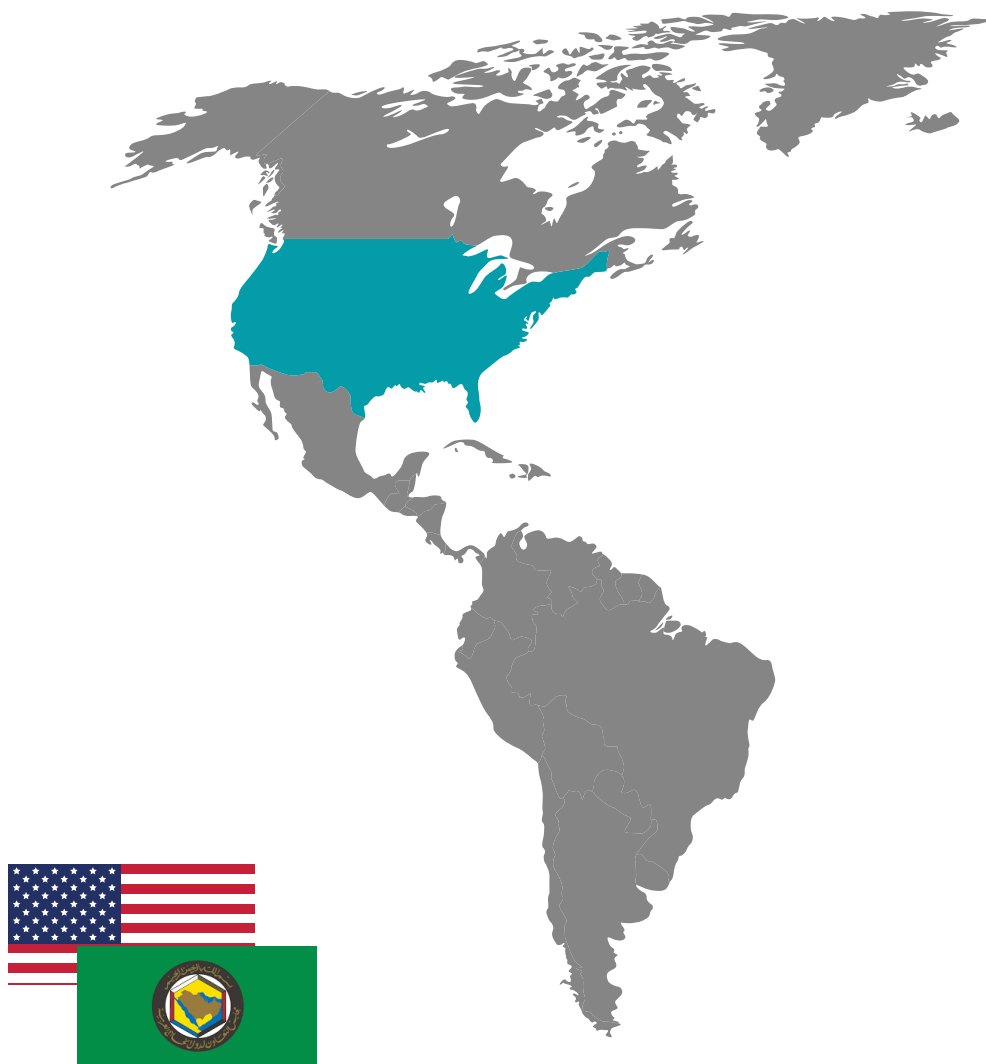


**Gulf Research Center**  
Knowledge for All

# U.S - GCC Relations



## 1. Key Domestic Developments

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th President of the United States, marking his return to the White House after a four-year hiatus. In his inauguration speech, he focused heavily on internal and domestic policies as well as his vision for an “America First” agenda. President Trump vowed to “completely and totally reverse” the policies of former President Biden, promising a “golden age” for the United States. “From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land,” he declared. The President vowed to prioritize domestic interests, signaling a shift in the nation’s global posture. “We will no longer allow ourselves to be taken advantage of,” he said, referring to international relationships and trade. President Trump declared the day as “liberation day” and announced a “revolution of common sense” aimed at restoring American prosperity and pride. President Trump signed approximately 50 executive orders, signaling a significant shift from Biden-era policies. Key actions included:

