Next month, Saudi Arabia will announce a billion-dollar contract to build two nuclear power reactors in the Kingdom. The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, based in Washington, DC, has asked the US Government not to put nuclear power in the hands of the Saudi regime. Last weekend at a press conference in Munich, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said that the Trump Administration had called for Riyadh to develop its nuclear fuel in order to achieve self-sufficiency.

This type of agreement is subject to conditions specified by a section of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which regulates the transfer of nuclear materials, equipment, and components from the United States to any recipient country. The act also regulates technical exchanges, scientific research, and discussions.

President Trump and his national security team now face a dilemma: they can try to change the federal regulation in order to secure the lucrative deal for the American company Westinghouse, or they can preserve the previous laws and make the contract conditional upon guidelines that Congress set to prevent global nuclear proliferation. The contract would give billions of dollars to Westinghouse, a Pennsylvania-based subsidiary of Toshiba that’s facing bankruptcy (and considering a foreign takeover offer by Brookfield Asset Management in Canada).

Section 123 [of the Atomic Energy Act] sets an important legal framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation; it stipulates that the country receiving support adhere to nonproliferation norms set by the US. So far, the United States has signed 23 deals that are 123-compliant, including other countries in the Middle East.