# UNITED STATES OPENS A NEW CHAPTER IN CIVIL NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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On 22 July 2026, the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) signed an Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy pursuant to Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (the 123 Agreement). This agreement marks a significant milestone in a negotiation process spanning US administrations and over a decade of bilateral discussions.[1] Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act establishes the conditions and process for nuclear cooperation with other countries.[2] Once an agreement is established, the United States can engage in civilian nuclear cooperation with the foreign state, including the export of nuclear technology, equipment, fuel, and related services. Section 123 agreements are a long-standing feature of US nonproliferation policy and have been negotiated with 50 countries, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Taiwan.[3]

The US-KSA agreement follows years of debate regarding the conditions under which the United States would support the KSA's growing civilian nuclear ambitions.[4] According to the US Department of Energy, the agreement establishes the legal basis for a “decades-long, multi-billion-dollar partnership” intended to facilitate the deployment of US nuclear technologies and enable US companies to participate in the development of the KSA's civil nuclear program. The agreement was signed by US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright and KSA Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud. Under the terms of the 123 Agreement, the parties are bound by a bilateral safeguards arrangement intended to support nuclear safety, security, and nonproliferation objectives. Following presidential approval pursuant to Section 123(b) of the Atomic Energy Act, the agreement was transmitted to Congress for 90 days of continuous session review.[5]

The 123 Agreement carries significance beyond the commercial nuclear sector. For years, successive US administrations and members of Congress debated whether any US-KSA nuclear cooperation arrangement should require the KSA to forgo domestic uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing activities, conditions often referred to as the “gold standard” of nuclear cooperation.[6] The final agreement reflects a negotiated approach that has attracted considerable attention from policymakers, nonproliferation experts, and regional stakeholders given its implications for US engagement in the Middle East, international competition in the global nuclear marketplace, and the future of KSA's nuclear ambitions. The agreement also underscores broader US policy efforts to expand US participation in international nuclear projects and strengthen the competitiveness of the US civil nuclear industry as countries around the world pursue large reactor, small modular reactor, and advanced nuclear technologies.

The firm continues to advise clients across the full spectrum of nuclear regulatory, transactional, project development, governmental affairs, international trade, national security, and public policy matters affecting the

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nuclear sector. We also have extensive experience across the Middle East, including in the KSA, having advised on a number of high-profile infrastructure projects in the KSA across the nuclear, rail, and technology sectors.

Our multidisciplinary Nuclear Energy practice group represents reactor developers, utilities, investors, fuel-cycle participants, technology companies, manufacturers, and institutional stakeholders navigating domestic and international nuclear opportunities.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Agreement for Cooperation Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (July 22, 2026). This agreement was transmitted to Congress in late August for a 90-day review period. See https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CDOC-119hdoc191/pdf/CDOC-119hdoc191.pdf.

[2] *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2153(a).

[3] *See 123 Agreements for Peaceful Cooperation*, U.S. DEP'T OF ENERGY, https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/123-agreements-peaceful-cooperation (last updated July 11, 2026). The 123 Agreement with the European Atomic Energy Community applies to Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

[4] *United States and Saudi Arabia Reach Historic Nuclear Cooperation Agreement*, U.S. DEP'T OF ENERGY (July 22, 2026), https://www.energy.gov/articles/united-states-and-saudi-arabia-reach-historic-nuclear-cooperation-agreement.

[5] Communication from the President of the United States Transmitting an Agreement for Cooperation Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Convening Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, H. Doc. 119-191 (Aug. 27, 2026).

[6] CONG. RSCH. SERV., PROSPECTS FOR U.S.-SAUDI NUCLEAR ENERGY COOPERATION, IF10799 (2026).

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