- **Immigration:** Declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border, reinstated the “Remain in Mexico” policy, deployed troops to the southern border, designated drug cartels as terrorist organizations, ended birthright citizenship for noncitizens’ children, and shut down the CBP One app. The White House has claimed that the United States reached negative net migration for the first time in fifty years, though independent estimates vary.
- **Energy and Climate Change:** Declared a national energy emergency to boost domestic energy production, expanded oil and gas supply, revoked the electric vehicle mandate, withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO), and passed the “One Big Beautiful Bill” phasing out clean energy subsidies and opening public lands for expanded resource extraction.

- **Trade:** Announced sweeping new tariffs on foreign imports to protect American workers, including a 100 % tariff on imported computer chips unless firms commit to U.S. manufacturing. Apple secured an exemption after pledging a \$600 billion investment in domestic production. Created an External Revenue Service to manage duties.
- **Social Policies:** Limited gender recognition to male and female, ended diversity and inclusion programs in federal agencies, reinstated U.S. service members dismissed over vaccine noncompliance with back pay.
- **January 6 Pardons:** Pardoned 1,500 individuals involved in the Capitol riots of January 2021.

Economic indicators show mixed performance. After a contraction in Q1 2025, GDP rebounded with 3.0 % annualized growth in Q2, driven by consumer spending but tempered by falling investment and exports. Inflationary pressures persist due to tariffs, while labor markets face strain from reduced immigration.

Domestic challenges and political polarization between the two major sides of the American political divide remain as stark as ever. The administration has increased federal law enforcement presence in Washington, D.C. to address crime amid partisan divides over gun control. Democrats have pushed for assault weapon bans, while Republicans defend Second Amendment rights. An ageing population, infrastructure renewal needs, homelessness, a drug crisis, and state-by-state abortion restrictions continue to dominate political discourse.





### *Key U.S. Economic and Social Data*

- **GDP:** 29.18 trillion USD (2024)
- **GDP per capita:** 85,809.90 USD (2024)
- **Annual Growth Rate:** 2.8% (2024)
- **Inflation:** 2.9% (2024)
- **Population:** 345.43 million (2024)
- **Unemployment Rate:** 4.1% (2024)
- **Credit Rating:** Standard & Poor's credit rating for the United States stands at AA+ with stable outlook. Moody's credit rating for the United States was last set at Aaa with negative outlook. DBRS' credit rating for the United States was last reported at AAA with stable outlook.

## **2. U.S. Foreign Policy**

While President Trump has described himself as a “peacemaker and unifier,” his second term has been defined by a transactional, sovereignty-focused foreign policy. In early 2025, he ordered a 90-day review of all U.S. foreign development assistance, effectively halting most USAID programs, later terminating 83% and initiating their integration into the State Department. The administration withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council, cut funding to UNRWA, and sanctioned the International Criminal Court.

**Europe:** President Trump has already sparked turmoil in Europe, particularly in Copenhagen, following comments that the U.S. wanted to acquire Greenland, which is an autonomous territory of Denmark. Europe remains wary of President Trump's stance on Ukraine, as he has criticized U.S. aid to Ukraine and NATO countries not meeting the 2% defense spending target. In February 2025, U.S. and Russian officials met in Riyadh to discuss ending the war without Ukrainian or European participation, prompting backlash. Vice President JD Vance stated that the U.S. would cease funding the war, urging Europe to take the lead. Despite tensions, in July 2025, the U.S. and EU reached a trade agreement imposing a 15% U.S. tariff on EU goods, ending a months-long dispute.

**Canada:** Relations soured after tariff threats escalated from 25% to 35% over migration and fentanyl trafficking. The administration revived rhetoric about Canada becoming the “51st state,” which Ottawa firmly rejected.

**Mexico:** President Trump designated Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, a decision that could escalate tensions with Mexico. Symbolic actions, such as renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the “Gulf of America,” and threats of 25% tariffs on Mexican imports are further straining relations.

