

What Drives President Biden's Middle East Policies?

And what are their Impacts on the Gulf States?

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Introduction

There are major differences between President Biden and the former President Barack Obama. The latter, for example, opposed the Iraq war in 2003, while Biden supported (both were Senators at the time). During his campaign for presidency in 2017, Biden proposed to divide Iraq into three autonomous regions along sectarian lines, while Obama opposed this proposition.¹ Biden is also closer to Israel than Obama was, and he has personal ties with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Additionally, Biden supported the continuation of the same stability policies in the Middle East, while Obama championed political reform.²

Nevertheless, this article claims that although President Biden's political views belong to the centrist camp of the Democratic Party, his policies will most likely lean more to the left than those of President Obama for two main reasons: the U.S.'s need to direct its resources to the competition with China and to mega projects to solve its internal economic crisis; and because of structural changes that took place within the Democratic Party. The Middle East is draining the U.S.'s scarce resources from where they are most needed: to confront China and to ensure the U.S.'s economic leadership. Furthermore, the progressive current in the Democratic Party is very strong, such that President Biden cannot turn his back to its political and economic demands.

In view of these considerations, President Biden will avoid further military involvement in the Middle East, and he will try to align his policies more closely with those of the progressive current in his party. This implies that the U.S. will return to the nuclear deal with Iran; reduce its military presence in the Gulf region; push for ending the war of Yemen; support reconciliation between the Gulf States; and back regional and international initiatives that aim to reduce tension between Iran and the Gulf States. Although the Biden administration will keep its rhetoric of supporting the relations between the Gulf States and Israel for domestic reasons, it will not exert pressure, as the previous administration did, on the Gulf States that did not normalise relations with Israel, simply because the Middle East is no longer one of the U.S.'s top priorities. Understanding that their security choices are limited in the short term, the Gulf States will try to adjust to the new realities. But in the long term, they will seek to diversify their securities and are likely to adopt a more reconciliatory tone with Iran. The article proceeds according to the structure of the argument outlined above.

The Question of Interests and Resources

There are no doubts that the elements that long governed U.S. policies in the Middle East have changed in the last decade. Historically, the U.S. had three main interests in the Middle East: ensuring the oil supply remained constant; safeguarding the security of Israel for cultural, strategic and domestic reasons; and preventing other great powers from establishing a foothold in the region, especially during the Cold War. However, over time, these interests have changed.

¹ Natasha Bertrand and Lara Seligman, "Biden deprioritizes the Middle East. *Politico*," February 22, 2021, <http://politi.co/3sNOIGp>

² Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (Crown: New York: 2020)

Today, the U.S. is no longer in need of Middle Eastern oil; its own production of oil exceeded its demand in 2019 for the first time since 1957.³ In fact, in 2020, the U.S. exported about 8.51 million barrels per day (MMb/d) and imported about 7.86 MMb/d; however, 52 per cent of its imports came from Canada, while only 7 per cent was imported from Saudi Arabia, equivalent to U.S. imports from Russia.⁴ Meanwhile, Israel's existence is no longer significantly threatened by any Arab country or a combination of Arab countries; it has a qualitative military edge over its entire Arab neighbourhood. More importantly, Israel has peace treaties with many Arab countries and there is a degree of security coordination between them. Finally, American hegemony in the region was secured after the victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War and the establishment of 25 military bases in the Middle East, 12 of which are in the Gulf region hosting more than 25,000 military personnel.⁵

Yet, U.S. dominance in the Middle East has not been without material and moral costs; it exhausted its resources, broadly defined here as financial, political, military, and soft power. American experts estimate that by the end of 2019 the military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan alone had cost the U.S. treasury nearly 6.4 trillion USD.⁶ That is more than 500 billion USD every year. By the end of November 2018, the U.S. had also lost 14,702 soldiers, contractors and civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷ A study by Megan Eckstein, for example, shows that American aircraft carriers spent 1,261 days in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea from 2016 to 2020, while the aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean combined did not spend more than 642 days, while in the Pacific Ocean they spent 1,857 days.⁸

