

# FRANCE

FRANCE | YEMEN | ARMS | SAUDI ARABIA

## France confirms arms shipped to Saudi Arabia

By RFI (/auteur/rfi/)

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Saudi cargo ship Bahri Yanbu in port of Tilbury, UK, 7 May 2019, before leaving for Le Havre to be loaded with French weapons.

Ben STANSALL / AFP

**The French government has confirmed that a new shipment of weapons will head for Saudi Arabia, but maintains it has no proof they are being used by Riyadh in the war in Yemen.**

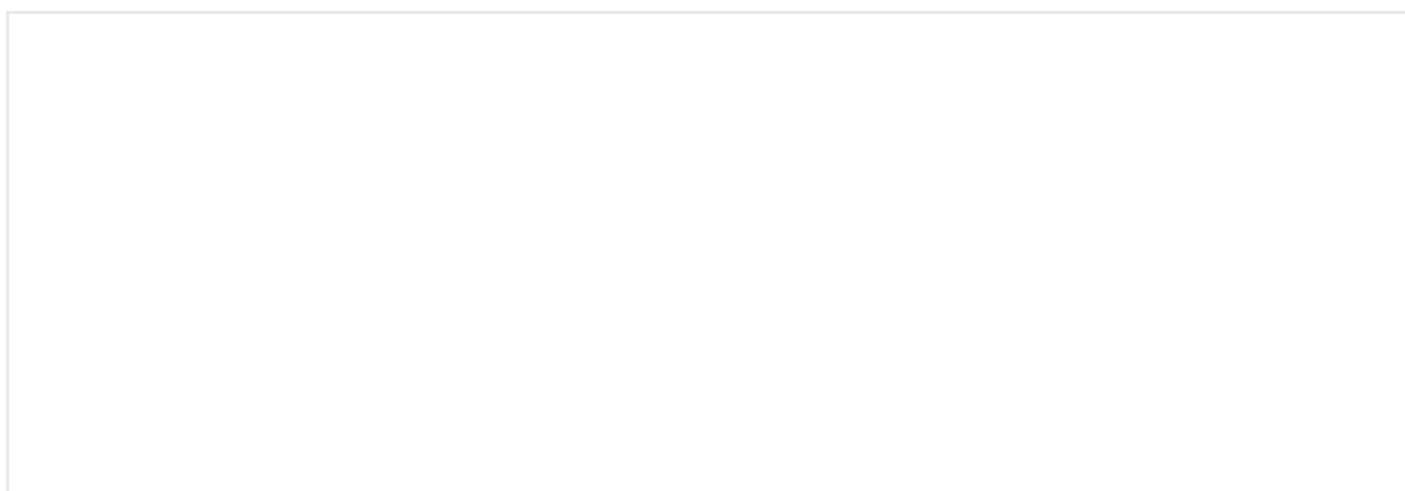
Defence Minister Florence Parly told BFM television Wednesday that the weapons would be loaded onto a Saudi cargo ship, Bahri Yanbu, which is due to arrive in the French port of Le Havre today.

She refused to identify the types of arms, but restated France's position that they have been used by Saudi Arabia solely for defensive purposes since it began its Yemen offensive in 2015.

"As far as the French government is aware, we have no proof that the victims in Yemen are the result of the use of French weapons," Parly said.

Pressure has been mounting on the government after [the investigative news site Disclose leaked a classified military note](http://en.rfi.fr/france/20190425-inquiry-launched-leaked-classified-french-weaponry-yemen-note) (<http://en.rfi.fr/france/20190425-inquiry-launched-leaked-classified-french-weaponry-yemen-note>) last month detailing the use of French tanks and artillery in the war against Houthi rebels.

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Disclose alleged the new shipment included eight truck-mounted Caesar howitzers, though a government source told AFP this week that such cannons were not included in the delivery.

The revelations prompted arms sales watchdog ASER to file a complaint with the Paris administrative court on Monday, calling for an urgent end to French arms shipments to the Gulf.

Benoit Muracciole, head of ASER, told France 24: "The court has between 72 hours and a month to rule on our complaint. Technically, if the shipment is still in French waters, the court can halt the delivery".

He believes the French government's strategy is to continue the sale of weapons while feigning ignorance of whether or not they are being used against civilians.

"Knowledge of war crimes being committed is crucial," said Muracciole. "The truth is France has been aware of war crimes in Yemen since they were documented by the UN."

### Protest in French parliament

The four-year Yemen conflict between a Saudi-led coalition and Iranian-backed Houthi militias has resulted in the deaths of more than 10,000 civilians and brought some 10 million people to the brink of famine. The United Nations has described it as the world's worst humanitarian crisis and its investigators say both sides may have committed war crimes.

Rights groups have accused Paris of being complicit in alleged war crimes against civilians in Yemen.

On Tuesday, all leftwing lawmakers exited parliament in protest after Genevieve Darrieussecq, secretary of state for the armed forces, said there was "no proof these weapons are being used against civilian populations".

Between 2013 and 2017, France accounted for 4% of all arms sales to the Saudis, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), well behind the US (61%) and the UK (23%).

But while its sales have declined sharply since 2016, it has resisted pressure to stop arms sales to Riyadh altogether – in marked contrast with Germany, which has suspended all weapon sales since last October.

"France has strategic interests in this part of the world," Parly said Wednesday, adding that the latest shipments were part of "long-term partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate"s.

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