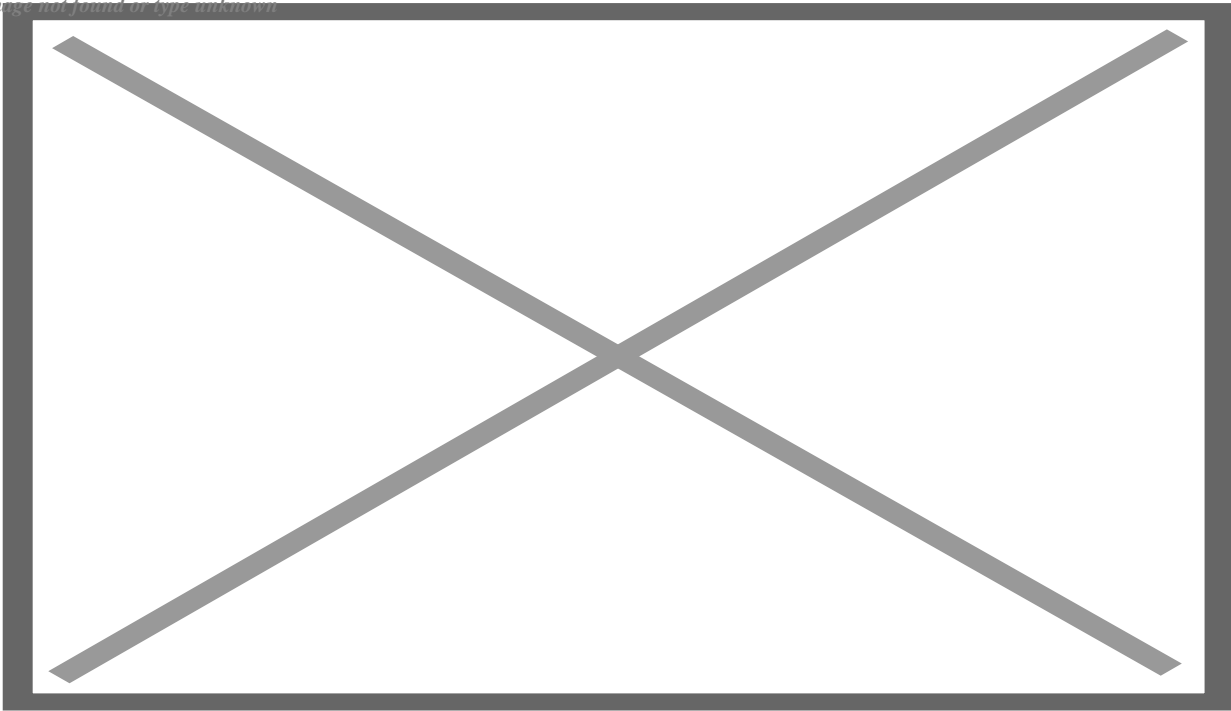


Washington moves forward with sale of 50 F-35 jets to UAE

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Washington moves forward with sale of 50 F-35 jets to UAE, (Photo: AFP)

Washington, October 30 (RHC)-- The U.S. State Department has notified Congress its approval of the sale of 50 F-35 fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in a deal that could be worth \$10 billion, despite a declared congressional effort to secure the Israeli regime's alleged military advantage in the Middle East region, sources have said.

The sources said that the Trump administration aims to send formal notifications for the deal in the coming days to Congress which can choose to pass legislation to block the sale. Reuters reported last month that Washington and Abu Dhabi hope to have an initial deal on the F-35s by UAE National Day celebrated on December 2.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations and House of Representatives Foreign Affairs committees have the right to review, and block, weapons sales under an informal review process. The Trump administration has been working to advance Abu Dhabi's longstanding request to buy F-35s after the UAE and Israel signed a normalization agreement at the White House in August.

Israel initially tried to stop the prospective sale but last week ended its opposition after getting so-called US guarantees that Israeli military superiority would be preserved.

US President Donald Trump has said he would have "no problem" selling advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates. Israel said that any deal must satisfy an old agreement between Washington and Tel Aviv that any American weapons sold in the Middle East region must not weaken Israel's "qualitative military edge."

"We all face a common threat," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters on Thursday when asked about reports of the impending UAE jet sale. "But with that said, it was important that the (Israeli) defense establishment received this clear American undertaking to preserve our qualitative military edge," added Netanyahu, who earlier on Thursday hosted visiting U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Eliot Engel said that an informal notification was sent to Congress on Thursday. "As Congress reviews this sale, it must be clear that changes to the status quo will not put Israel's military advantage at risk," he said.

Under understandings dating back decades, Washington has refrained from Middle East arms sales that could blunt Israel's "qualitative military edge" (QME). This has applied to the F-35, denied to Arab states, while Israel has bought and deployed it.

Israel and the UAE, on August 13, reached a deal that will lead to a full normalization of diplomatic relations between the two sides, in an agreement brokered by U.S. President Donald Trump.

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