

Analysis paper | August 2022

# The Middle East Between Jeddah and Tehran Summits: Motives and Results



By | Nancy Talal Zidan

**The** Middle East arena has witnessed a state of growing momentum due to the mutual visits among the Arab Leaders. Additionally, there were bilateral and trio summits which gathered the Gulf countries, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Israel and also Turkey. Such meetings served as the Arab-Middle Eastern framework of arrangements prior to the Arab American Jeddah Summit and the visit by US President Joe Biden on July 16th. The Jeddah Summit constituted a qualitative stage of Arab-Arab harmonization. It demonstrated the Arab ability to create compromises at regional and international levels concurrently with visits and contacts by Russian officials to Arab and African leaders. The Arab-American Summit in Jeddah was followed by the Tehran Summit on July 19th which gathered leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran.

This paper seeks to Analyse the motives and the goals behind these dynamic interactions as well as their relevant interests, adjustments and balances for the regional states with the major world forces.



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## □ Analysing the Jeddah Summit's speech from a media perspective

The Jeddah summit witnessed speeches delivered by Arab leaders and the US President. They included an accurate display of opinions, strategies or even motives of all parties in a very momentous way. At the beginning, there was a speech delivered by the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman, as being the Summit's president and host. Although his speech didn't exceed 5 minutes, it was a concentrated one that conveyed the Saudi official assertions about the need to cooperate in light of the UN-Charter which underscores the need to respect sovereignty and laws of states and non-interference in their internal affairs.<sup>1</sup> The content of these words came as a decisive Saudi response towards what preceded this visit regarding months of debate within the American society, Congress and US Media about the issue of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Such a debate aimed to pressure the US President against any American-Saudi rapprochement.<sup>2</sup>

The Saudi Crown Prince went ahead with his speech stressing that it aims at enhancing partnership. He used words such as between "our countries" and "the United States" in a way that suggests the unity of the Arab states as being one entity. He drew attention to the international challenges in some points which began with the economic consequences of Covid-19. He then spoke about the environmental challenges, foremost of which is climate change and the need to move towards more durable energy resources. He indicated that the KSA is aware of the supply chains, hydrocarbon resources and the carbon neutrality that attract the KSA'S attention as part of "the green Saudi Arabia and Middle East."

Bin Salman said: "I call Iran, the neighboring state with which we have religious and cultural links, to be part of the cooperation process in the region and to abide by international legitimacy as well as not to meddle in the internal affairs of other states and to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency."

He linked this with ongoing efforts to solve the Yemeni crisis through the crystallization of a Yemeni-Yemeni political solution to support the current truce along with continuous humanitarian support to the Yemeni people.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jeddah Summit for Security and Development was launched with Arab-American participation, July 16th 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRUQUa22Uik>

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Talal Zidan, Biden's Expected Visit to Riyadh: Motives and Prospects, 08-06-2022 <https://bit.ly/3Bvv4B4>

It is worth mentioning that the Saudi Crown Prince in his speech portrayed a tangible image that suggests the Saudi-Arab responsibility towards the Yemeni file as a vital one which is separated from other region's issues.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the Yemeni file was mentioned in Arab leaders' speeches in a defined and independent way which is separated from the notion of the Arab security as a whole with all its joint issues. This was clear in the speeches of the Emir of Qatar and the Crown Prince of Kuwait. We should not ignore the link drawn by Bin Salman between the cooperation with Iran and the Yemeni issue solution. Such a link was explicitly repeated in the speech delivered by Saudi Foreign Minister in his press conference when he said: "We work seriously not only to prolong the truce but for a ceasefire and to pave the way for Yemeni-Yemeni negotiations along with activating some new mechanisms to stop Iranian missile supplies to the Houthis in Yemen." He obviously underscored that the kingdom's hand is still extended to Iran to crystallize understandings that treat Yemeni activities. He praised Iraqi mediation, adding that progress was achieved but without reaching final results in the Saudi-Iranian negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Bin Salman's speech which didn't mention the Ukrainian crisis, US president, Joe Biden, began his 10 minute- speech by focusing on the Russian-Ukrainian war. He said that the Russian move has destabilized the Middle East. He described the Chinese moves in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region as being "coercive moves". The US determination to reduce the expansion of the Russian-Chinese in the Middle East is one of the direct messages in the American speech. On the other hand, the Arab leaders didn't explicitly mention the Ukrainian crisis in their speeches except the Jordanian King whose speech was the shortest one in the summit (4 minutes) and the Emir of Qatar (9 minutes) as a kind of flattery towards the US. Jordan was able to sign a new memorandum of understanding with Washington by which Jordan will receive annual assistance which won't be less than 1.45 billion \$ between 2023-2029.<sup>5</sup>

