



## [A Delegation of Top American Officials Travels to the United Arab Emirates Following the Death of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan](#)

The United States sent a high-level delegation to the United Arab Emirates this week following the death of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He was the nation's second president and had ruled the country since 2004, retaining ceremonial powers but assuming a lower profile in state affairs following a stroke in 2014. At that time, his half-brother Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan became the de facto ruler and has since carried out public affairs of the state and day-to-day decision making. The traveling American delegation led by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris included CIA Director William Burns, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and Climate Tzar John Kerry. Their trip comes as the United States attempts to boost bilateral relations, which have recently come under strain. The U.S. reversal of the Houthi rebel terrorist designation for humanitarian purposes and increased condemnation of the devastating Saudi and UAE-led war in Yemen has caused relations between the two states to become frayed. The UAE has also expressed concern that the U.S. is leaving its security commitments in the region. As the UAE is a major oil provider and with record-setting gas prices in the United States, the Biden administration feels that enhancing ties is a necessary step.

The notable delegation is the United States' largest show of support and will to improve bilateral relations with the UAE since the Biden administration took office. Last month, Secretary of State Tony Blinken apologized to the UAE for its lack of response to a Houthi attack on Abu Dhabi. Some analysts have highlighted the particular significance of this, considering that the United States removed the Houthi rebel terrorist designation for humanitarian reasons last year. The move was criticized by the UAE and Saudi Arabia; however, it has been widely supported by human rights activists as it allows for fewer restrictions on humanitarian assistance that is increasingly needed to address the dire crisis in Yemen.

The members of the U.S. delegation are some of the highest and most public members of Biden's cabinet. The makeup is mostly foreign policy officials in an attempt to show the U.S. still has a focus on Gulf region issues. The UAE has expressed concern in light of the war in Ukraine that the U.S. will begin to shift global attention away from Gulf security issues to Eastern Europe. They argued that the Biden administration had refused to attempt to assure partners and allies in the region that the U.S. still maintains a commitment, especially as it has pulled out of Iraq and Afghanistan. By sending this delegation along with ensuring that arms deals go through, the Biden administration hopes to reassure not only the UAE, but the greater Gulf region.

The Biden administration's decision to try and mend bilateral ties through this large and high-profile delegation following the UAE leader's death is in no small part related to the UAE's large oil capacity at a time in which the U.S. is increasingly concerned with combating the skyrocketing prices. While this decision will have benefits and could see improvements in working with the UAE to combat the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, it is imperative that human rights are not on the negotiation table.