Morally, the U.S. has lost its soft power in the region; in the Middle East, it is widely perceived that the military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and failed to create more stable and democratic regimes. In regard to Iraq, it can be claimed that it was one of the main reasons for the rise of sectarianism and the advent of al-Qaeda and ISIS.⁹ Brown University's Watson Institute estimates the numbers of casualties in the two countries at between 415,000 and 442,000.¹⁰ Finally, due to its military involvement in the Middle East, the U.S. has dedicated most of its foreign aid and diplomatic effort to this region. Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq were the first five recipient countries of U.S. foreign aid in 2019, consuming 31.5 per cent of its total foreign aid budget, estimated at 39.2 billion USD,¹¹ while no other region in the world has so consumed the time of U.S. diplomatic staff.

The shifts in U.S. interests in the Middle East and the resource problem have caused many decision-makers, pundits and research centres to question U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. They argue that the U.S. must end its "forever wars" in the Middle East and direct its resources to ensuring a political, economic, and military edge over China in this century, as well as to developing mega economic projects that can create millions of jobs domestically and ensure the country's economic supremacy.¹²

These pressures from within come at times of a significant decline in the U.S. economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first quarter of 2020, the U.S. lost more than 5 per cent of its GDP,¹³ while the

3 "U.S. Energy Facts Explained," U.S. Energy Information Administration, <http://bit.ly/3qfQ5X8>

4 "Oil and petroleum products explained: Oil imports and exports," U.S. Energy Information Administration, <https://bit.ly/3tm8t21>

5 "U.S. Military Bases and Facilities in the Middle East," American Security Project, June 2018, <https://bit.ly/3ePz0zP>

6 Neta C. Crawford, "United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2020: \$6.4 Trillion," Watson Institute, Brown University, November 13, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3h0PXd2>

7 Neta C. Crawford, "Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency," Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, November 2018, <https://bit.ly/3rjmlVi>

8 Megan Eckstein, "No Margin Left: Overworked Carrier Force Struggles to Maintain Deployments After Decades of Overuse," USNI NEWS, November 12, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3uOOAml>

9 Fanar Haddad, "From Existential Struggle to Political Banality: The Politics of Sect in Post-2003 Iraq," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 18:1 (2020) 70-86.

10 Crawford, Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars

11 Afghanistan (4.89 billion USD), Israel (3.3 billion USD), Jordan (1.72 billion USD), Egypt (1.46 billion USD), Iraq (960 million USD). See "Foreign Aid Explorer: U.S. Foreign Aid by Country," USAID, <https://bit.ly/3aVNSun>

12 Martin Indyk, "The Middle East Isn't Worth It Anymore," *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2020, <http://on.wsj.com/3qbRdLC>; Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, "Getting America out of Middle East purgatory," *Brookings*, December 11, 2018, <http://brook.gs/3rh9Ssqx>

13 Kimberly Amadeo, "How COVID-19 Has Affected the U.S. Economy," *The Balance*, February 24, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3bh5YZc>

unemployment rates increased from 3.7 per cent in 2019 to 8.9 per cent in 2020.¹⁴ Given that China is the only country that has achieved economic growth in 2020, estimated at 2.3 per cent,¹⁵ the Biden administration is being forced to redirect its financial, military, and political resources to policies of recovery, economic growth and competition with China.

As such, President Biden has already proposed two bills: one for economic stimulus, dubbed 'The American Rescue Plan', which cost 1.9 trillion USD and has been passed by Congress;¹⁶ the other, 'The American Jobs Plan' cost 2 trillion USD, and is still waiting for congressional approval. The second bill includes big infrastructure projects, such as repairing and rebuilding bridges, highways and roads; establishing high-speed broadband across the entire country; upgrading and building new schools; expanding and improving power lines; as well as spurring a shift to clean energy.¹⁷

This strategy of huge spending on economic recovery and mega projects makes it imperative to reduce U.S. military expenditure in the Middle East, given strained resources. In the last two decades a great deal of resources were spent in this manner, and the U.S. is in urgent need for them elsewhere. U.S. military presence in the Middle East is thus likely to be reduced. This is especially true since Senator Bernie Sanders is currently serving as the Chair of the Senate Budget Committee, which gives him more leverage in the allocation of the U.S. budget, and he is particularly vocal against U.S. military presence in the Middle East.

