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# France confirms contested arms shipment to Saudi Arabia

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Ben Stansall, AFP | The cargo ship Bahri Yanbu is seen moored at Tilbury Docks at the Port of Tilbury in Essex on May 7. French parliamentarians called on the French government to clarify the intended cargo to be loaded on the Saudi cargo ship.

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**The French government confirmed Wednesday that a new shipment of weapons will head for Saudi Arabia, despite claims Riyadh is using the arms in the Yemen war.**

## ADVERTISING

Defence Minister Florence Parly told BFM television the weapons would be loaded onto a [Saudi](#) cargo ship scheduled to arrive Wednesday in the French port of Le Havre.

She refused to identify the types of arms, but reiterated France's stance that they have been used only for defensive purposes by Saudi Arabia 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 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 part of 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.

"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," said Benoît Muracciole, head of ASER, in an interview with FRANCE 24.

According to Muracciole, 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."

Pitting a Saudi-led coalition against Iranian-backed [Houthi militias](#), the four-year conflict in Yemen has shattered the country's economy and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations, whose investigators say both sides may have committed war crimes.

More than 10,000 civilians have been killed during the conflict and some 10 million people have been driven to the brink of famine.

Rights groups have accused Paris of being complicit in alleged war crimes against civilians in Yemen, where around 10,000 people have died and millions been forced to the brink of starvation.

"The Saudi regime is one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world, and has inflicted a terrible humanitarian crisis on Yemen," said Andrew Smith of the Campaign Against Arms Trade NGO.

"The destruction would not have been possible without the complicity and support of arms-dealing governments," he said.

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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 authoritative [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) (SIPRI), well behind the US (61%) and the UK (23%).

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, the world's third-biggest arms exporter, counts Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as major clients and has resisted pressure to stop arms sales to the Gulf countries.

It is a marked contrast with Germany, which has suspended its weapon sales to Saudi Arabia 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.

The United Nations says the Yemeni conflict is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 3.3 million people displaced by the fighting and 24.1 million in need of aid.

*(FRANCE 24 with AFP)*

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