



Trump's Middle East Trip Focuses Heavily on Luring Investments and Business Deals

This week, U.S. President Donald Trump embarked on a multi-day trip to the Middle East which included visits to the three Gulf nations of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This marked Trump's first major foreign trip of his second term in office, and was largely focused on luring investments and business deals with the aforementioned countries. However, one of the most momentous things to come out of the trip was related to Syria. While speaking at a forum during the first leg of the trip in Saudi Arabia, Trump announced that the United States would remove all of its sanctions on Syria – a much-welcomed development as observers had been highlighting the need for and importance of this since the ousting of the repressive Assad regime back in December of last year. As many have pointed out, sanction relief gives Syria's delicate political transition the best chance to succeed and should be provided given that the measures were put in place as a means of punishing the country's previous dictatorial regime – which is now no longer in power. The removal of sanctions would also help pave the way for much-needed economic recovery and, it is hoped, increase the prospects of stability and inclusivity.

Other than the surprising announcement regarding the intention to remove U.S. sanctions on Syria and a landmark gathering with the country's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa – which represented the first time in 25 years that leaders of the two respective nations meet, much of Trump's trip was concentrated on securing a series of strategic deals and investments with the Gulf nations that he visited. The American president's time in Saudi Arabia included the unveiling of new Saudi investments in energy production, technology, and artificial intelligence, as well as a massive \$142 billion weapons deal. Some analysts have suggested that the focus on securing huge investments seems largely motivated by the Trump administration's desire to gain the upper hand in its ongoing trade standoff and technological competition with China. It is also consistent with the type of transactional approach to diplomacy and foreign policy that political commentators have come to expect from the current U.S. administration. Worth noting however as well is the fact that details regarding some of the specific financial commitments have remained vague, and some of the programs began under the previous administration of President Biden. This is similar to what took place during Trump's first term back in 2017, when fact-checkers and experts [noted that](#) most of the publicly announced items stemming from his trip to Saudi Arabia had been previously announced by the Obama administration. As such, these numbers and figures should often be "taken with a grain of salt." While on the second leg of his trip, Trump became the first U.S. president to make an official state visit to Qatar. There, the American president met with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and the White House announced that the U.S. and Qatar had signed deals worth at least \$1.2 trillion – including a major transaction that would see Qatar Airways buy 210 aircraft from American company Boeing. Other agreements consisted of Qatar purchasing drone and anti-drone technology from U.S. defense companies and investments in the American energy sector.

Even beyond the aim of deepening economic and business ties though, it is evident to experts that Trump has come to see the Gulf countries he visited as key diplomatic and strategic partners, both in the region and overall. This has been demonstrated by their participation on various pressing contemporary issues such as Saudi involvement in hosting talks on Russia-Ukraine and Qatar's position as a key mediator regarding the Gaza War. It is telling with respect to the state of American foreign policy under Trump's second term that his administration views these Gulf nations in particular – and not the United States' most traditional allies in Europe and North

America – as critical partners, and hence worthy of his first main overseas trip following his return to the White House. In fact, commentators have highlighted how prior to Trump's first term in office, American presidents dating back to the end of World War II normally made their first foreign visit to one of the United States' two North American neighbors (Canada or Mexico) or a major ally in Europe. Thus, this clear shift under Trump emphasizes his administration's heightened interest in the region, with an enormous focus placed on the strengthening of economic and strategic ties through the penchant for dealmaking.

Trump's decision not to visit Israel on the regional trip was an observation of note to analysts as well. It aligns with the growing belief that ties between the American president and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu have deteriorated, as the Trump White House has become increasingly unhappy that Netanyahu is intent on perpetuating the Gaza War. Many have outlined how Trump has made it clear that he wants to be viewed as a peacemaker, going as far as divulging that one of his ambitions is to win a Nobel Peace Prize, and thus Netanyahu's warmongering runs counter to this. It is no secret that President Trump came into office for his second term promising to end the longstanding conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine as two of his main foreign policy goals, and it appears as though him and members of his administration are beginning to acknowledge the hugely obstructive role that Netanyahu is playing in derailing the efforts to put an end to the destructive Gaza War.