**China:** U.S.-China relations are likely to grow more contentious, building on Trump's earlier trade war and targeting of Huawei. After announcing a 10 % tariff on all Chinese goods effective February 1, 2025, the U.S. and China entered a 90-day tariff truce in May (yet to be renewed), raising the risk of renewed escalation.

### *Key Foreign Policy Initiatives*

- In August 2025, the United States brokered a peace deal between Azerbaijan and Armenia, ending decades of conflict between the two sides. The deal includes a transport corridor called the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity.”
- In June 2025, the United States facilitated a peace deal between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda to help end the decades-long deadly fighting in eastern Congo while helping the U.S. government and American companies gain access to critical minerals in the region.
- The United States completed one of the last major troop departures from Niger after the ruling leadership in the country ordered the troops to leave ahead of the September 15, 2024, deadline. As a result, the U.S. is re-evaluating its policy on the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and its respective aid initiatives.

- The U.S. signed the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) with Bahrain on September 13, 2023.
- The U.S. announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the 2023 G20 Summit in India alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

### 3. U.S.-GCC Fact Sheet

- U.S. trade in goods with GCC countries (2024, USD million):

Country	Exports	Imports	Balance
Bahrain	1,550.5	1,095.6	454.9
Kuwait	2,213.3	1,536.8	676.5
Oman	1,790.3	1,212.5	577.8
Qatar	3,133.2	1,773.5	1,359.6
Saudi Arabia	11,905.1	12,033.2	-128.1
United Arab Emirates	24,605.7	6,818.6	17,787.1

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)



### *Establishment of Diplomatic Relationships*

- U.S.-GCC Diplomatic Relations: Saudi Arabia (1940 following recognition in 1931), Kuwait (1961), Bahrain (1971), United Arab Emirates (1972), Qatar (1972), and Oman (1972).

### *Key Research Centers and Think Tanks*

- American Enterprise Institute: <https://www.aei.org>
- Arab Gulf States Institute: <https://agsi.org>
- Atlantic Council: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>
- Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu>
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <https://carnegieendowment.org>
- Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org>
- Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org>
- Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org>
- Foreign Policy Research Institute: <https://www.fpri.org>
- Heritage Foundation: <https://www.heritage.org>
- Hudson Institute: <https://www.hudson.org>
- Middle East Institute: <https://www.mei.edu>
- Middle East Policy Council: <https://mepc.org>
- Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft: <https://quincyinst.org>
- RAND Corporation: <https://www.rand.org>
- Stimson Center: <https://www.stimson.org>
- The Century Foundation: <https://tcf.org>
- United States Institute of Peace: <https://www.usip.org/>



- Center for a New American Security (CNAS): <https://www.cnas.org/>
- Baker Institute for Public Policy: <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/>
- Congressional Research Service: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>

### *Selected Key Regional Experts*

- [Karen Young](#) (Middle East Institute)
- [Hussein Ibish](#) (Arab Gulf Institute in Washington)
- [David des Roches](#) (National Defense University)
- [F. Gregory Gause, III](#) (Texas A&M University)
- [Frederic Wehrey](#) (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
- [Kirsten Fontenrose](#) (The Atlantic Council)
- [Bilal Y. Saab](#) (Chatham House)
- [Kristian Coates Ulrichsen](#) (The Washington Institute)

### **4. Key Developments in U.S.-GCC Relations**

The United States and GCC nations have maintained a resilient, multifaceted partnership for decades, anchored in shared priorities like energy security, regional stability, and counterterrorism. Under President Trump's second administration, this relationship has intensified through renewed diplomacy, vast economic agreements, and reinforced security ties. Gulf leaders greeted Trump's return with optimism, recalling his first term's emphasis on strengthening economic and security bonds. His 2025 Middle East tour, starting in Saudi Arabia, symbolically echoed his 2017 visit and underscored a dual-track strategy: expansive economic cooperation alongside sustained political and diplomatic engagement.

