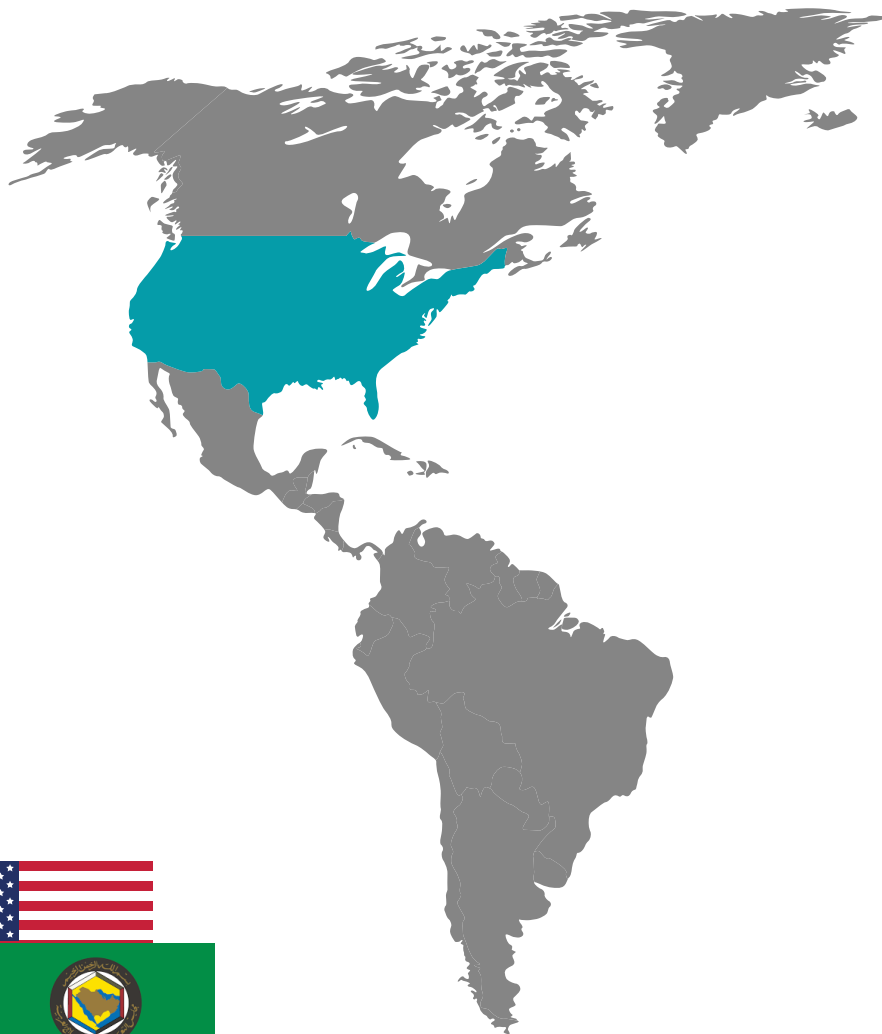


**Gulf Research Center**  
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# U.S - GCC Relations



## 1. Key Domestic Developments

Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, 2025, returning to office after a four-year hiatus. He pledged to restore an “America First” agenda centered on domestic renewal and rapid policy reversal. Within days, he signed approximately 50 executive orders, signaling an assertive start to his second term. President Trump also pardoned approximately 1,500 individuals involved in the January 6, 2021, Capitol riots, a move that generated substantial controversy.

Immigration became an immediate priority. The administration declared a national emergency at the U.S.–Mexico border, reinstated the “Remain in Mexico” policy, deployed additional military personnel, designated major drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, ended birthright citizenship for children of noncitizens through executive action, and terminated the CBP One asylum application.

The administration also reversed several Biden-era climate policies by declaring a national energy emergency, expanding oil and gas production, revoking electric vehicle mandates, and withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization. The “One Big Beautiful Bill” phased out clean energy subsidies and expanded access to federal lands for extraction.

