

BEST OF FRIENDS

## Trump, MBS announce sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets, progress on defense pact

*Trump indicated Saudi Arabia may receive F-35s of a similar caliber to Israel's uniquely advanced model*

By [Matthew Shea](#) November 18, 2025



*President Donald Trump (R) meets with Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia during a bilateral meeting in the Oval Office of the White House on November 18, 2025. (Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)*

In an Oval Office appearance following their meeting on Tuesday, President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced progress on multiple bilateral initiatives, including a U.S.-Saudi defense pact and Riyadh's purchase of F-35 fighter jets.

Trump indicated Riyadh may receive a similar jet to Israel's advanced F-35I Adir model: "When you look at the F-35 and you're asking me 'Is it the same [as Israel's]?' I think it's going to be pretty similar," said Trump. "This [Saudi Arabia] is a great ally, and Israel's a great

ally. I know they'd like you [MBS] to get planes of reduced caliber, but I don't think that makes you too happy. ... We're looking at that exactly right now but as far as I'm concerned, [both countries are] at a level where they should get top of the line."

The U.S. is obligated to uphold Israel's qualitative military advantage in the region, which the sale of the F-35 stealth fighter jets could threaten. The U.S. has thus far only sold the F-35s to longstanding military allies.

In addition, U.S. national security hawks have raised worries that, given Saudi Arabia's growing relationship with China, some of the sophisticated technology in the advanced military systems could fall into the hands of America's leading geopolitical rival.

With Saudi Arabia now the only other country in the Middle East besides Israel to obtain the fighter jet, questions remain around which model and allowances Riyadh will receive. The F-35I is Israel's unique model; other countries fly standard F-35A, B or C models. In addition, the U.S. has granted Jerusalem customization rights and operational freedoms with the F-35 that other countries do not have, including the ability to install its own software and gear, access to deeper source code and domestic maintenance and repair authorities, all of which contribute to its qualitative military edge.

When asked why normalization with Israel is not a prerequisite to the deal, Trump said, "Israel will be happy. Israel's aware and they're going to be very happy," but did not elaborate.

MBS said Riyadh is still interested in such normalization: "We believe having a good relationship with all the Middle Eastern countries is a good thing. We want to be part of the Abraham Accords, but we want also to be sure that we secure a clear path of a two state solution."

"Today we had a healthy discussion that we are going to work on that to be sure that we can prepare as soon as possible to have that," he continued.

Trump said he had not received a definitive "commitment" from MBS, but said that the crown prince has "a very good feeling toward the Abraham Accords."

"Definitely, Mr. President," MBS replied. "We want peace for the Israelis, we want peace for the Palestinians. We want them to coexist peacefully in the region. We will do our best to reach that day."

Trump said the two countries "have reached an agreement" on a defense pact, without offering further details, and also noted that he expects the U.S. to reach a civil nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia, saying he can "see that happening," but also stressing that "

it is not urgent.” He also confirmed the U.S. is working on approving export licenses for “certain levels of chips” to Saudi Arabia.

“We may have announcements on that later today,” said Secretary of State Marco Rubio. “But that’s what we’ve been working on, is the mechanics by which something like that can be achieved. And that’s part of this broader engagement and cooperation between our two countries.”

MBS also confirmed that Saudi investment in the U.S. will be increased, following on Trump’s visit to Riyadh for a U.S.-Saudi investment forum in May when Saudi Arabia pledged to make a \$600 billion investment in the U.S in sectors such as defense, energy and technology.

“Today and tomorrow we can announce that we are going to increase that \$600 billion to almost \$1 trillion of investment, real investment and real opportunity,” said MBS. “The agreement that we are signing today in many areas in technology and AI and materials ... that will create a lot of investment opportunities for our countries.”

Trump welcomed the announcement. “When you invest a trillion dollars, that’s national security for us too because it creates jobs, it creates a lot of things,” he told reporters. “When you hear one country is putting a trillion dollars into the United States that creates national security ... that’s a real ally that will do that. It creates a lot of power for the United States.”