

US Air Force Redirects Missile Funds to Convert Qatar's Gift into Trump's New Presidential Jet

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The U.S. Air Force has announced it will shift \$400 million from its nuclear missile modernization program to convert a Boeing 747 donated by Qatar into a secure presidential aircraft for Donald Trump.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink confirmed the decision last week during a Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee hearing. He explained the funds were more than needed in 2024 within the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile project, which is designed to replace the country's aging Minuteman III missiles.

"The Sentinel program remains fully funded and has all the resources it needs to stay on schedule," Meink told lawmakers.

However, the plan has sparked intense debate. Some lawmakers and defense analysts warned that pulling funds from a critical nuclear program could create new delays and weaken U.S. security. The Sentinel project has already grown to a projected cost of \$140 billion and has faced years of delays.

"This is not the time to take money away from our strategic deterrent," said Rep. Andrea Keller (D-MN). "We're using missile funds to retrofit a plane that was a gift from a foreign government. That raises serious questions."

The Boeing 747 was accepted by the U.S. in May as what Qatari officials described as a "gesture of partnership." While the Air Force says the donation helps modernize the Air Force One fleet faster, critics have also raised concerns over whether accepting such a costly gift violates constitutional rules.

Converting the aircraft into a presidential jet will require advanced security systems, secure communications, and protective countermeasures. While some experts estimate the upgrades could cost up to \$1 billion, Meink insisted the price will stay near \$400 million and be finished within a year.

The urgency comes as the two new Air Force One planes ordered during Trump's first term have been delayed until 2027 or 2028, leaving a gap in modern presidential transport.

A White House spokesperson defended the plan, saying, "The American people expect the president to have safe, reliable transportation. This project will deliver that much sooner."

Still, many lawmakers remain concerned about the precedent. "This decision sets a troubling example of mixing defense priorities with political optics," Keller said.

As work on the aircraft begins, the debate over cost, security, and constitutional limits shows no signs of ending.