It is important to mention here that it was President Barack Obama who first paid attention to the U.S. resource problem. In his 2010 National Security Strategy, he expressed the intention to reduce U.S. military presence in the Middle East and to direct the U.S.' capabilities to the competition with the great powers, a departure from President Bush's focus on the "axis-of-evil" countries.¹⁸ Obama adopted two political approaches aimed at helping Washington to reduce its military presence in the region. The first approach occurred after the inception of the Arab Spring in 2011 when he supported the "right of individuals in the Middle East for self-determination ... and the support of political reform and democratic transformation."¹⁹

The second was signing the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, and calling for the Gulf states "to find ways to coexist and share the region with Iran."²⁰ According to Obama, the main driver behind the nuclear deal with Iran was not only to prevent it from acquiring nuclear capabilities, but also because Iran is the only country in the Middle East that could compel the U.S. to send hundreds of thousands of troops to a region they no longer views as key in case of conflict, further depleting U.S. resources.²¹

Obama's policies felt cold in some capitals in the Gulf states. In his book *A Promised Land*, Obama recalls a phone call conversation with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ), the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). MBZ, Obama said, criticised his call to President Mubarak of Egypt to give up power, asking at the same time "whether the U.S. would do the same in Bahrain if there were calls for Sheikh Hamad to leave power." MBZ added that "abandoning Mubarak suggests that the U.S. is no longer a partner that the Gulf states can rely on."²² The nuclear deal with Iran created a deep rift between some Gulf States and Washington. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE criticised it on the grounds that it did not address Iran's destabilising policies in the region, and it did not include its advanced missile program. Furthermore, these countries felt overlooked as the deal was made without their consultation.

This trend to reduce U.S. military presence in the Middle East continued during the Trump administration despite the withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran. President Trump cut the number of the American troops in Syria and planned to do the same in Iraq before the killing of the Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani.²³ He also refrained from escalation with Iran when its forces shot down an expensive and

¹⁴ Lora Jones, Daniele Palumbo & David Brown, "Coronavirus: How the pandemic has changed the world economy," *BBC News*, January 2021, <http://bbc.in/3qg8uml>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ "H.R.1319 - American Rescue Plan Act of 2021," *Congress*, March 11, 2021, <https://bit.ly/33d2wtP>

¹⁷ "Here's What's In President Biden's \$2 Trillion Infrastructure Proposal," *NPR*, March 31, 2021, <https://n.pr/3vGyafr>

¹⁸ "The White House. National Security Strategy," *The White House*, May 2010, <https://bit.ly/30aAWvj>

¹⁹ "Transcript: Obama's Speech About The Arab World," *NPR*, May 19, 2011, <http://n.pr/3e8Yl3s>

²⁰ Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <http://bit.ly/3bYPhRw>

²¹ Ibid

²² Obama. *A Promised Land*, p. 647

²³ Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt, "Trump Orders Withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Northern Syria," *New York Times*, October 13, 2019, <http://nyti.ms/388ECm7>

highly sophisticated drone in the Arab/Persian Gulf in June 2019,²⁴ and did not respond when Iran or its proxies hit the oil facilities of Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones in September 2019.²⁵

In sum, the Middle East has lost its significance for the U.S. in the last decade and the country will continue to reallocate its strained financial, military and political resources away from the region; a process that started under Obama, continued under Trump, and looks set to carry on under Biden.

