

# Blinken discusses Palestinian Authority reform with Mahmoud Abbas

Author:

Tue, 2022-02-01 02:56

WASHINGTON: In a further step to strengthen bilateral relations, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the need for reform in the Palestinian Authority in a phone call on Monday with President Mahmoud Abbas, the State Department said.

President Joe Biden has sought to repair ties weakened when his predecessor, President Donald Trump, slashed aid to Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza and closed a US consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem. The Biden administration has restored aid and pledged to reopen the consulate over Israeli objections, while urging Abbas, 86, to change several policies including payments his self-rule authority makes to Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Briefing reporters on Monday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price did not mention the prisoner stipends but said Blinken and Abbas discussed "the need for reform within the Palestinian Authority."

The two also discussed "the need to improve quality of life for the Palestinian people in tangible ways," Price said.

In a readout of the phone call, Abbas' office did not mention any discussion of reform within the authority, which exercises limited self-rule in West Bank territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Good discussion with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas today. We discussed strengthening the U.S.-Palestinian relationship, and the need for Palestinian Authority reform and for Palestinians & Israelis alike to enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, & prosperity.

– Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [January 31, 2022](#)

Abbas told Blinken that Israel must "stop the abuse of prisoners and ... the withholding of taxes." Israel in 2018 began deducting the value of the prisoner stipends from taxes it collects on the Palestinian Authority's behalf and transfers to it monthly.

Israel and the US say the stipends, dispersed monthly to prisoners, their relatives and the families of Palestinians killed for allegedly carrying out attacks, encourage further violence.

The Palestinians consider them a form of welfare for inmates and families they regard as national heroes.

Meanwhile, two members of Wisconsin's congressional delegation asked the Biden administration Monday to investigate how a Palestinian-American who lived in Milwaukee before moving back to his home village died at a West Bank checkpoint.

Omar Assad, 78, died after Israeli troops stopped him at a checkpoint in his native village of Jiljilya during the early morning hours of Jan. 12, according to family members and media reports.

Assad's nephew, Assad Assad, said others who were detained at the checkpoint told family members that the soldiers dragged Assad out of his car, threw him to the ground and shackled his hands and feet with zip ties, then fled after he died on the spot.

The Israeli military has said Omar was detained after resisting an inspection and later released, implying he was alive. It's unclear exactly when he died. An autopsy performed by Palestinian doctors that became public on Thursday determined the cause of death was a heart attack brought on by "external violence."

Lt. Col. Amnon Shefler, an Israeli military spokesman, said Assad's death remains under investigation and that "actions will be taken if wrongdoing is found."

Assad was born in Jiljilya but spent about 40 years in the United States. He became a US citizen before he returned to his home village in 2009 to retire with his wife, Nazmia, his nephew told The Associated Press.

US State Department officials have said they're seeking clarification about the events leading up to Assad's death.

US Sen. Tammy Baldwin and Rep. Gwen Moore sent a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken asking him to launch an investigation into Assad's death and whether the soldiers involved used equipment procured with American aid. "We strongly support human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of United States foreign policy," Baldwin and Moore wrote. "As a Palestinian American, Mr. Assad deserves the full protections afforded US citizens living abroad and his family deserves answers."

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday that he hadn't seen the request from Baldwin and Moore and the agency hasn't seen a final report from Israeli officials.

"We continue to support an investigation that is thorough and comprehensive into the circumstances of the incident and we welcome receiving additional information as soon as possible," Price said.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six Day War in 1967. Assad Assad said his uncle and aunt left Jiljilya for Chicago in 1969 in hopes of finding jobs. They moved to Milwaukee in 1974 and prospered, opening convenience stores and a restaurant, he said.

They were among dozens of Jiljilya residents who have returned to the village over the years to build retirement homes, Assad Assad said.

*(With Reuters and AP)*



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Palestinians raise funds for Syrians living in tents  
Autopsy says violence caused death of detained Palestinian

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## [Lebanon pleased with Gulf reaction to Kuwaiti initiative](#)

Mon, 2022-01-31 22:53

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants believes the country's response to the Kuwaiti initiative proposing confidence-building measures to end a diplomatic rift with Gulf states had a "positive impact" during Sunday's Arab League consultative meeting in Kuwait.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib attended Sunday's meeting, at which Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah once

again stressed his country's "keenness to maintain Lebanon's stability and the welfare of its people."