Economic alignment has emerged as a core driver of the U.S.-GCC relationship. Trump's May 2025 visit saw the signing of over \$2 trillion in deals,

integrating U.S. innovation with Gulf states' long-term national strategies. These commitments reflect a U.S. pivot from a purely defense-focused approach toward supporting the Gulf's economic diversification and technology ambitions. Although some skepticism remains about the full realization of such large-scale deals, their integration with national transformation agendas suggests greater potential for follow-through.

The GCC has evolved from a passive security recipient to an active geopolitical player, mediating in conflicts from Palestine to Ukraine and facilitating U.S.-Iran contacts. Trump's 2025 visit also marked a policy shift: steps toward restoring U.S.-Syria relations, lifting certain sanctions after consultations with Gulf and Turkish leaders, and high-level U.S.-Syrian meetings, moves aligned with Saudi diplomatic policy.

The most serious recent challenge arose in June 2025 when U.S. B-2 bombers struck Iranian nuclear sites over proliferation concerns. Iran retaliated the next day with missile strikes on the U.S. Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the first direct Iranian attack on U.S. forces in the Gulf, seen regionally as a violation of Gulf sovereignty. This prompted immediate regional security measures and heightened fears of broader conflict. GCC states, highly vulnerable due to proximity to Iran and hosting critical U.S. assets, pushed for preventive diplomacy and multilateral conflict resolution. While they avoided outright condemnation of the U.S. strikes, they strongly denounced Iran's retaliation. This balanced stance aimed to preserve U.S. security ties while discouraging Iranian aggression and safeguarding Gulf sovereignty.

The U.S., meanwhile, sought to cast itself as both deterrent and peace broker. Trump's public statements, including urging Israel not to escalate against Iran after a ceasefire, signaled an intent to preserve regional stability rather than enable unilateral military action. Nonetheless, Gulf leaders want the U.S. to play a more active, even-handed role in de-escalating the Gaza conflict, pressing Israel toward a two-state solution.





However, divergences remain over the United States' policy on Iran, Palestine, and regional security frameworks. Still, the trajectory suggests both sides will manage differences pragmatically while deepening cooperation. In a shifting global order, the U.S.-GCC partnership, rooted in economic synergy, strategic dialogue, and mutual security concerns, will remain central to Middle East geopolitics, with adaptability and shared vision as its defining strengths.

### U.S.-GCC

- In May 2025, Riyadh hosted the GCC-U.S. Summit on President Trump's second day in the Kingdom, reinforcing broader GCC-U.S. relations.
- On January 10, 2025, GCC Secretary General Jasem Albudaiwi and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf discussed support for regional stability and security via phone call. They also exchanged views on the latest regional developments and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the GCC and the United States.
- On the sidelines of the 20th IISS Manama Dialogue, GCC Secretary General Jasem Albudaiwi and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf met on December 6, 2024, to discuss the cooperative U.S.-GCC relationship and explored ways to strengthen and develop the strategic partnership. It addressed economic and security cooperation in equal measure.
- In April 2024, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to Saudi Arabia and met in Riyadh with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as Palestine Liberation Organization Secretary General Hussein Al Sheikh, to discuss the war in Gaza. The U.S. Secretary also met with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

### U.S.-Bahrain

- On July 9, 2024, Bahrain's King Hamad received the commander of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Fifth Fleet, Vice Adm. George Wikoff, and the U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain, Steven C. Bondy, to discuss regional navigation, protection, and trade. During this meeting, the King of Bahrain praised and acknowledged the historical and bilateral ties between the two nations as well as their cooperation, particularly in the areas of military and defense. The officials also discussed recent regional and international developments.
- On March 19, 2024, the U.S. approved a potential \$2.2 billion sale of Abram tanks to Bahrain. According to a statement by the Pentagon, the deal would improve Bahrain's ability to meet potential threats through the provision of a credible force strong enough to deter opponents and give it the capability to take part in regional operations with the U.S. and their allies. The decision to authorize the sale of tanks and other equipment to Bahrain was made on the basis of the Kingdom's status as a prominent non-NATO ally to the U.S., as well as being the home of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT).
- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Bahrain's leader, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in Manama. The two officials discussed the Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and reaffirmed their shared commitment to international law and freedom of navigation through Operation Prosperity Guardian.

