



[Kushner Leads a White House Delegation to Qatar and Saudi Arabia](#)

Senior White House advisor Jared Kushner traveled to the Middle East this week for talks with Saudi Arabia's crown prince and Qatar's emir. Kushner is accompanied by U.S. International Development Corporation executive Adam Boehler, and Ari Berkowitz and Brian Hook, both of whom are envoys to the Middle East. Media outlets reported that the delegation led by Kushner would be discussing ending the Saudi-led economic boycott of Qatari goods. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates cut ties with Qatar in 2017 as part of a political row over the country's alleged links to terrorism, something that the Qatari government has repeatedly and definitively denied. It is also suspected that Kushner's delegation could be pursuing additional normalization agreements with Israel before the outgoing Trump administration leaves office.

Kushner's last diplomatic trip as a member of the White House is seemingly aimed at repairing ties between the Saudi-led coalition and Qatar. The United States previously tried to negotiate an end to the blockade of Qatar, but was unsuccessful. Observers have noted that nothing significant has changed since the previous attempts to negotiate an end to the blockade, which will likely mean Kushner's trip is in vain. Earlier in 2020, Qatar sued the four countries restricting it after refusing to comply with a list of demands issued by the Saudi-led coalition. Qatar is accused by them of fostering extremist groups and supporting terrorism throughout the region, an accusation it strongly denies.

The timing of Kushner's trip to the Middle East has raised eyebrows due to the recent flashpoint between Iran and Israel. Earlier this week, Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh was assassinated outside of Tehran in what is suspected to be an Israeli plot. Additionally, a high-profile meeting between Mike Pompeo, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Mohammed bin Salman occurred last week in the Saudi city of Neom prior to the assassination of Fakhri-zadeh. It was reported that dealing with Iran was a topic of discussion during the meeting, as well as potentially normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The Trump administration's Middle East policy has been largely focused on maintaining maximum pressure on Iran while creating a favorable environment for Israel. Last week's meeting with the Saudi crown prince and Israeli prime minister, in addition to Kushner's delegation traveling to the Gulf this week, has raised the possibility of additional normalization agreements with Israel being negotiated. It is no secret that the Trump administration is seeking foreign policy victories during its remaining time in office in order to attempt to secure a significant legacy, despite the major fallacies and problems with the already-agreed upon deals. Negotiating the end of the blockade on Qatar would seemingly satisfy this desire, and brokering the normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia would be viewed by the Trump administration and its political base as a significant victory. However, so long as any agreement – like the recent ones between Israel and the UAE among others – fails to include fair and equitable Israeli concessions to the Palestinians, impartial observers contend that the deals do nothing to help achieve lasting and meaningful progress regarding the Middle East peace process.