A protectionist trade agenda was introduced, including sweeping tariffs and a proposed 100 percent tariff on imported computer chips unless companies committed to U.S.-based manufacturing. Select exemptions were granted, notably to Apple following significant domestic investment pledges. An External Revenue Service was established to administer the expanded tariff regime.

Despite an emphasis on domestic consolidation, the United States continues to face structural challenges, including demographic pressures,

infrastructure needs, homelessness, the opioid crisis, and divergent abortion policies. Political polarization has intensified, with ongoing partisan disputes over gun control, federal authority, and the framing of midterm elections.

In January 2026, a brief partial government shutdown occurred due to congressional disputes over immigration and Department of Homeland Security policy. Several departments were affected before funding was extended through September 2026, with DHS receiving only a short-term extension pending further negotiations.

A new National Security Strategy emphasized “America First” realism, reduced multilateral engagement, and prioritization of U.S. interests, particularly in the Western Hemisphere through the so-called “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. The subsequent National Defense Strategy focused on homeland defense, deterring China, revitalizing the defense industrial base, and increasing allied burden-sharing. The America First Arms Transfer Strategy aligned defense sales with domestic reindustrialization and strategic objectives.

### *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% annual change (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 a stable outlook. Moody’s credit rating for the United States was last set at Aaa with a negative outlook. DBRS’s credit rating for the United States was last reported at AAA with a stable outlook.



## 2. U.S. Foreign Policy

President Trump's second term has been defined by a transactional, sovereignty-focused foreign policy centered on economic leverage and burden-sharing. In early 2025, he ordered a review of U.S. foreign assistance, resulting in the termination of roughly 83 percent of USAID programs and their integration into the State Department. The administration also withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council, cut funding to UNRWA, and sanctioned the International Criminal Court, reflecting skepticism toward multilateral institutions seen as limiting U.S. autonomy.

Relations with Europe have faced renewed strain, particularly following remarks suggesting potential U.S. interest in acquiring Greenland, which drew firm opposition from Denmark, the EU, and NATO partners. Continued criticism of NATO burden-sharing and U.S. assistance to Ukraine has increased pressure on European defense spending while raising doubts about long-term U.S. commitments. Nevertheless, economic ties remained pragmatic, with a July 2025 trade agreement establishing a 15 percent U.S. tariff on EU goods.

Relations with Canada deteriorated amid escalating tariff threats linked to migration and fentanyl trafficking, rising from 25 percent to 35 percent. Remarks about Canada potentially becoming the "51st state" were rejected by Ottawa, further straining ties, though diplomatic engagement continues.

U.S. policy toward Latin America has adopted a more coercive, security-driven posture. Tensions with Mexico intensified following cartel designations as foreign terrorist organizations and tariff threats tied to border security. In Venezuela, U.S. military operations between late 2025 and early 2026 culminated in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, prompting domestic debate and international criticism over sovereignty concerns.

Relations with China have combined strategic rivalry with selective stabilization. After imposing

a 10 percent tariff on Chinese goods in February 2025, the administration reached a November 2025 agreement that eased certain tariffs in exchange for Chinese commitments on fentanyl precursors, rare earth exports, semiconductor trade, and agricultural purchases.

In February 2026, the United States and India concluded an Interim Trade Framework under which India pledged \$500 billion in U.S. energy, aircraft, and technology purchases over five years. Reciprocal tariffs were applied selectively, reinforcing a transactional and partnership-based trade approach.



### *Key Foreign Policy Initiatives*

- In February 2026, the Department of State paused immigrant visa issuances for nationals of multiple high-risk countries, effective January 21, 2026.
- In January 2026, the United States launched the Board of Peace, a new international initiative aimed at advancing conflict de-escalation and post-war stabilization in Gaza. The initiative was formally inaugurated on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum 2026 in Davos, bringing together senior political leaders, international organizations, and representatives from key regional and global stakeholders.
- In August 2025, the United States brokered a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, ending decades of conflict



between the two sides. The agreement included the establishment of a new transport corridor referred to as the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity.”

