

Royal Saudi Air Force

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The **Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF)** (Arabic: القوات الجوية الملكية السعودية, *al-quwwāt al-ġawwiyyah al-malakiyyah as-su'ūdiyyah*), is the aviation branch of the Saudi Arabian armed forces. The RSAF has developed from a largely defensive military force into one with an advanced offensive capability. The RSAF maintains the third largest fleet of F-15s after the American and Japanese air forces.

The backbone of the RSAF is currently the Boeing F-15 Eagle, with the Panavia Tornado also forming a major component. The Tornado and many other aircraft were delivered under the Al Yamamah contracts with British Aerospace (now BAE Systems). The RSAF ordered various weapons in the 1990s, including Sea Eagle anti-ship missiles, laser-guided bombs and gravity bombs. Al-Salam, a successor to the Al Yamamah agreement will see 72 Eurofighter Typhoons delivered by BAE.

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History

The RSAF was formed in the mid-1920s with British assistance. It was re-organized in 1950 and began to receive American assistance from 1952 including the use of Dhahran Airfield by the United States Air Force.

The Saudi forces are equipped with mainly western hardware. Main suppliers are companies in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Both the UK and the US are involved in training programs conducted in Saudi Arabia.

Royal Saudi Air Force



Founded	8 January 1926 ^[1]
Country	 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Allegiance	Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
Type	Military aviation
Role	Aerial warfare
Size	40,000 active employees 23,000 conscript personnel^[2]
Part of	KSA Department of Defense Royal Saudi Arabian Armed Forces (1950–)
Headquarters	Ministry of Defence, Riyadh
Engagements	- Gulf War - Operation Desert Shield - Operation Desert Storm - Battle of Khafji - Intervention against ISIL - War in Yemen (2015–)^[3]
Commanders	
Chief of Air Staff	Lieutenant General Mohammed bin Ahmed Alshaa'lan, RSAF



Derelict RSAF T-28A Trojan, one of four acquired in the 1950s, at King Abdulaziz University

During the 1980s and 1990s, by Middle Eastern standards the armed forces of Saudi Arabia were relatively small. Its strength however was derived from advanced technology. The backbone of the fighter force is formed by 134 Tornados from which a batch of 48 Tornado IDS were ordered in 1993 under the al-Yamamah II program and 72 F-15S aircraft delivered from the mid-1990s that operate beside the more than 120 F-15C/D aircraft delivered starting in 1981. Aircraft training is executed on the Pilatus PC-9, BAe Hawk, Boeing F-15D Eagle and the Northrop F-5F Tiger II. The C-130 Hercules is the mainstay of the transport fleet and the Hercules is assisted by CASA CN-235s. Reconnaissance is performed by 17 Squadron with its RF-5E and the Boeing E-3A is the Airborne Early Warning platform operated by 18 Squadron.

The VIP support fleet consists of a wide variety of civil registered aircraft such as the Boeing 707, 737 and 747, Lockheed Tri-Stars, MD11s and G1159A as well as Lockheed L-100-30. The HZ- prefix used in the civilian registrations of these aircraft derived from the former name of the territory (Hejaz)

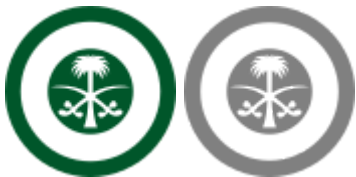
Recent purchases

The Al Yamamah contract was controversial because of the alleged bribes associated with its award. Nonetheless, the RSAF announced its intention to purchase the Typhoon from BAE Systems in December 2005. On 18 August 2006 a memorandum of understanding was signed for 72 aircraft in a GB£6-10 billion deal.^[4]

Following this order, the investigation of the Al Yamamah contract was suppressed by the British Prime minister Tony Blair in December 2006, citing "strategic interests" of the UK. On the 17 September 2007 Saudi Arabia announced it had signed a £4.4bn deal with BAE Systems for 72 Typhoons.^[5]

On 29 December 2011, the United States signed a \$29.4 billion deal to sell 84 F-15s in the SA (Saudi Advanced) configuration. The sale includes upgrades for the older F-15s up to the SA standard and related equipment and services.^[6]

On 23 May 2012, British defence firm BAE Systems is to sell 22 BAE Hawk advanced jet trainer aircraft to the Royal Saudi Air Force for a total of £1.9 billion (\$3 billion). The deal also includes simulators, ground and training equipment and spares.^[7]

	Insignia
Roundels	
Attack	Eurofighter Typhoon Panavia Tornado IDS
Bomber	Boeing F-15S Panavia Tornado IDS
Electronic warfare	Boeing RE-3A Boeing E-3A
Fighter	Eurofighter Typhoon Boeing F-15C/S
Interceptor	Eurofighter Typhoon Boeing F-15C/S
Reconnaissance	Northrop RF-5E Panavia Tornado IDS
Trainer	Pilatus PC-9A BAE Hawk
Transport	Lockheed C-130



RSAF Roundel on the side of a Lightning Aircraft

On April 2013, British defence firm BAE Systems delivers the first two new Typhoons of 24 to Saudi Arabia.