Biden then greeted the souls of the American soldiers including his son for their military efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East in general as part of counterterrorism. He also addressed the role of the US 5th Fleet in protecting the freedom of navigation through the international lanes (Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab) and securing the Red Sea. Biden's speech presented an obvious keenness to mix between the US supplies to the region over the past decades

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<sup>3</sup> The Jeddah Summit for Security and Development was launched with Arab-American participation, July 16th 2022 (Aforementioned references at minute 3:39.

<sup>4</sup> Press conference of Saudi Foreign Minister at the end of the Jeddah Summit, 16/7/2022, <https://bit.ly/3Q4VwFP>

<sup>5</sup> New US \$1.45 Billion Annual Assistance Memorandum for Jordan,16/7/ 2022, <https://cnn.it/3BCTPLA>

and the crystallization of economic and diplomatic opportunities between Washington and the region's states. This aims to enhance the idea of strategic partnership between the two sides to exclude the common notion of US withdrawal from the Middle East Arena.<sup>6</sup> Biden displayed five axes for the US vision that governs its partnership with the Middle East states to support the countries committed by the international law by strengthening its capabilities to defend itself against any external threats. Moreover, he expressed his refusal to use power or make threats to use it in order to change the borders. Meanwhile, he praised the countries that voted in favor of condemning the Russian invasion against Ukraine. Russia had a strong presence within the American mind during the summit.

In another context, Biden confirmed the vital American-Arab cooperation regarding climate change and allocating hundreds of billions for clean energy as well as giving attention to supply chains and food security. He pointed out that the US allocated one billion \$ for the Arab region. This point was included in the Saudi Foreign Minister's speech in the press conference. He said that along with the US support, there is a to support a number of Arab sovereign funds to deliver food to the poorest states under the auspices of the Arab League.<sup>7</sup>

Biden concluded his speech by saying that the American-Saudi approach was a productive one in reaching a truce in Yemen. The US engaged with the Arab efforts by sending the US Special Envoy to Yemen "Tim Lenderking" to Riyadh, Oman and Jordan after the summit immediately as of July 25th to continue the American diplomatic efforts to back the UN-mediated truce in Yemen.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, Biden stressed the US keenness to continue imposing restrictions against Iran and to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> He indicated that his country respects human rights as a basic axis in its strategy. He ended his speech by underscoring that the US won't withdraw from the region and that it made a lot of investments with all its countries.

The speech delivered by Egyptian President AbdelFatah Al-Sissi was the one which balanced Biden's speech regarding narrative and content. For 15 minutes, he presented a five axes strategy (Solving the region's crises including Syrian, Lebanese, Yemeni and Libyan files, building societies from inside, how to

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<sup>6</sup> The Jeddah Summit for Security and Development was launched with Arab-American participation, July 16th 2022 (Aforementioned references)

<sup>7</sup> Minute 29:53, Press conference of Saudi Foreign Minister at the end of the Jeddah Summit, 16/7/2022, aforementioned reference.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Lenderking's Travel to Saudi Arabia and Jordan, July 25, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3SbRHR5>

<sup>9</sup> Min. 12:55, The Jeddah Summit for Security and Development was launched with Arab-American participation, July 16th, 2022 (Aforementioned references)

enhance Arab national security capabilities, combating terrorism with all its forms and strengthening the international cooperation in food security, maritime security, navigation security and climate change). He invited the participants to take part in the global climate summit “OP27” which will be hosted by Egypt in November in cooperation with the UN.

