

US foreign policy

Trump administration approves \$24bn sale of F-35 jets to Saudi Arabia

Deal comes amid escalation in Middle East conflict — but transfer likely to face opposition in US Congress



Donald Trump with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Approval of the US's sale of F-35s to the kingdom will probably face opposition in Congress © Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

Steff Chávez and **Abigail Hauslohner** in Washington

Published YESTERDAY

Updated 18:22

The Trump administration has approved a potential \$24.3bn sale of advanced F-35 jets to Saudi Arabia, in a win for the kingdom as it faces a fresh onslaught from Iran-backed Houthi forces in Yemen.

The proposed package announced on Thursday by the state department could include up to four dozen of the world's most advanced fighter aircraft, plus 49 Pratt & Whitney engines and other parts.

The deal with Riyadh comes as the kingdom fights an escalating conflict with the Houthis, who launched a [lightning offensive](#) in Yemen last week and have targeted Saudi assets and threatened shipping through the Red Sea.

“The proposed sale will improve Saudi Arabia’s capability to deter current and future threats by strengthening its homeland defence, and improving interoperability with US forces and other

regional and Nato forces,” the state department said.

But the F-35 sale is likely to face opposition in Congress and from special-interest groups that have helped to derail earlier US attempts to sell the advanced fighter jets to Middle East governments.

Even if finalised, a US production backlog could push back delivery by years.

The Iranian-backed [Houthis](#) have sharply escalated the Middle East conflict this month and have responsibility for hitting Saudi tankers in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a vital oil-export route.

The group’s advance in Yemen, coupled with the US-Iran [conflict](#) in the Strait of Hormuz, has helped drive oil prices above \$100 a barrel.

President Donald Trump has shrugged off the threat posed by the Houthis and downplayed the chances of the US defending Saudi Arabia. “They don’t want to fight with us,” Trump said of the group during a trip to Ireland last weekend.



A US Marine Corps F-35B © Kevin Carter/Getty Images

Saudi authorities on Thursday announced the first civilian death since the Houthis resumed their attacks on the country, after debris from an intercepted drone killed one person and injured two

others.

Raja Krishnamoorthi, a top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, warned on Thursday that the sale, if allowed to proceed, would pose a threat to US national security.

US intelligence officials have frequently warned against transferring the country's most advanced [fighter jets](#) abroad, citing the risk that China could gain access to the critical technology.

“Beijing has spent decades stealing American intellectual property and technology to close the gap with the United States, and we must not help them do it,” Krishnamoorthi said in a statement.

Over the summer, the US approved the sale of \$7bn in precision-guided missile systems and bombs to the kingdom.

The US has also approved billions of dollars in potential sales to other Gulf allies since the start of the war in Iran.

Saudi Arabia's oil exports have fallen steeply in recent months due to the increased regional attacks triggered by Trump's war in Iran.

Oil prices rose last week after Riyadh [shut](#) a critical east-west export pipeline — which allows the kingdom to bypass the Strait of Hormuz — following attacks it said emanated from Iraq.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2026. All rights reserved.

Follow the topics in this article

Middle East war

Aerospace & Defence

US politics & policy

US foreign policy

Department of State US