### U.S.-Kuwait

- In December 2023, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, His Excellency Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al Sabah, to convey his condolences on the passing of His Highness Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



- In February 2023, the U.S. approved the possible sale of military systems to Kuwait for an estimated cost of \$250 million.

### U.S.-Oman

- On April 12, 2025, the United States and Iran embarked on a potentially pivotal diplomatic endeavor concerning reviving dialogue over Iran's nuclear program, holding indirect but "constructive" talks in Muscat, Oman. These discussions, mediated by Oman's Foreign Minister H.E. Badr Albusaidi, marked the first substantive engagement between Tehran and President Donald Trump's administration since his return to the White House. The negotiations ended due to the 12-Day War.
- In June 2024, U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia and Oman to continue discussions on Houthi detentions of UN, diplomatic, and international NGO staff and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.
- In May 2024, U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to continue discussions with partners regarding the peace process in Yemen and an immediate end to the reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways.
- In May 2024, Washington's top Middle East official, Brett McGurk, and the deputy special envoy for Iran, Abram Paley, spoke with Iranian counterparts through intermediaries from Oman to reduce regional tensions.
- U.S. Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons Cindy Dyer traveled to Muscat, Oman, from January 20-23, 2024. Ambassador Dyer discussed with her Omani counterparts their endeavors to criminally investigate reports of domestic worker abuse and prosecute and convict labor traffickers, particularly those who exploit migrant workers.
- The United States and Oman held the inaugural meeting of the Subcommittee on Environmental

Affairs on February 19-20, 2024, under the United States–Oman Free Trade Agreement, and the fourth meeting of the Joint Forum on Environmental Cooperation (Joint Forum) under the United States–Oman Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation. The two countries discussed efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

### U.S.-Qatar

- During President Trump's visit to Qatar, Qatar entered into a \$1.2 trillion economic exchange agreement, which included \$243.5 billion in commercial and defense deals. These deals encompassed a \$96 billion aviation contract for up to 210 Boeing aircraft, as well as \$8.5 billion in energy infrastructure investments. In the realm of technology, Qatar committed up to \$1 billion toward quantum computing in collaboration with U.S. firm Quantinuum, indicating a long-term alignment in emerging technological domains.
- On January 15, 2025, Qatar and the United States announced a ceasefire and hostage-release deal between Israel and Hamas. Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani said the agreement would come into effect so long as it was approved by the Israeli cabinet. Former U.S. President Joe Biden said it would "halt the fighting in Gaza, surge much needed-humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, and reunite the hostages with their families."
- On August 4, 2024, Qatar's Undersecretary Minister of Interior, Abdullah bin Khalaf bin Hattab Al-Kaabi, and the U.S. Ambassador of Qatar, Timmy Davis, signed an agreement in Doha to magnify security cooperation between the countries.
- In late July 2024, Qatar's Prime and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, in a phone call with the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, discussed the importance of continuing to push for a



ceasefire in Gaza. This call, which occurred after the killing of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, sought to reaffirm achieving a ceasefire as a top priority for both Qatar and the U.S., as both nations have been active mediators throughout the conflict, alongside Egypt.

- The U.S. Embassy in Qatar has announced a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for non-profit organizations and individuals to have a chance to submit applications for funding between \$10,000 and \$100,000 to subsidize initiatives. The targeted initiatives support the increase of political and economic opportunities for women in Qatar, promote higher education and emerging technology between the U.S. and Qatar, promote sustainable technology, alleviate climate change, and support environmental causes.
- In February 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha to discuss ongoing efforts to secure the release of the hostages held by Hamas and enable an extended humanitarian pause in the conflict in Gaza.
- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Washington, D.C., to discuss hostage negotiations between Hamas and Israel. They agreed to continue close coordination to provide increased humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza and to urge the protection of civilians consistent with humanitarian law.

