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Ukraine Signs Letter of Intent for Rafale Fighter Jets

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the defence sector with French President Emmanuel Macron on 17 November 2025, during the former's visit to a French air base near Paris. President Zelensky noted that "this document allows our country to purchase military equipment from the French defense industrial and technological base, including 100 Rafale F4 aircraft by 2035 for Ukraine's combat aviation, SAMP-T air defense systems, radars for air defense systems, air-to-air missiles and aerial bombs". President Macron noted that the Rafales would help in the "regeneration" of the Ukrainian military, with deliveries expected to be completed by 2035. The share price of Dassault Aviation, the maker of the Rafale, surged on the Paris stock exchange following the news. Dassault noted that this was a sign of confidence in the jet's operational capabilities.

Analysts, however, noted that the declaration of intent may or may not translate into the actual sale of the aircraft. The issue of funding the purchase of the jets was flagged. Reports noted that Ukraine may have to finance the purchase through financing from the European Union (EU). Ukraine had also signed a memorandum with Sweden in October 2025 for the possible sale of over 100 Gripen E fighter jets over the next decade. Most media reports noted that these memorandums/letters of intent would not materially impact Ukraine's current military capabilities, as they were long-term political commitments rather than concrete purchase orders.



Before the Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine had about 80 combat-capable aircraft, including Russian-origin Su-27 and MiG-29 aircraft. Reports noted that in the first few weeks of the war, Ukraine lost as many as one-third of these aircraft in Russian attacks. Subsequently, President Zelensky's repeated requests to Ukraine's Western allies to provide fighter aircraft were met with caution. In January 2023, President Macron flagged concerns about escalation. The latest development regarding the possible purchase of Rafale F4 fighter jets can therefore be seen as part of a longer-term effort to strengthen Ukraine's air force.

Ukraine had received a few French Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets, with reports indicating that at least three have been transferred since February 2025. At a meeting of the 'Coalition of the Willing' (made up of 34 countries) in October 2025, President Macron stated that France would "deliver additional Aster missiles, new training programs, and new Mirage aircraft in the coming days." The French Air and Space Force reportedly had around 26 Mirage 2000-5s at the beginning of 2025, which are being replaced by the Rafales. Most of the French Mirage fighters could be transferred to Ukraine in the coming years, according to analysts.

Other advanced weaponry and equipment, such as interceptors and guided bombs, that were mentioned as part of the 17 November Letter of Intent, will be delivered to Ukraine “in the very short term”, according to Macron. Ukraine, for instance, will receive the ‘new generation’ SAMP/T missile interceptor system. This is a mobile surface-to-air missile system jointly developed by France and Italy. The system can intercept both tactical ballistic missiles and hypersonic cruise missiles. Ukraine currently has three SAMP/T systems in its inventory (two of which have been donated by Italy). The air defence system shot down a Russian Sukhoi fighter jet in March 2025. Ukraine will receive an upgraded version of the air defence system beginning in 2026.

Overall, France has provided nearly Euros 9 billion in military and economic assistance to Ukraine since 2022. This includes Euros 6 billion relating to weapons transfers, maintenance, and training, and Euros 2.3 billion as a contribution to the European Peace Facility. This EU fund reimburses member states for arms deliveries.

On 17 November, President Zelensky also noted that his country will jointly produce interceptor drones with France. French drone companies, such as Delair and Alta Ares, and French defence majors, such as MBDA, Thales and Safran, attended the signing of the Letter of Intent in Paris on 17 November. Reports noted that joint development and/or production of such drones will help European manufacturers tap into Ukraine’s battlefield drone expertise. Apart from the agreement with France, Ukraine signed a licensing agreement with the United Kingdom on 27 November for the licensed production of the Ukrainian Octopus interceptor drone in the UK. Earlier in July 2025, Ukraine had signed agreements with US companies to produce drones jointly.

