to MANPADS." (Note: the ROYG claims it has collected 32 million USD in assorted SW/LA and is seeking to recover this expense. Although we doubt the claim of 32 million, we understand from MOD and NSB contacts that the ROYG has yet to reimburse the arms dealers it contracted to collect these weapons and Minister of Defense Alaiwa is under considerable pressure to make good on the deal. End Note.)

Inventory Control Assistance

14. (S) A/S emphasized that the program on the table is urgent and specific; it targets several countries with large numbers of these dangerous systems. He stressed that the current proposal is for MANPADS only, and he is offering to buy them for significantly more than market price. "We hope that this important first step will be completed as soon as possible," said A/S, adding, that he was prepared to explore ways the U.S. can assist the ROYG in controlling its official stocks such as providing inventory controls, computer systems, stockpile security, and training. Saleh replied that he looked forward to learning the details of this assistance.



Give Us Our Spare Parts

15. (C) Saleh complained to A/S of ongoing licensing difficulties which had grounded F-5's, and Augusta helicopters, and rendered M-60 Tanks and M109 artillery inoperable. "We have made request after request," he said, "Why doesn't the U.S. respond?" The President repeated a common theme, telling A/S Bloomfield that he pays a high political price in the region and internally for his CT cooperation with the U.S. "Our cooperation" he said will be commensurate with yours, "As much as you move, we will move."

16. (S) A/S Bloomfield responded that the USG appreciates its cooperative relationship with Yemen in the GWOT, and pointed out that, "as a demonstration of our trust, yesterday I gave Military Chief of Staff Qassemi a C-130 licensing agreement." "No, interrupted Saleh, "that is a transport plane. We need our F-5 in Sa'da." A/S assured the President that he would personally look at each Yemeni licensing request when he returned to Washington and would make sure that they received full consideration. (Note: When A/S Bloomfield handed the C-130 license to Chief of Staff Qassemi on August 31, the General said sarcastically "these few parts to a transport plane represent the biggest step forward in our military to military cooperation in years." End Note.)

Comment: "What, Won't Haggle?"

17. (S) All joking aside, Saleh appears serious in trying to push up the price per system. It is hard to imagine a shrewd operator like the President paying more than market price for Strela 2's, approximately 2000 USD. It would be true to style for Saleh to try to extract as much possible from the USG in exchange for his security cooperation. On the margins of the meeting, NSB Deputy Director, and Saleh's nephew, Ammar Saleh recommended A/S Bloomfield send the President a follow-up letter to our meeting listing other benefits to Yemen that may result from the agreement, and urging him not to break the deal over prices that cannot/will not change. End Comment.

KRAJESKI