### U.S.-Saudi Arabia

- In July 2025, Saudi Arabia and France co-hosted The High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of a Two-State Solution at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. Despite the breadth of support, the absence of the United States from the proceedings reflected a continuing divide in global diplomacy. The U.S. administration deemed the conference “counterproductive,” arguing that unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state could complicate ongoing ceasefire negotiations and hostage releases.
- In May 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump officially concluded his ‘historic’ Middle East tour, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia serving as his first official international visit following his re-election. Reaffirming ties with Riyadh signaled Washington’s intention to consolidate its traditional alliances. It further underscored Saudi Arabia’s strategic relevance in U.S. foreign policy. Beyond diplomacy, defense and economic cooperation continue to serve as a cornerstone of bilateral relations and strategic partnerships. Saudi Arabia committed to a \$600 billion investment package spanning next-generation technology, energy, healthcare, and finance. Riyadh has also hosted the Saudi-U.S. Investment Forum on the occasion of President Trump’s visit.
- In February 2025, Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Defense HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman visited Washington DC where he met with senior U.S. officials such as his U.S. counterpart Pete Hegseth, U.S. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.
- In February 2025, Saudi Arabia hosted talks between Russia and the U.S., the first meeting between the two sides in three years. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio attended the meeting in the presence of Saudi Foreign Minister H.H. Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Saudi Minister of State and National Security Advisor H.E. Musaed AlAiban.
- In June 2024, U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia and Oman to continue discussions on Houthi detentions of UN, diplomatic, and international NGO staff and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.
- In May 2024, Saudi Oil Company Aramco signed three MoUs with leading American





companies to advance the development of possible low-carbon energy solutions. The MoUs were signed by the Minister of Energy for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman al Saud, and U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm.

- In April 2024, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to Saudi Arabia to discuss ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that would secure the release of hostages.
- In February 2024, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made his fifth visit to the Middle East since October 7. He met with HRH Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman for continued discussions on regional coordination to achieve an enduring end to the crisis in Gaza. He attempted to push forward a proposal by the U.S., Qatar, and Egypt to end the conflict and secure the release of hostages on both sides.
- In January 2024, HRH Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman met with U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham at the Winter Camp in Al Ula to discuss Saudi- U.S. relations, international and regional developments, and issues of common interests. HRH also met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to review ongoing efforts to reduce regional tensions, including the deterrence of Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

### U.S.-United Arab Emirates

- During President Trump's visit to the UAE, the UAE signed \$200 billion in commercial deals, with particular emphasis on critical minerals, digital infrastructure, and energy production. A 10-year \$1.4 trillion investment framework was also unveiled between the U.S. and UAE governments, encompassing collaboration in AI, energy, semiconductors, and national security. This framework is projected to contribute up to \$181 billion to the UAE's digital economy by 2033, suggesting a significant U.S. role in the Gulf's technological future.

- In September 2024, President Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates visited Washington for a landmark U.S. trip—his first official visit since 2017 and the first-ever White House meeting for a sitting Emirati president. The UAE President met with former U.S. President Biden to advance artificial intelligence cooperation. In addition to discussing technology and trade, the former U.S. president said the UAE would now have “major defense partner” status along with India to foster greater security ties through measures such as joint military training and exercises.
- In August 2024, the UAE's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a phone conversation to discuss diplomatic efforts to respond to the rising conflicts surrounding the Middle East. During the phone call, a negotiation on ways to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and increase humanitarian aid was conducted. Throughout this conversation, Sheikh Abdullah affirmed the urgency of escalating efforts by the international community to improve the humanitarian response to the crisis in Gaza and ensure civilians' protection.



- In May 2024, U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to continue discussions with partners regarding the peace process in Yemen and an immediate end to the reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways.

- In January 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi. The two discussed the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Sudan. They affirmed their shared vision of a more secure and prosperous region and underscored the importance of the strategic partnership between the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

## 5. Supporting Documents

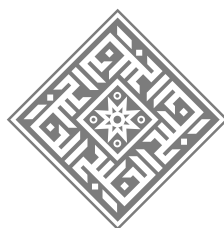
### *Araa Magazine*

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- [Issue 153](#): U.S.-Chinese Relations and Its Impact on the Arab Region - September 2020
- [Issue 148](#): U.S.-Saudi Relations Over 75 Years - April 2020

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