Post-Ceasefire Developments in Gaza

The 20-point Gaza Peace Plan was unveiled at the White House on 29 September 2025. Two facets of the first phase, i.e. uninterrupted entry of aid into Gaza and handover of all deceased hostages, remain incomplete. Hamas released 20 living hostages on 13 October 2025. Hamas has so far returned 26 dead bodies, while two are yet to be recovered. The subsequent phases require Hamas’ disarmament, Gaza’s demilitarisation, deployment of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), and a technocratic Palestinian administration supervised by the ‘Board of Peace’ led by US President Donald Trump. In the third phase, the Israel Defence Force (IDF) will progressively withdraw, maintaining a security perimeter until Gaza is deemed stable. On 18 October, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed a US-drafted resolution endorsing Trump’s Gaza plan, calling for the formation of the ISF and the Board of Peace, with Russia and China abstaining. Hamas rejected the UNSC resolution for imposing international guardianship and undermining Palestinian rights.

The Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) was established by US Central Command on 17 October in Kiryat Gat, Israel, to coordinate international efforts

supporting Gaza's stabilisation, oversee ceasefire implementation, recover dead hostages, facilitate aid delivery, and facilitate Phase Two of Trump's plan. The US-led body includes representatives from nearly 50 states and organisations. CMCC has somewhat affected Israel's operational freedom and sidelined the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to a contractor role in aid flow.

Despite the ceasefire that took effect on 10 October 2025, the situation in Gaza has remained volatile. Israel's security concerns post-ceasefire have persisted due to Hamas' refusal to disarm and relinquish political control. According to the Government Media Office in Gaza, Israel violated the ceasefire agreement at least 497 times between 10 October and 22 November through direct shootings, air and artillery attacks. Reportedly, IDF raided beyond the Yellow Line 21 times, bombed and shelled Gaza 228 times and demolished properties on more than 100 occasions.

The 19 October Rafah clashes marked the first significant breach of the truce, killing two IDF soldiers and triggering Israeli air and artillery strikes, killing 45 Palestinians. On 25 October, Israeli warplanes targeted a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operative in Nuseirat Camp. Tensions intensified on 27–28 October after Israel accused Hamas of faking a hostage handover and launched renewed strikes on Rafah, killing around 109 Palestinians. One IDF reservist was killed by Palestinian operatives near the Israeli-controlled Yellow Line. Hamas denied any provocation, accusing Israel of violating the ceasefire.

On 19 November, the IDF launched airstrikes across Gaza, killing 25 people, after Hamas operatives opened fire at Israeli troops near Khan Younis. Israel said it targeted senior Hamas commanders, including the Zeitoun Battalion chief and the head of Hamas's naval forces. Another Hamas operative was killed after crossing the Yellow Line. On 22 November, at least 21 Palestinians were killed in a series of drone and missile attacks in north and central Gaza. Between 10 October and 26 November, three IDF soldiers and more than 350 Palestinians have been killed. Israel has continued its restrictions on the flow of aid. Between 10 October and 25 November, only 5,458 trucks have reached their intended destinations inside Gaza.

Moreover, around 200 Hamas fighters are believed to be trapped behind the IDF-controlled Yellow Line in Rafah's Jenina neighbourhood. However, the number has since dropped to several dozen after months of strikes and starvation in tunnels. Israel remains focused on killing or capturing them. Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner have urged Israel to offer amnesty and safe passage to surrendered fighters as a pilot programme to test whether a broader decommissioning-and-amnesty model could work across Gaza. Israel has resisted, citing security risks and the likelihood that many fighters would face prosecution for past attacks.

In Israel, thousands rallied at Tel Aviv's Habima Square on 22 November 2025, demanding a state-led inquiry into the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack, rejecting Netanyahu's government probe as a 'whitewash'. Opposition leaders, bereaved

families, and activists insisted that only an independent judicial commission can ensure accountability for security failures and honour the victims.

On 23 November, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir dismissed or censured senior officers for failures on 7 October 2023. Former intelligence chief Aharon Haliva, operations chief Oded Basiuk, Southern Command head Yaron Finkelman, Unit 8200 chief Yossi Sariel, Gaza Division's Avi Rosenfeld, and others were removed from reserve duty. Current chiefs Shlomi Binder, Tomer Bar, and Navy head David Sa'ar Salama were censured but will finish their terms. Zamir called the attack a "systemic failure" requiring accountability.