In 2013, the USAF tendered for security services to protect the Saudi air force from Cyberwarfare.^[8]

Divisions

The RSAF units are divided into Wings that are dispersed across the seven air bases:

- RSAF Wing 1 at King Khalid Air Base
- RSAF Wing 2 at King Fahad Air Base, Taif
- RSAF Wing 3 at King Abdulaziz Air Base, Dhahran
- RSAF Wing 4 at King Khalid Military City, Al Kharj
- RSAF Wing 5 at King Khalid Air Base, Khamis Mushait
- RSAF Wing 6 at Prince Sultan Air Base, Al Kharj
- RSAF Wing 7 at King Faisal Air Base, Tabuk
- RSAF Wing 8 at King Abdullah Air Base, Jeddah
- RSAF Wing 11 at King Abdulaziz Air Base, Dhahran



RSAF BAe Hawk

Units of the RSAF

- 1 Squadron (Royal Flight/BBJ&HS125)
- 2 Squadron (F-15)
- 3 Squadron (Eurofighter Typhoon)^[9]
- 4 Squadron (C-130)
- 5 Squadron (F-15)
- 6 Squadron (F-15)
- 7 Squadron (Tornado IDS)
- 8 Squadron (The Mushshak)
- 9 Squadron (PC-9)
- 10 Squadron (Eurofighter Typhoon)^[9]
- 11 Squadron (Royal Flight/G-IV&CE550)
- 12 Squadron (Bell 212)
- 13 Squadron (F-15)
- 14 Squadron (Helicopters)
- 15 Squadron (F-5B possibly transitioning to the Eurofighter Typhoon)
- 16 Squadron (C-130)
- 18 Squadron (E-3/KE-3A)
- 19 Squadron (RE-3A)
- 21 Squadron (Hawk)
- 22 Squadron (PC-9)
- 24 Squadron (A330 MRTT)^[10]
- 27 Squadron (Eurofighter Typhoon)
- 29 Squadron (Tornado ADV to be replaced with the Eurofighter Typhoon)
- 30 Squadron (Helicopters)
- 32 Squadron (KC-130H)
- 33 Squadron (Royal Medical Flight)
- 34 Squadron (F-15)
- 35 Squadron (Jetstream)
- 37 Squadron (F-15)



RSAF F-15C Eagle about to refuel from a KC-135 over the Persian Gulf



RSAF Boeing E-3A Sentry

- 44 Squadron (Bell 412)
- 55 Squadron (F-15)
- 75 Squadron (Tornado IDS)
- 77 Squadron (F-15)
- 79 Squadron (Hawk)
- 80 Squadron (Eurofighter Typhoon)^[11]
- 83 Squadron (Tornado IDS)
- 88 Squadron (Hawk)
- 92 Squadron (F-15S)^[10]
- 99 Squadron (Cougar)



RSAF Lockheed C-130H Hercules

Current aircraft inventory

On 11 August 2011, The Saudi Royal Air Force received 48 Typhoons from British Royal Air Force (Taif Airbase). On 12 August 2009, UPI reported that Saudi Arabia was seeking upgrades for their E-3 fleet and aerial refuelling tanker aircraft.^[12]

In October 2010, an interest for a 60 billion USD defense procurement package from the US was unveiled. It consisted of \$29.4 billion for 84 F-15SA fighters, upgrade of the existing F-15S to the same standard, parts and munitions as well as another 30 billion for 72 UH-60M, 36 AH-6I, 36 AH-64D, 12 MD530 helicopters and parts. The helicopter request is for the Saudi Arabian Army.^[13]