The speeches of Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq and Kuwait fluctuated between 7-9 minutes to assert the same axes of Egyptian strategy as a whole. Additionally, they focused on the electrical link project between the Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan which came as part of fostering the energy resources. The Iraqi PM proposed the establishment of “Middle East Bank for Development and Integration” as a financing and sponsoring body for all sustainable development projects. They crystallize a harmonious scene described by the Saudi Foreign Minister in his press conference as a result of “the maturity of the joint Arab work system, to put its goals and priorities in full harmony and to formulate its strategy by itself”.<sup>10</sup>

We can't ignore mentioning a common important feature among the Arab leaders' speeches which is their joint assertion about the importance of reaching a fair and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian state based on June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

It is worth mentioning that the UAE is the only state which delivered no speeches in the Jeddah Summit. However, it was the only country whose leader, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, met with the US President on the sidelines of the summit and was invited by him to visit Washington.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, UAE security arrested Assem Ghafor, the member of DAWN. He is an Arab who holds US citizenship and worked as a lawyer to Jamal Khashoggi and his fiancée Hatice Cengiz who still launches media attacks inside the US against the Saudi Crown Prince. Ghafor was arrested in the Dubai International Airport while waiting for his flight to Istanbul coming from the US. The investigations against him in Abu Dhabi revealed that he was condemned in absentia for laundering money charges<sup>12</sup> and was sentenced for 3 years and a fine of 800,000\$.<sup>13</sup> The timing of this scene is likely a response to the US media coverage against the Saudi Crown Prince in Khashoggi issue.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Min. 53:12, Press conference of Saudi Foreign Minister at the end of the Jeddah Summit, 16/7/2022, aforementioned reference.

<sup>11</sup> Biden invites Mohamed Bin Zayed to US, 16 Jul 2022, <https://bit.ly/3vs8Hca>

<sup>12</sup> UAE: Immediately Release Asim Ghafoor, Former Lawyer for Jamal Khashoggi and DAWN Board Member, July 15, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3SfdPKg>

<sup>13</sup> John Hudson & Kareem Fahim, U.S. requests more information on UAE arrest of Khashoggi lawyer, July 19, 2022, <https://wapo.st/3Q8Rlsv>

<sup>14</sup> Jul 20, 2022 <https://bit.ly/3biQlDm> Min. 17:34

## □ Did the US visit to the region succeed?

The assessments regarding the summit swung between success and failure. The US media believes that “there were many positive aspects for the Saudi and many negatives to the Americans”<sup>15</sup> Others believe that Biden achieved some victories in his first foreign visit to the Middle East as a President which began in Israel. This includes the KSA’S approval to open its air flights to and from Israel.<sup>16</sup> The Saudi Civil Aviation Authority announced in a twitter statement “the decision to open the Kingdom’s airspace for all air carriers that meet the requirements of the authority for overflying.” The statement didn’t mention Israel in particular. Originally, Israel was the only one which was banned from overflying in the Saudi airspace. Israel has high hopes to reach normalization with the KSA through a US mediation to open the airspace in return of the Saudi’s annexation of Tiran and Sanafir islands to be under its sovereignty along with the exit of multinational forces.<sup>17</sup> However, The KSA gained sovereignty over the two islands according to the US agreement without accomplishing the hoped-for normalization<sup>18</sup>.

According to the American news outlet “Axios”, the KSA will make a commitment to the US that it will maintain the Israeli ships’ freedom of navigation in the Strait of Tiran. Meanwhile, the US will give Israel security guarantees regarding the KSA’S obligations.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the KSA made it clear that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based upon the Arab Peace Negotiation (2002) is a main condition to such relations. Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir told CNN that his country supports the Arab initiative. He added: “We are its author. We pointed out that peace came at the end of the operation and not at its onset. Saudi Arabia is committed to reach a settlement based upon two states through establishing a Palestinian state within the occupied territories with East Jerusalem is its capital. This is our demand for peace which has not changed. We adopted stances and demonstrated that peace with Israel is possible”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Felicia Schwartz in Jerusalem and Samer Al-Atrush in Jeddah, Joe Biden’s fist bump belies unease between US and Saudi Arabia, July 17 2022, <https://on.ft.com/3Se0VMt>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> [Jacob Magid](https://bit.ly/3oEwlc6) and [TOI staff](https://bit.ly/3oEwlc6), Saudi Arabia opens airspace to all carriers, in first fruits of budding Israel deal, 15 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3oEwlc6>

<sup>18</sup> [Jacob Magid](https://bit.ly/3cQ9iOe), US aims to close island transfer, Saudi normalization steps before Biden trip, 7 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3cQ9iOe>

<sup>19</sup> [Dilara Ozer](https://bit.ly/3OHULS5), Tiran and Sanafir Islands May Tie the Saudi-Israel Knot, July 30, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3OHULS5>