- In June 2025, the United States facilitated a peace deal between the Democratic Republic of the 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.

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

- U.S. trade in goods with GCC countries (2025, USD million):

Country	Exports	Imports	Balance
Bahrain	1,238.2	1,149.7	88.5
Kuwait	2,284.6	1,329.7	955.0
Oman	2,074.6	1,039.3	1,035.3
Qatar	3,706.5	1,828.6	1,877.8
Saudi Arabia	12,977.4	9,749.8	3,227.6
United Arab Emirates	28,832.7	6,967.6	21,865.1

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 states have long maintained a resilient partnership grounded in energy security, regional stability, and counterterrorism. Under President Trump’s second administration, ties have intensified through renewed diplomacy, expanded economic engagement, and reinforced security cooperation. His 2025 Middle East tour, beginning in Saudi Arabia, echoed his 2017 visit and underscored a dual-track approach combining economic agreements with sustained political dialogue.

Economic alignment has become a central pillar of the partnership. The May 2025 visit produced over \$2 trillion in agreements integrating U.S. technology and innovation with Gulf national strategies. Saudi Arabia expanded its U.S. investment commitments to nearly \$1 trillion,

while cooperation in civil nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, and critical minerals deepened. Although implementation timelines remain under scrutiny, the scale of these agreements reflects a shared ambition to institutionalize long-term economic and technological collaboration.

Security remains foundational. The U.S.–Saudi Strategic Defense Agreement established formal mechanisms for joint planning and interoperability, alongside Saudi Arabia’s designation as a major non-NATO ally. Major defense procurements, including F-35 aircraft and nearly 300 American tanks, reinforced structured and predictable security coordination.

However, regional security challenges and tensions persisted throughout 2025. In June, U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear sites were followed by Iranian missile retaliation against Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, marking the first direct Iranian attack on U.S. forces in the Gulf. The United States subsequently launched “maximum pressure 2.0,” issuing a 60-day ultimatum for negotiations. Amid internal unrest in Iran, indirect talks resumed in Muscat by February 2026.

While positioning itself as both deterrent and mediator, Washington has faced Gulf expectations for a more balanced role in de-escalating the Gaza conflict and advancing a two-state solution. This effort was formalized through the launch of the Board of Peace in January 2026 at Davos, chaired by President Trump and endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025) to oversee Gaza’s redevelopment.

The durability of recent agreements will depend on implementation, oversight, and sustained coordination. Despite policy divergences, the trajectory points toward pragmatic management of differences alongside deeper economic and security cooperation. The U.S.–GCC partnership thus remains a central pillar of regional geopolitics, adapting to evolving strategic dynamics.



## U.S.-GCC

- In September 2025, the U.S. and GCC held the GCC-U.S. Foreign Ministers Joint Ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the 80<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly. The ministers discussed the longstanding ties between the GCC states and the U.S. in various political, security, economic, and development domains, and means to advance cooperation and coordination to more comprehensive levels to serve mutual interests.
- 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

- In December 2025, the U.S. State Department approved the potential sale of sustainment for F-16 jets and related equipment to Bahrain for an estimated cost of \$455 million.
- The principal contractors for the sale will be General Electric Aerospace and Lockheed Martin Aeronautics, according to statements from the Pentagon.
- In August 2025, the Trump administration notified Congress of a proposed \$500 million sale of four M142 HIMARS systems and related equipment to Bahrain, a major U.S. non-NATO ally that hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. The announcement comes amid heightened regional tensions, including recent Iranian missile strikes in Qatar, and follows previous HIMARS acquisitions in the region by the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.
- 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

- In February 2026, the United States and Iran agreed to hold high-level talks in Muscat, Oman, despite ongoing disagreements over the scope of the negotiations. Iran maintains that discussions should focus solely on its nuclear program, while the United States has stated that ballistic missiles and regional activities must also be addressed. Mediators have presented a proposed framework that includes limits on uranium enrichment and missile use, but no agreement on the agenda has been confirmed.
- 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.

