

United Airlines A350 Order To Be Terminated?

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Daniel Fowkes 14 FEB 2026

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*ZHUKOVSKY, MOSCOW REGION, RUSSIA - AUGUST 24, 2015:
Airbus A350-941 F-WXWB manufactured by Airbus Industrie
performing demonstration flight - Photo: Fasttailwind /
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United Airlines' A350-900 order is at risk of being terminated, with [The Airline Observer](#) reporting that the U.S. carrier has shelved plans to take delivery of the aircraft.



First ordered in 2009, the airline has a 45 A350-900 order; however, it is currently in dispute with Rolls-Royce.

That dispute was highlighted in a recent United States Securities and Exchange Commission filing, in which the airline disclosed that, after an initial agreement with Rolls-Royce, it paid \$175 million.

However, a breach by Rolls-Royce led United to demand, in December 2025, a commitment payment and to signal an intent to escalate the contractual situation.

Rolls-Royce failed to make the payment. The airline now says it has terminated its referenced agreements following the breach and has taken necessary steps to recover the owed amount from the engine manufacturer.

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United Airlines A350 Order Background

United Airlines' A350 contract holds a unique but unfortunate position: it is among the most heavily deferred commercial orders to date.

The first order for the aircraft comprised 25 units, and the business believed at the time of the 2009 commitment that the Airbus widebody would play an integral role in replacing existing models, which were expected to age.

A United Airlines A350 – Flightsim rendering with thanks to plus44designs

Given that the program represented a new, efficient era of flight, the benefits were clear: improved operating economics across the airline's international network and the opportunity to deliver a fresh customer experience.

At the time, what seemed like a routine order for the Airbus A350, with the full intention of integrating it into the business very quickly, became unlikely to proceed, leading to well over a decade of challenges.

A Mess: Deferrals, Variant Switches & More

Over the past 17 years, since the order was first placed, United has on several occasions adjusted its order book in response to evolving trends, strategies, and other factors; the A350 was not included in these adjustments.

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Aside from persistent delays that have delayed delivery, the carrier eventually upgraded its A350-900 order to the high-capacity A350-1000, adding more units.

*Farnborough, Hampshire, UK – July 16 2018: Airbus A350-1000
XWB taxiing off the runway at Farnborough air show 2018 –
Photo: Graham Cornall (shutterstock)*

Then, United Airlines' A350 backlog would again reverse as the business switched back to the A350-900, and each time it deferred delivery, without any further information on when the jet would be delivered.

During these deferrals and in the interim, United Airlines would further strengthen its order book for Boeing aircraft, notably the 787 Dreamliner, which serves as the current backbone of the next-generation widebody fleet.

United Airlines operates every variant of the 787, with each model serving a different purpose and demonstrating the model's versatility. Still, a place for the A350 in the fleet has always seemed to be lacking.

United Said It Must Make A Decision

17 years after the first placement, tensions over the deal have continued to surface in headlines.

Speaking at the [APEX Global Expo](#) in 2025, Scott Kirby, the CEO of United Airlines, discussed the A350 deal and said that, in considering its future, it needed to keep all options open.

With delays persisting for next-generation jets, Kirby highlighted that it would need to ensure its backlog remained strong, and with outgoing aircraft such as the 757 and 767, a replacement, especially for the latter, would be required.

A United Airlines Boeing 767 – Photo: Aero Icarus

United Airlines expects to retire its Boeing 767 fleet by the end of the decade and will need a replacement. This is also where we identified an ideal timeframe for introducing the A350.

With a decision cited as required during this period and Airbus required to formulate its delivery schedule, there was renewed hope that the A350 might be introduced; now that seems all the more uncertain.

Is A Cancellation About To Come?

While reports indicate that United Airlines' A350 deal is likely to be drawn into the recent dispute with Rolls-Royce, the order's fate is now, for the first time, unclear.

Reporting from Airinsight, based on sources, indicates the order is still on with strong authority. As for its delivery plan, it remains unclear given the parties' lengthy history.

Airbus A350-900 MSN1 during rollout

However, one thing that remains abundantly clear is that United Airlines must decide on its A350 order sooner rather than later, as not only are 767s

aging, but its 777 fleet is as well. Widebody availability is becoming scarcer despite its 787 order backlog.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Daniel Fowkes is a Melbourne-based aviation analyst and journalist with over a decade of industry experience. As founder of Dj's Aviation, he delivers trusted analysis on aircraft, airline strategy and global aviation trends for djsaviation.net

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