



## Antony Blinken's Visit and its Significance in Mending Ties with the Region

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Source: [Arab News](#)

While the decades-long strategic relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US has hit a few bumps recently, bilateral ties appear to be back on track, with the US putting in the effort needed to mend the relationship. In June 2023, the [White House](#) announced that: “Secretary of State Antony Blinken would travel to Saudi Arabia June 6-8 to meet with Saudi officials to discuss US-Saudi strategic cooperation on regional and global issues and a range of bilateral issues, including economic and security cooperation.” The visit marked the third consecutive month a senior official from the Biden Administration has paid a visit to the Kingdom following Jake Sullivan, the White House National Security Adviser, who traveled to Jeddah in May, and NSC Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk and Special



Presidential Envoy Amos Hochstein who visited the Kingdom in April. By and large, these visits have signaled a positive shift in the relationship, in which the US recognizes that the Kingdom was, and always be, an essential partner in promoting regional and global peace and stability on various fronts.

While in the Kingdom, the Secretary of State met with HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss shared priorities such as countering terrorism through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, achieving peace in Yemen, and deepening economic and scientific cooperation. Blinken also participated in a US-GCC Ministerial Meeting during which the US and GCC states discussed growing cooperation to promote security, stability, de-escalation, regional integration, and economic opportunities across the Middle East, particularly in finding a solution to the crisis in Sudan, ending the conflict in Yemen, and countering Iran’s destabilizing behavior. Lastly, Blinken co-hosted a ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS with Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister, HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

Following these meetings, Blinken [explained](#) that the bilateral relationship has reached a point of “increasing convergence” despite “a difference in views” over the OPEC+ decision to cut oil-production targets last October. In his statement, the Secretary of State [elaborated](#): “We’ve had a partnership together for decades that was grounded in security, in cooperation, energy and, in recent years, counterterrorism, and that foundation remains...But what we’re also seeing — and what this visit reconfirms — is that there are important opportunities for our two countries to work together to advance some very positive issues, very positive trends.” These opportunities include de-escalating tensions in the region as well as collaboration on health, climate, energy, and food security.



Source: [Al Arabiya](#)

On China, the Secretary of State reiterated President Biden’s message from the Jeddah Security and Development Summit last year: The US is not abandoning the region in the face of growing Chinese influence. From the Kingdom’s perspective, it was reiterated that Saudi Arabia does not see ties to China as any type of replacement for its relations with the United States. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia continues to prefer close ties to the US and favors US security and defense deals over any other alternative that currently presents itself.

Washington increasingly understands that the motives behind the Gulf’s growing relationship with China are economic diversification and accessing the Chinese market. Specifically, China is Saudi Arabia’s most important trading partner, while in other parts of the Middle East, trade with China is [three times](#) the trade with the US. The US even had a fairly welcoming position on China’s recent involvement in brokering the agreement between the Kingdom and Iran, with Blinken recently [saying](#) that they “applaud what happened,” and that “if countries — including China — can play a positive role, wherever it is, in helping to advance peace, to reduce tensions then, again, I think that’s positive, that’s what we should all be trying to do.” In fact, Blinken [explained](#) that “we’re not asking anyone to choose between the US and China. We’re simply trying to demonstrate the benefits of our partnership and the affirmative agenda that we bring.”



Source: [Arab News](#)

Moving forward, it is expected that the US and Saudi Arabia will take measures to re-establish mutual confidence and continue to strengthen their decades-long strategic relations. Already, the visit by the US Secretary of State yielded positive results. Firstly, the Kingdom and the US have taken steps toward finding a solution to the situation in Sudan, with the two countries arranging for a brief cease-fire following agreement from representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). There will be further coordination to allow for a window of opportunity for humanitarian assistance and to find a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Secondly, on the global security front, HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan [announced](#) that Saudi Arabia joined the presidency of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh Africa Focus Group, along with the US. In a joint statement by the two countries, Saudi Arabia and the United States [asserted](#) that “the responsibility and momentum of the international community against this shared adversary was evident today. The Global Coalition is the largest international coalition and remains intent on defeating Daesh/ISIS anywhere it operates.”



Source: [Arab News](#)

Thirdly, the GCC states and the US released a joint statement that outlines cooperation on issues important to the region. On Iran, the ministers “[reaffirmed](#) their support for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and renewed their call for Iran to fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency.” On Yemen, Syria, and Sudan, they underscored

their commitment to promoting peace and stability and political solutions to conflicts. Moreover, on Iraq, the ministers welcomed the progress made on the GGC Interconnection Authority project to link Iraq to the GCC electricity grid and welcomed continued progress to support a stable and sovereign Iraq. Additionally, with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they “[underscored](#) their commitment to reaching a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East in accordance with the two-state solution, along 1967 borders with mutually agreed swaps consistent with internationally recognized parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative.”

The visit by Secretary Blinken can therefore be seen as allowing US-GCC ties to be recalibrated on several fronts as the two sides anticipate boosting their collaboration in a number of areas, including clean energy, climate change, maintaining regional peace and stability, and advancing health and food security. Yet, to say that all issues have been resolved or to suggest a new page has been turned, might be an overstatement. While the US-GCC relationship remains robust and resilient, development regionally and globally is moving at such a fast pace that bilateral ties need continuous attention and flexibility. In that context, there is still a learning curve in Washington when it comes to partnering with a Kingdom that is increasingly influential and prominent on the global stage.

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