Structural Changes within the Democratic Party

Besides the problem of resources, there are structural changes that took place in the Democratic Party. Today, the party consists of a broad coalition with an important part taken by ethnic minorities, African Americans, and the progressive current. Bernie Sanders, the presidential candidate of the progressive highly sophisticated drone in the Arab/Persian Gulf in June 2019,²⁶ and did not respond when Iran or its proxies hit the oil facilities of Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones in September 2019.²⁷

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current in 2016 elections was able to win the nomination of 22 states in the democratic presidential primary.²⁸ In 2020's primary, Sanders received more than a quarter of the votes (1136 delegates out of 3912).²⁹ Today, there are 100 MPs in Congress who define themselves as progressive.³⁰ In fact, President Biden owes his electoral victory to the support of African Americans and the progressive current, especially in swing states.³¹

Given this social base of support, as well as the need for Congress in order to pass legislation, President Biden will be vulnerable to the demands of the progressive current and of African Americans, desirous of making their mark on the administration's policies. The key issue for African Americans is social justice, while the focus of the progressive current is both social justice and foreign policy. The progressive current seeks to redefine the relations between the U.S. and the Gulf States on issues related to arms sales, human rights, and military involvement in the region. Here, one should note that many items in 'The American Rescue Plan' and 'The American Jobs Plan', mentioned above, were initially proposed by the progressive current and duly adopted by President Biden.

Indeed, the progressive current had already influenced the democratic party's stance on U.S. military involvement in the Middle East, and on relations with Iran and with the Gulf States. Regarding military involvement, the platform of the Democratic Party reads "it's past time to rebalance our tools, engagement and relationships in the Middle East away from military intervention — leading with pragmatic diplomacy to lay the groundwork for a more peaceful, stable, and free region." It also asserts that it will "end two decades of large-scale military deployments and open-ended wars" in the region. For Iran, the platform says, "Democrats believe the United States should not impose regime change on other countries and reject this as the goal of U.S. policy toward Iran." It also makes clear that returning to "the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) remains the best means to verifiably cut off all of Iran's pathways to a nuclear bomb."

As for the Gulf States, the platform advocates for "resetting" the relations with the Gulf States to better advance the U.S.'s "interests and values." In this regard, the platform makes it clear that the U.S. "has no

²⁴ Joshua Berlinger, Mohammed Tawfeeq, Barbara Starr, Shirzad Bozorgmehr and Frederik Pleitgen, "Iran shoots down US drone aircraft, raising tensions further in Strait of Hormuz," *CNN*, June 21, 2021, <https://cnn.it/3eQvwNw>

²⁵ David D. Kirkpatrick and Ben Hubbard, "Attack on Saudi Oil Facilities Tests U.S. Guarantee to Defend Gulf," *New York Times*, September 19, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3b0KHmd>

²⁶ Joshua Berlinger, Mohammed Tawfeeq, Barbara Starr, Shirzad Bozorgmehr and Frederik Pleitgen, "Iran shoots down US drone aircraft, raising tensions further in Strait of Hormuz," *CNN*, June 21, 2021, <https://cnn.it/3eQvwNw>

²⁷ David D. Kirkpatrick and Ben Hubbard, "Attack on Saudi Oil Facilities Tests U.S. Guarantee to Defend Gulf," *New York Times*, September 19, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3b0KHmd>

²⁸ Bernie Sanders, *Our Revolution* (MacMillan, 2016), p.1

²⁹ Lauren Leatherby and Sarah Almuttar, "Democratic Delegate Count and Primary Election Results 2020," *New York Times*, September 14, 2020, <http://nyti.ms/2MJK9bc>

³⁰ "Caucus members," *Congressional Progressive Caucus*, <http://bit.ly/3qgrPEj>

³¹ See, for example, how the Republican party is trying to limit votes of African Americans in Georgia after the 2020 elections. Nick Corasaniti and Reid J. Epstein, "Georgia G.O.P. Fires Opening Shot in Fight to Limit Voting," *New York Times*, March 21, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3eVA7Og>

interest in continuing the blank-check era of the Trump Administration, or indulging authoritarian impulses, internal rivalries, catastrophic proxy wars, or efforts to roll back political openings across the region."³²

President Biden's administration appointees indicate his priorities, but they also show the importance of the structural changes in the Democratic Party. Robert Malley, the architect of the former nuclear deal with Iran, was appointed as the special envoy to Iran. Malley, a member of the Security Council during the Obama administration, is accused by the Republicans of sympathising with Iran.³³ Matt Duss, Sanders' political advisor, is currently running for a top position in the State Department; if approved, it would be an important indicator of the influence of the progressive current on Biden's foreign policy.³⁴ Duss calls for more support to human rights and democracy in the Middle East. He is one of the most prominent advocates for a return to the nuclear deal with Iran and for U.S. military withdrawal from the region. Crucial appointees were those of Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, and National Security Adviser, Jack Sullivan. Both worked in the Obama administration, indicating President Biden's desire to maintain Obama's policies in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the appointment of African Americans Lloyd Austin as Defense secretary, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield as U.S. ambassador to the U.N. reflects the increasing power of African Americans within the party.

