

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Pentagon says it has accepted Qatar's gift of a luxury megajet for Trump's use

The prospect of the plane has drawn security and ethical concerns from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, as well as ethics groups.

House Republican says there are 'national security' and 'ethical' concerns over Trump-Qatar jet deal

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By Gordon Lubold, Katherine Doyle, Mosheh Gains and Courtney Kube

WASHINGTON – The Defense Department said it has officially accepted a luxury jet plane from Qatar to use as the new Air Force One for President Donald Trump. Now the administration's task is to get it ready for him as quickly as possible, despite real security and logistical issues that will need to be overcome, as well as bipartisan concern about the gift.

"The Secretary of Defense has accepted a Boeing 747 from Qatar in accordance with all federal rules and regulations," Sean Parnell, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said Tuesday. "The Department of Defense will work to ensure proper security measures and functional-mission requirements are considered for an aircraft used to transport the President of the United States."

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Parnell referred additional requests for information to the Air Force. There was no immediate comment from the Qatari government.

Despite the Pentagon's public acceptance of the gift, the deal is not yet finalized and the legal issues have not yet been resolved, according to a source familiar with the discussions.

The prospect of the plane, which is set to go to Trump's presidential library after he leaves office, has drawn security and ethical concerns from [lawmakers from both sides of the aisle](#), [close Trump allies](#) and [ethics groups](#).

"That's a pretty strange offer," Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., said.

Laura Loomer, a Trump ally, said on social media that accepting a plane from Qatar [would be "such a stain"](#) on the Trump administration. "I'm so disappointed," she wrote.

Valued at \$200 to \$400 million, the plane has been called a "flying palace."

There are also a number of other concerns about how a plane from a foreign government could imperil both the president and national security if it is not properly inspected and rebuilt and significant renovations necessary to make it suitable for flying the president of the United States are not made.

A refitting could cost \$1 billion and take years to complete, more than twice the plane's reported value, [NBC News has reported](#).

But Trump, eager for a new Air Force One to replace the current planes, which are more than 30 years old, and frustrated that the new planes are mired in delays, may find a way to bypass all those concerns, according to a U.S. defense official. A White House official said Trump could be flying in the plane in as soon as a year.

Getting the plane up and operating as Air Force One that quickly would most likely mean waiving some requirements now on the books that define the safety and security standards for the presidential plane. That could include some security measures or eliminating the mandate that the plane be equipped to be refueled by air, for example.

The Air Force will not say publicly which company will do the work, how long it will take or how much it is going to cost, because it is all classified, according to two U.S. defense officials. Other Air Force One contracts that are similar are not classified, according to the officials.

That the work orders would be classified would give the White House, which has stressed transparency, maximum control over the project.

"It's up to him about how secure and safe he wants to be," said a Democratic aide on Capitol Hill.

Some members of Congress are looking at ways to block Trump's ability to use the plane as Air Force One. Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., who has introduced legislation that would prohibit the use of any foreign plane as Air Force One, called the gift "naked corruption." The legislation would also prohibit funding to modify, restore or maintain the plane.

Schumer has also blocked the administration's nominees to the Justice Department, saying he was concerned about potential influence the Qatari government would gain through the gift of the plane.

"Today marks a dark day in history," Schumer said Wednesday. "This unprecedented action is a stain on the office of the president and cannot go unanswered."

And House Democrats are introducing a resolution that would invoke the Foreign Emoluments Clause of the Constitution, which makes acceptance of gifts or payments to government officials illegal unless Congress approves it.

But Trump has some ways to get around those attempts to block his use of the plane. One thing he could do is pay to renovate the plane with a Pentagon discretionary fund.

Using that fund, which typically amounts to around \$3 billion and is used in emergency situations, could mean a lack of available money should the Defense Department suddenly need it unexpectedly, for instance if a hurricane significantly damaged a base or a missile struck an aircraft carrier, officials said.

If the discretionary fund is not used, any time the Pentagon is going to move more than \$100 million from one account to use it for something else, it must submit a reprogramming request to Congress.

“Normally, they are approved,” the Democratic aide said of reprogramming requests. But a request for this purpose would draw much scrutiny. Still, it’s unclear whether congressional Republicans would stand in the way of Trump’s getting his new plane.

“For something like this, frankly we are in uncharted territory,” the Democratic aide said.

John Thune, R-S.D., the Senate majority leader, said Wednesday: “We’re hearing that they’re going to accept it subject to all the rules and regulations surrounding those sorts of things, and I think they are prepared to brief us on that. But hopefully we’ll get more information.”

Pence: 'It's just a bad idea' for Trump to accept plane from Qatar

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Over the weekend, former Vice President Mike Pence suggested the move could raise constitutional issues and [questioned whether the United States should](#) place so much trust in a partner that "has a long history of playing both sides."

Accepting the plane, Pence said in an interview with NBC News' "Meet the Press," "is inconsistent with our security, with our intelligence needs. And my hope is the president reconsiders it."

Saying there are "very real constitutional issues," Pence referred to the [part of the Constitution](#) that does not allow public officials to accept gifts from foreign governments.

When Trump was asked about the plane during a bilateral meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Wednesday, Ramaphosa interjected, saying, "I'm sorry I don't have a plane to give you."

"I wish you did," Trump responded.

Trump defended the offer from Qatar before he visited it last week, calling the gift "a great gesture" and saying turning it down would be foolish. "I could be a stupid person and say, 'No, we don't want a free, very expensive airplane,'" he said.

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