<sup>20</sup> [TOVAH LAZAROFF](https://www.ipost.com/middle-east/article-713158), Opening of airspace to Israel not a sign of normalization - Saudi official, JULY 27, 2022, <https://www.ipost.com/middle-east/article-713158>

There was a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid and Jordanian King in Amman to discuss the mutual relationships. This is in addition to Biden's visit to the region and its resulting capabilities and opportunities. Furthermore, there are planned projects including industrial "Jordan Gateway," building Solar energy and desalination facilities in Israel, joint tourism in the Gulf of Eilat and Aqaba as well as food security. King Abdullah confirmed to Lapid that Palestinians should be part of US-sponsored regional economic projects toward bolstering stability, Jordanian officials pressure Israel to include Palestinians in water deals in return for potential energy that could be financed by Gulf states.<sup>21</sup>

As for the KSA internal field, Saudi ministers of energy, investment, communications and health signed, during the summit, 18 agreements with their American counterparts and many private sector companies. This included a group of leading US companies in the healthcare sector and many other US companies in the sectors of energy, tourism, education, manufacturing and textiles. Additionally, the Saudi Space Authority signed Artemis agreements with NASA, which allow joint exploration of the Moon and Mars. Furthermore, a memorandum of cooperation between the Ministry of Information Technology and IBM was signed to raise the skills of 100,000 young men and women over a period of five years within eight initiatives that could make the Kingdom a hub for technology and innovation in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>22</sup> The ministry signed a memorandum of cooperation with US National Communications and Information Administration including mutual cooperation in G5 and G6 technologies. The US hopes through this deal to alienate the KSA away from the Chinese communication technologies.<sup>23</sup> The US administration believes that the crystallization of these various economic agreements serves to enhance and renew the American-Saudi relationships and re-consolidate the US presence in the Middle East in a way that serves the American interests as soon as possible. The most prominent of those interests is relevant to the influential oil production rate which is the first driver that shapes the prices of oil and its derivatives internationally. This is the main cause behind a major crisis inside the US.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In Amman, Lapid and Jordan's King Abdullah Talk Agtech, Energy, Tourism, July 28, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Sf6Hxu>

<sup>22</sup> Saudi Arabia, US ink 18 agreements, including on space, investment, energy, July 16, 2022, <https://arab.news/n26c4>

<sup>23</sup> Felicia Schwartz and Samer Al-Atrush, Op.cite.

<sup>24</sup> Jul 20, 2022 <https://bit.ly/3biQLDm>, Min. 5:15



## □ **Russia cast its shadows over the Jeddah Summit**

Russia quickly announced visiting Iran days after Biden's participation in the Jeddah Summit. Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Tehran on July 19th 2022 as his first international journey outside the Soviet Union borders since the onset of the Ukrainian crisis. The visit witnessed mutual meetings with Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Moreover, Putin also met with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>25</sup>

The Tehran Summit was an immediate response to Biden's repeated statement that he won't leave a vacuum in the Middle East to be occupied by Russia and China. They want to remind him that they are actually present. This is in light of the Russian heavy influence on the Iran Nuclear file and the Syrian crisis. Moreover, it has an impact in Libya and Yemen as well as its international oil production percentage. The Russian-Iranian meeting witnessed signing a 40 billion\$ agreement between national companies from both sides for developing Iranian gas fields and building new pipelines for gas export, and discussing a Russian decision that alarmed American and European observers, that Iran would provide Russia with "hundreds" of "Iranian drones", including drones capable of carrying weapons in order to use it in the war in Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> Iran's Supreme Leader supported Putin's goals in the Ukraine war. He said in the triple Summit that "West opposes an independent and strong Russia. NATO does not recognize borders if the road is open in front of it. If it was not stopped in Ukraine, it would begin the same war using the Crimea peninsula as a pretext."<sup>27</sup>

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On July 21st, less than one week after Biden's visit to the KSA, Putin made a phone call with Mohammed Bin Salman in which they discussed the circumstances of his visit to Iran and the friendly relationships between Russia and Saudi Arabia. They discussed the global oil market and the expansion of trade and economic relations. By this phone call, Putin wanted to show that Biden's visit did not harm relations between Russia and the Saudi crown prince.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rob Picheta, Anna Chernova, Uliana Pavlova and Chris Liakos, CNN, Putin arrives in Iran for first trip outside former Soviet Union since his invasion of Ukraine, July 20, 2022, <https://cnn.it/3PPCZO3>