On 24 November, the US- and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) shut down its four heavily guarded aid "mega-sites" after a US-brokered ceasefire, ending a mission widely criticised for replacing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and severely restricting access. Despite GHF claims of reliable aid delivery, over 2,000 Palestinians were killed in shootings, crushes, and stampedes while trying to access the assistance.

President Trump's Executive Order on the Muslim Brotherhood

President Donald Trump issued an Executive Order (EO) on 24 November 2025 to begin the process of designating the Jordanian, Egyptian, and Lebanese chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT). Before these designations are formalised, the Secretary of State, the Director of National Intelligence, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of the Treasury must collectively submit a report within 45 days, i.e., by 8 January 2026. Once the designations become applicable, all MB assets under United States (US) jurisdiction will be frozen, and it will become a punishable offence to provide any material support to the specific MB chapters, affiliated organisations or individuals.

The latest decision marks a continuation of his first term's approach to terrorism and counter-terrorism. In a speech in Riyadh in May 2017, President Trump had urged regional leaders to "drive out terrorists and extremists," while expressing



American solidarity for such initiatives. The EO, however, marks a pivot as this is the first time multiple chapters of the pan-Islamist MB have been categorised under designations commonly applied to ISIS or al-Qaeda affiliates.

The EO reflects a broader focus on dismantling material and organisational support to Hamas, the

Palestinian offshoot of MB, which has intensified particularly after the 7 October 2023 terror attacks. It also marks a continuation of the administration's policy to curate the narrative about Islamist parties and political Islam as the primary threat to the homeland vis-à-vis far-right extremism, aligning with Trump's Make America Great Again electoral base and political allies.

The militant Palestinian movement has long been classified as an FTO and SDGT by the U.S. for its targeted attacks and rhetoric against Israel, the most significant American ally in West Asia. One could also assert that by dismantling networks allegedly supporting Hamas, especially after October 2023, the Trump administration is seeking further to reduce Iran's influence in the broader region, as Tehran is perceived as an existential threat by Washington and Tel Aviv. One could recall that Hamas is considered an integral part of Iran's asymmetrical pursuit of power in West Asia via the Axis of Resistance, an ideological and strategic network formed with non-state actors to counter the West (led by the US) and Israel.

This EO might also be viewed as an attempt to persuade Arab governments or monarchies to accelerate normalisation of their bilateral ties with Israel, which has been obstructed by regional criticism of Tel Aviv's recent military campaign in the Gaza Strip, and to temper criticism surrounding the unconditional support provided by the US to Israel. For countries that have already established diplomatic ties with Israel, this EO could serve as an assurance that the US remains a vital security guarantor. This role has come under scrutiny over the past few years. The EO could play a crucial role in helping President Trump achieve this objective, as MB has been categorised as a terrorist outfit by countries in West Asia and North Africa, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.

In addition, it would strengthen the narrative that the US aligns with regional allies' security objectives. This would be a critical step for American foreign policy moving forward, especially after the outpour of criticism—condemned as state terrorism by Doha—regarding the US' failure to prevent the Israeli violation of Qatari sovereignty, which resulted in fatalities (Hamas and Qatari) in September 2025. Notably, the US's most extensive military base – Al Udeid Air Base – in the region is situated in Qatar, and it is believed that the Americans had prior information about the Israeli aerial attack.

Finally, this EO also has implications for the already polarised socio-political ecosystem within the US. Once the 45-day deadline passes, it can be expected that there might be increased surveillance on Muslim advocacy groups and activists who may or may not have any correlation to MB, while creating avenues for radicalisation by extremist recruiters. Furthermore, heightened monitoring and surveillance measures adopted by domestic intelligence and law enforcement agencies could lead to overreach and violations of personal liberties, as ambiguities or loopholes could be exploited by those in power. The EO could, however, play a decisive role in dismantling radicalisation incubators and material support channels that could be used to undermine U.S. interests.