### 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.

### U.S.-Saudi Arabia

- The visit of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to Washington, D.C., on November 18, 2025, resulted in a series of agreements that reinforced U.S.–Saudi strategic coordination across defense, technology, energy, and investment. Central to the outcomes was the signing of the U.S.–Saudi Strategic Defense Agreement, which formalized joint planning and interoperability, alongside the designation of Saudi Arabia as a major non-NATO ally. Major defense sales, including future F-35 deliveries and U.S.-manufactured tanks, underscored continued military modernization and expanded industrial cooperation. In parallel, the Joint Declaration on Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation and an AI Memorandum of Understanding deepened collaboration in critical and emerging sectors, while a Critical Minerals Framework advanced supply chain coordination and industrial development goals under Vision 2030. Economically,

Saudi Arabia expanded its U.S. investment commitment to nearly \$1 trillion, signaling the scale of its long-term financial engagement and supporting diversification and technology objectives, while contributing to U.S. economic activity. The visit took place amid heightened regional security pressures and was framed as reinforcing structured defense cooperation and shared responsibility for regional stability. Collectively, the agreements reflected an evolving bilateral relationship anchored in institutionalized security arrangements and a broad-based economic partnership. Coinciding with the visit, the two sides held the U.S.-Saudi Investment Forum.

- 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 cornerstones of bilateral relations and strategic partnerships. Saudi Arabia committed to a \$600 billion investment package spanning next-generation technology,



energy, healthcare, and finance. Riyadh 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.

### U.S.-United Arab Emirates

- In January 2026, Russian, Ukrainian, and U.S. delegations met in Abu Dhabi under the auspices of the UAE leadership, marking the first trilateral talks involving all three parties since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. U.S. officials described the discussions as productive and set to continue, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky cautioned that it was too early to draw conclusions, noting that territorial issues, particularly in the Donetsk region, remain a central point of contention.
- 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.

### 5. Supporting Documents

#### *Araa Magazine*

- [Issue 210](#): The Impact of Trump’s Tariffs on the Economy, Trade, and Global Growth - June 2025
- [Issue 176](#): Enhancing U.S.-Gulf Relations and the Results of the Jeddah Security and Development Summit - August 2022
- [Issue 167](#): The AUKUS Agreement and Its Impact on Global Alliances and the Gulf Region - October 2021

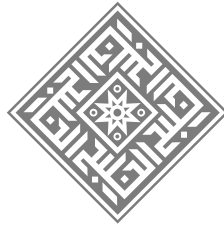
#### *GRC Commentary & Analysis*

- After Washington: Consolidating U.S.–Saudi Strategic Alignment - [December 2025](#)
- Shifting Global Dynamics, Steady U.S.-Saudi Ties - [November 2025](#)
- The Normalization Narrative: A Misleading Interpretation of Saudi–U.S. Relations - [November 2025](#)



- U.S. Foreign Policy Retrenchment in Africa: Implications for Gulf Engagement and Strategy – [June 2025](#)
- Saudi Arabia and the U.S.-Iran Nuclear Talks: A Strategic Imperative for Engagement – [May 2025](#)
- A Return with Purpose: Trump’s Second Saudi Visit – [May 2025](#)
- Strategic Posturing in a Multipolar World – [May 2025](#)
- Strategic Realignment: U.S.–Saudi Economic Relations in a Fragmenting Global Order – [May 2025](#)
- President Trump’s Visit to Saudi Arabia: A Strategic Opportunity Amid Regional Challenges – [May 2025](#)
- From Isolation to Engagement: U.S.-Iran Nuclear Talks Resume in Oman – [April 2025](#)
- From Riyadh to Washington: Trump’s Second Term and Saudi-U.S. Relations – [March 2025](#)
- U.S.-Gulf Relations Under Trump 2.0 – [March 2025](#)





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