<sup>26</sup> Rob Picheta & others, Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> What was discussed at the Russia-Turkey-Iran summit?, 20/07/2022, <https://bit.ly/3oLzzjm>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, note that Turkey found itself on the opposite side of Russia in conflicts in Azerbaijan, Libya and Syria, to the extent that it sold drones to the Ukrainian forces. However, as a NATO member, it has not imposed sanctions on the Kremlin, and it remains as a main possible partner to Moscow as Turkey relies upon the Russian market in the face of sweeping inflation and the growing decline of the currency value.

<sup>29</sup> Barak Ravid, Putin and MBS discuss oil less than week after Biden visit to Saudi Arabia, Jul 21, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3OQYahx>

Moreover, The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, arranged a tour that began with Cairo to deliver a speech in front of all the 22 state members of the Arab League. The tour extended to African countries including Ethiopia, Uganda. It was another Russian attempt after Biden's visit to assert that its relationship with the Middle East is well-established at the Arab and African levels.

Worth mentioning that Lavrov's speech in Cairo fostered the need to follow diplomacy and support the ways for political compromises to solve the regional crises. The formulation of his speech was in tune with Arab Leaders' speeches in the Jeddah Summit.<sup>30</sup> He praised the Russian-Arab relationships and delivered reassuring messages about the food grain exports.<sup>31</sup>

In a statement following meetings in Cairo, Lavrov said that Russia will fulfil its grain export commitments to its clients. He pointed out that the deal about grain exports was a "package" of measures related to Russian and Ukrainian grains. He added that issues regarding Ukrainian grain would be resolved through the establishment of a coordination center in Istanbul. Lavrov explained that Russia made arrangements with Turkey and its naval forces to ensure the safety and arrival of the shipments.<sup>32</sup>

In a message published by African newspapers in countries he visited, Lavrov said: "the speculations launched by western and Ukrainian propaganda which claim that Russia exports hunger are baseless allegations at all". He added that "Russia is not tarnished by the bloody colonial crime, and it doesn't impose anything on others or teach them how they live". He praised the African position towards what happens in Ukraine and the surroundings.<sup>33</sup>

***Accordingly, the Middle East will remain an arena of rivalry between Russia, US and other forces. However, the current phase is characterized by a state of awareness and maturity in the Arab and African leaders. Thus, they can play an influential role with their sovereign tools at the political and economic levels in order to affect the events on the international arena and not limited to the regional one. This is clear in the Arab freedom to receive the Russia Foreign Minister despite the American and the European sanctions which aim at isolating***

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<sup>30</sup> Press conference of Egyptian Foreign Minister with his Russian Counterpart in Cairo, 24 Jul 2022, [- YouTube](#)

<sup>31</sup> Russian Foreign Minister's speech in the Arab League about the war developments in Ukraine, 24 Jul 2022, [- YouTube](#).

<sup>32</sup> Polina Ivanova, Sergei Lavrov on Africa tour to counter accusation Russia is 'exporting hunger', July 24 2022, <https://on.ft.com/3SgTnbZ>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

*Russia even diplomatically.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Lavrov was warmly received, and he managed to sign deals and understandings.<sup>35</sup>*

*As for oil production which pushed Biden to visit the region, all eyes focused on the OPEC+ meeting on August 3rd which resulted in an agreement on a limited increase by 100000 barrels in September only. However, reality says that the interests of Russia, the main player in OPEC+, totally contradict with Washington. The KSA confirmed that it reached its maximum production level.<sup>36</sup> The task now is how to allow the US to save face while appeasing Moscow also in order to ensure the stability of the world's largest oil alliance.*

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<sup>34</sup> Russia continues Africa charm offensive as Lavrov arrives in Congo, 25/07/2022, <https://bit.ly/3bkbMUy>

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Byaruhanga, Russia-Ukraine crisis: Lavrov shows diplomatic clout in Africa, 28/7/2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62316313>

<sup>36</sup> Brian Evans, Saudi Arabia's oil exports hit a 2-year high in July as the US pleads for more output, 1 August 2022, <https://bit.ly/30Ve22m>



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# Motives and Results



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