Aircraft	Origin	Role	Version	Quantity	Note
Fighter aircraft					
McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle		Strike fighter	SA S	84 on order 70	70 S variant to be upgraded to SA standard. ^{[14][15]}
McDonnell Douglas F-15C Eagle		Fighter	C D	70 16	^[16]
Eurofighter Typhoon		Multirole fighter	T.2 T.3A	48 24	72 on order, all will be manufactured by BAE Warton facility, instead of planned final assembly line in Saudi Arabia. ^[17] A further 72 may be up. ^[18]
Panavia Tornado IDS		Ground attack		80	Being upgraded at a cost of \$4.66 billion.
Trainer aircraft					
BAe Hawk		Advanced trainer	Mk. 65 Mk. 65A	29	22 Hawk AJT on order, delivery planned in 2016.
BAe Jetstream		Trainer	31	1	2 delivered, S/n 2102 crashed near Dhahran 14 October 1989, killing all 5 on board ^[19]
Raytheon King Air 350		Special Mission / Electronic Warfare		6	3 on order
Super Mushshaaq		Trainer	—	20	
Pilatus PC-9		Trainer	—	47	
Pilatus PC-21		Trainer	—	40	55 on order for 2014
Cirrus SR22		Trainer		24	replaced The Reims Cessna F172s
Transport / Special mission					
Airbus A340		Transport	A340-213	1	Royal Flight
Airbus A330 MRTT		Transport & refuelling	MRTT	6 ^[20]	
BAe 125		Transport	B	4	Royal Flight
Boeing 747		VIP Transport	747-300 747SP	2	Royal Flight, 747-300 from Saudi Arabian Airlines
Boeing 757		Medical Transport	—	1	
Boeing 737		Transport	BBJ1 BBJ2	1 1	Royal Flight
Saab 2000 AEW&C		airborne early warning and control	2		
Boeing E-3 Sentry		AWACS Airborne	E-3A KE-3A	5 5	E-3A seeking upgrades Being upgraded & then replaced by

		Refuelling SIGINT/ELINT	RE-3A	3	A330 MRRT, 3 converted to RE-3A reconnaissance aircraft. ^[21]
AN-132		Electronic warfare		0	2 on order, a further 98 on order in multiple variants, to be build in Saudi Arabia under license
Antonov An-148		Medical Transport		0	4 on order
Antonov An-178		Surveillance and reconnaissance / Transport		0	30 on order
CASA CN-235		Transport	M-10	4	Royal Flight
Cessna 550 Citation Bravo		Transport	C550	4	Royal Flight
Gates Learjet 35		Transport	A	2	Both transferred to the Royal Saudi Armed Forces Medical Wing in July 2009
Gulfstream III		Transport	—	2	
Gulfstream IV		Transport	—	1	
Gulfstream V		Medical Transport	—	2	
Lockheed C-130 Hercules		Transport Airborne refuelling VIP transport	E/H KC-130H VC-130H	30 7 5	
Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules		Transport Airborne Refuelling	C-130J-30	0	20 on order. ^[22]
			KC-130J	2	3 on order. ^[22]
Lockheed L-100 Hercules		Transport	L-100-30	6	
McDonnell Douglas MD-11		Transport	MD-11	1	Royal Flight
Transport / Attack helicopters					
Agusta-Bell 212	 	Transport helicopter	—	27	
Agusta-Sikorsky AS-61		Transport helicopter	A-4	3	Royal Flight
Bell 205		Transport Helicopter	—	24	
Bell 212 / Bell 412		Transport helicopter	EP	37	
Eurocopter AS532 Cougar		Combat search and rescue	M	12	

Eurocopter AS365 Dauphin		Naval helicopter Medical helicopter	F N	24	The SA-365F variants are operated by Royal Saudi Naval Aviation.
Eurocopter AS332 Super Puma		Naval helicopter	F	13	Operated by Royal Saudi Naval Aviation.

Gallery

Current and former aircraft of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF)



An RSAF Eurofighter Typhoon at Malta on delivery



An RSAF Tornado F3 during Operation Desert Storm



A Boeing F-15S Eagle, the prime strike fighter of the RSAF



Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force pilot adjusts his oxygen mask while in the cockpit of an F-5 Tiger II aircraft prior to flying a training mission in 1982.



A RSAF British Aerospace Hawk in 2011



A RSAF F-5 Tiger during the Gulf War



C-130 Saudi Air Force

Commanders

The following officers have been commanders of the RSAF:

- 1985–1996, Lieutenant General Ahmed Ibrahim Behery
- *Unknown*- 4 April 2004, Lieutenant General Abdul Aziz bin Mohammad Al-Henadi
- 5 April 2004, Prince Lieutenant General Abdulrahman bin Fahd Al-Faisal^[23]
- Lieutenant General Mohamed Al Ayesh
- Lieutenant General Fayyadh H. AL Ruwaili
- May 14, 2014 - June 10, 2015 Lieutenant General Mohammad Bin Ahmad Al-Shaalan^[24]

See also

- Royal Saudi Air Force Museum
- Saudi ranks
- Prince Sultan Advanced Technology Research Institute (معهد الأمير سلطان لأبحاث التقنيات المتقدمة), a Defense research and development center established by Royal Saudi Air Force and King Saud University.

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External links

- RSAF official website (<http://www.rsaf.gov.sa/Pages/Default.aspx>)
- Order of Battle (<http://www.scramble.nl/sa.htm>) at *Scramble* magazine
- "The Royal Saudi Air Force - A Paper Tiger, Minus the Tiger" (<http://www.strategypage.com/militaryforums/message.aspx?boardid=40&messageid=173&page=1#startofcomments>)



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