Indications for the Decline of the Middle East in President Biden's Policies

In a clear indication of the decline of the status of the Middle East in President Biden's policies, he did not contact any of the region's leaders, including the Prime Minister of Israel, until four weeks after taking office. President Biden did not contact King Salman of Saudi Arabia until two days before his administration published the U.S. security assessment of the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.³⁵

Natasha Bertrand and Lara Seligman, two reporters working for *Politico* said that a close political adviser to President Biden informed them that "the Middle East does not fall within Biden's three geographical priorities: The Asia-Pacific region, Europe, and the Western hemisphere." The two journalists also reported that the U.S. Defense Secretary, Lloyd Austin, is considering reducing the number of U.S. troops in the Middle East and that the new appointments in the Defense Department did not include advisers on the Middle East. Likewise, Jack Sullivan reduced the number of advisers for the Middle East in the National Security Council, while he increased their number for East Asia.³⁶

On the issue of U.S. military presence in the Middle East, the Biden administration has set September 11, 2021 as a definitive date by which to withdraw from Afghanistan.³⁷ It also "directed the Pentagon to begin removing some military capabilities and forces from the Gulf region in the first steps of an effort to realign the U.S. global military footprint away from the Mideast." The military equipment included three Patriot antimissile batteries, an aircraft carrier, surveillance systems, and several thousand troops that operate the equipment.³⁸ Some equipment, according to the Wall Street Journal, "may be redeployed to focus on what officials consider to be leading global competitors, including China and Russia."³⁹

Implications for the Gulf States

Having spent over three months in office, we know by now that Biden's administration seeks to return to the nuclear with Iran, and that the impediments to doing so are more technical than strategic.⁴⁰ We also know that the U.S. wants to end the war in Yemen: it has stopped supplying offensive weapons to Saudi

³² "2020 Democratic Party Platform," July 27, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3rfSwKEf>

³³ Murtaza Hussain, "The smear campaign against Robert Malley - and Biden's Iran Policy," *The Intercept*, <http://bit.ly/3ed71ez>

³⁴ Harry Cheadle, "Matt Duss's State Department Appointment Is Biden's First Test on Israel," *Blue Tent*, <http://bit.ly/3e9xo5e>

³⁵ Julian Borger and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "Joe Biden speaks to Saudi Arabia's King Salman before release of Khashoggi murder report," *The Guardian*, <http://bit.ly/3sSuupk>

³⁶ Natasha Bertrand and Lara Seligman, Biden deprioritizes the Middle East.

³⁷ Missy Ryan and Missy Ryan, "Biden will withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, 2021," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2021, <https://wapo.st/3b1YF75l>

³⁸ Gordon Lubold and Warren P. Strobel, "Biden Trimming Forces Sent to Mideast to Help Saudi Arabia," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2021, <https://on.wsj.com/3h4Q5Z9>

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Jonathan Tirone, "The Iran Nuclear Deal," *Bloomberg*, April 14, 2021, <https://bloom.bg/3ePvt7>

Arabia that can be used in the war;⁴¹ it has allowed the U.N. special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, to visit Iran to discuss the Yemen crisis for the first time since the beginning of the war in 2015;⁴² and it has also appointed a special envoy to Yemen, Timothy Lenderking.⁴³ There are also indications that the Biden administration will make human rights a key focus of its policies in the Middle East, as can be envisioned by the disclosure of the security assessment report of the killing of the Saudi Arabian journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. The disclosure of the report coincided with imposing sanctions on 76 people from Saudi Arabia who participated in the killing and/or were accused of violating human rights. The U.S. state department also announced the 'Khashoggi Ban' which, when applied, would expose anyone who threatens the life of journalists to U.S. sanctions.⁴⁴

