



## Regional Relations

As most of the Middle East regional communities continue to observe the holy month of Ramadan, a time which usually coincides with fewer people travelling and celebration, matters of security continue to press and change daily.

**Covid-19** remains a challenge as latest updates from countries in the West including the USA and United Kingdom are still advising against travel to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. International travel in and out of India has also been suspended due to the increasing numbers of new daily infections.

Relations between **Iran and the United Arab Emirates** remain hostile, although Saudi Arabia are looking to improve on the Region's current position. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman says it wants "good relations" with its arch-rival Iran. The prince told Al Arabiya TV that his country wanted Iran to help push the Middle East towards prosperity. But he noted that it had an issue with "Iran's negative behavior", citing its nuclear program, missile launches and support for "outlaw militias".

He added that Saudi Arabia was working with its regional and global partners "to find solutions to these problems". (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56913398>)

The USA president Joe Biden has made some recent decision and changes to their stance in the Middle East, most specifically involving Afghanistan. The US has begun its final phase of the withdrawal of its own and NATO's last troops from Afghanistan - with the aim of leaving the country by the end of summer. It will bring to an end America's "forever war" in the country, which began with the invasion in response to the 9/11 terror attacks.

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About 2,500-3,500 US and about 7,000 NATO soldiers remain. In recent weeks, the military has been flying out equipment on massive C-17 cargo planes but now it is stepping up the job of deciding what is being shipped back to the US, handed to the Afghan security forces, or sold as junk in Afghanistan's markets. The Taliban, which has renewed vigor in its battle to regain power in Afghanistan, continues to accuse Washington of breaching the deal it signed with Donald Trump more than a year ago.

In that agreement, the US said it would withdraw completely by 1 May. With the deadline having passed, Kabul was on edge on Saturday, with a noticeably increased military presence and security at checkpoints. (<https://news.sky.com/story/us-begins-final-phase-of-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-12292802>)

Joe Biden has also made changes to his stance in Yemen and his support for Saudi Arabia in the ongoing war between the countries. Asked about the war in Yemen, which has caused what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the crown prince said that no country wanted an armed militia along its borders. He urged the Houthis, who rejected a Saudi ceasefire proposal last month, to "sit at the negotiating table" to find solutions that could "assure the rights of the people of Yemen and also the interests of the region".

Relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel continue to strengthen as the two countries are working together on several new deals and projects. However, recent events has seen The United Arab Emirates warn that any moves to change the historic identity of Jerusalem threaten peace and called on Israel to put an end to violence following the latest clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in the city.

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The statement was a rare rebuke of Israel by the UAE, which has welcomed tens of thousands of Israeli tourists and signed a slew of deals to strengthen bilateral ties since the administration of President Donald Trump brokered a historic and surprise deal to normalize relations between the two countries some seven months ago. The UAE move laid the path for Bahrain and Sudan to also formalize ties with Israel.

The UAE Foreign Ministry said in a statement, carried on the Emirates' state news agency, that it was concerned over “acts of violence committed by right-wing extremist groups in the occupied East Jerusalem.” The ministry called on Israeli authorities to “assume responsibility toward de-escalation and putting an end to all aggressions and practices that perpetuate tension and hostility.”

The UAE cautioned it was necessary to preserve Jerusalem's historical identity and maintain “maximum self-restraint to avoid the region slipping into new levels of instability in a way that threatens peace.” (<https://news.yahoo.com/uae-urges-israel-stop-jerusalem>)

### **US, Saudi officials hold talks on regional security May 2.**

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and the Kingdom's ambassador to the US Princess Reema bint Bandar met with a visiting US delegation in Riyadh on May 2. The American officials included US State Department adviser Derek Chollet, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood, and Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Dr. Mara Karlin, along with the Charge d'Affairs of the US embassy in Riyadh Martina Strong. During the meeting, they discussed the most prominent regional and international issues of common interest. They also touched on strategic relations between the two countries and ways to enhance them, the Kingdom's foreign ministry said.

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The meeting comes as US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking and the US ambassador to Yemen Christopher Henzel affirmed on Sunday “the need for a consensus to end the Houthi Marib offensive and for a comprehensive, nationwide cease-fire” in Yemen, the State Department said. Lenderking held “important discussions” with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Princess Reema during a visit to Riyadh on Thursday “on joint efforts to implement a sustainable political resolution to the Yemeni crisis,” the Saudi ambassador to Washington said. Princess Reema added that “the cooperation between our two countries is key to establishing long lasting peace.” (<https://www.arabnews.com>.

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