The Biden administration's policies, coupled with its strategic goal to pivot away from the Middle East, will have a direct impact on the Gulf States. First, because the U.S. is the sole security guarantor to the Gulf States, these will seek to adjust their policies in order to avoid confrontation with the Biden administration. Saudi Arabia, for example, presented a new peace initiative to end the war in Yemen last March, which included a nationwide ceasefire, the reopening of air and sea links, and the resumption of negotiation with the Houthis.⁴⁵ It also released women's rights activists,⁴⁶ reconciled with Qatar, and opened an official dialogue with Iran to diffuse regional tensions.⁴⁷ Bahrain relies strategically on Saudi Arabia and therefore it is expected to follow the same policies. The UAE has seen these changes coming for some time now, and has acted accordingly: they declared withdrawal from Yemen in 2019; they initiated a dialogue with Iran after the attacks on oil carrier ships in the Arab/Persian Gulf Sea in 2019; and they established relations with Israel, believing this might create stronger bonds with the U.S. in the hope of shielding themselves, for example, from criticism related to human rights abuses. The other Gulf States, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait are aligned with many policies of the Biden administration, especially those relating to the nuclear deal with Iran and ending the war in Yemen.

The second impact is that Saudi Arabia will be relieved from pressures imposed on it previously by the Trump administration to normalise relations with Israel. Although the Biden administration has welcomed the new agreements between some Arab countries and Israel, and has said it will build on them to establish peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, solving this conflict is not one of its highest priorities. Furthermore, the progressive current in the Democratic Party is calling for the linkage of U.S. aid to Israel with the latter's acceptance to stop settlements in the Palestinian territories, respect Palestinian human rights, and establish a Palestinian state. Accordingly, the Biden administration will neither put pressure on Saudi Arabia to normalise relations with Israel, nor it will invest time on an issue that is not high on its agenda.

Third, while some of Saudi Arabia's new policies might be tactical — such as the reconciliation with Qatar and the release of women's rights activists — others may well be strategic in nature. Saudi Arabia wants to end the war in Yemen, but not at any cost. At minimum, in any agreement with the Houthis, Saudi Arabia wants to secure its southern borders and it seeks to ensure that its allies will be well represented in any new Yemeni government. As for the dialogue with Iran, although the information is scarce, Saudi Arabia may well be strategically aiming at creating new security arrangements in a manner that satisfies the needs of both sides.

Finally, in the short term, for structural reasons, no country can replace the U.S. in providing security to the Gulf States. This is because no other country has military bases in the Gulf region similar to those of the U.S., and the Gulf States are heavily dependent on arms purchases from the U.S. However, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular, will seek to diversify their security in line with their economic interests.

⁴¹ "Biden administration pauses weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE," *Aljazeera*, January 21, 2021,

<https://bit.ly/2PL1Zfs>

⁴² "Reuters Staff. U.N. envoy Griffiths in Iran for first time to discuss Yemen crisis," *Reuters*, February 7, 2021,

<https://reut.rs/3egDkcn>

⁴³ "US envoy Tim Lenderking heads back in push to end Yemen war," *The Arab News*, Feb 23, 2021,

<http://bit.ly/3bZuTzz>

⁴⁴ "Accountability for the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi," *State Department*, February 26, 2021, <http://bit.ly/30eC8hy>

⁴⁵ "Saudi Arabia proposes Yemen ceasefire plan to Houthi rebels," *France 24*, March 23, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3xjZuLv>

⁴⁶ Martin Chulov, "Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul released from prison," *The Guardian*, February 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3ehONsc>

⁴⁷ Ben Hubbard, Farnaz Fassihi and Jane Arraf, "Fierce Foes, Iran and Saudi Arabia Secretly Explore Defusing Tensions," *New York Times*, May 1, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3ujMPNt>

For instance, they are likely to increase their security and military ties with China, Japan and South Korea, all of which are heavily dependent on Saudi Arabia/UAE oil imports. This might, in turn, reduce tensions with Iran since China has good relations with the countries on both banks of the Arab/Persian Gulf.

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