He noted that Kuwait will keep trying to mend the relationship, adding: "The concerned authorities in Kuwait and the Gulf countries will discuss the Lebanese response to decide on the next steps with Lebanon."

The Lebanese response stressed Beirut's commitment to respect all international resolutions in a manner that guarantees domestic peace and stability, and the government's commitment, in word and deed, to the policy of neutrality, so the country is not turned into a platform for attacks against Arab countries.

The response did not mention specific international resolutions or steps to implement them, such as UN Security Council resolution 1559 – which was adopted in 2004 and calls for the disarmament of armed militias in Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf countries cut diplomatic ties with Lebanon in October 2021 after Information Minister George Kordahi offended the Kingdom.

Kordahi then resigned in November in an attempt to ease the situation, but the crisis persisted amid hostility from Hezbollah.

The Lebanese Cabinet resumed discussions for the 2022 budget on Monday, while a speech by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, scheduled for Monday, was postponed.

Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi announced Lebanon's support for the UAE "against attempts to target Arab legitimacy, which we are keen to preserve and strengthen," adding: "We have been, and will remain, unified in the fight against harm and evil of all kinds."

Mawlawi also briefed the Cabinet on busting 17 spy networks in Lebanon, allegedly working for Israel.

The Information Branch of the Internal Security Forces was able to uncover the networks, arresting at least 10 suspects.

A security source stated: "Over a month ago, specifically after the bombing that shook the Burj Al-Shemali Palestinian refugee camp in Tyre, southern Lebanon, the branch obtained information about a person close to Hamas being linked to the bombing.

"The Information Branch was able to uncover multiple unconnected networks after monitoring the suspect's movement and communications," said the source, adding that a number of suspects were arrested and were currently under investigation.

Two suspects are allegedly from the city of Sidon, with another employed at a commercial center in the city of Tyre. Other suspects live inside and around Sidon.

One was arrested in Tyre, and his house and the house of another suspected agent were raided simultaneously. Large quantities of gift boxes, perfumes and computers were confiscated.

The spy networks are thought to be distributed throughout Lebanon and include agents from different sects, initial investigations reportedly revealed.

These agents were apparently recruited through social media, with most unaware that they were working for Israel, while others knew and were asked to buy burner phones.

On Monday, President Michel Aoun asked the foreign minister to file a complaint in the UN Security Council against Israel for “using Lebanon’s airspace” to attack Syria, with the Cabinet condemning the “Israeli breach that took place at 3 a.m., when Israeli planes bombed the Syrian territory from the airspace of Riyaq in the Bekaa.”

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported “human losses resulting from the Israeli bombardment, which targeted Hezbollah sites and warehouses, northeast of Damascus.”



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Lebanon highlights drug seizures as PM 'smooths rough edges' of response to Kuwaiti initiative  
Gulf states review Lebanon's response to proposal to ease row

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## [Israeli president meets UAE vice president on first official visit](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-01-31 19:36

RIYADH: UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid met Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the UAE pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, state news agency WAM reported on Monday.

Sheikh Mohammed welcomed Herzog, who is on his first official visit to the UAE, and the two sides discussed the future of economic, commercial and investment cooperation.

They also held talks on raising the level of scientific and technological cooperation and other paths that supported the future of development, as well as various regional and international developments, issues of common concern, and international efforts to accelerate the pace of global recovery.

Excellent discussion today with the Ruler of Dubai, HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum [@HHSkhMohd](#). We discussed a range of issues, including deepening collaboration in trade, innovation, tourism and investments. We also discussed Israel & UAE's special shared history. [pic.twitter.com/7di93pRqcd](https://pic.twitter.com/7di93pRqcd)

– [Isaac Herzog \(@Isaac\\_Herzog\)](#) [January 31, 2022](#)

Sheikh Mohammed said that Israel's participation in the expo, along with more than 190 countries, opened several areas for cooperation as "the mega global event seeks to shape a better future for humanity based on peaceful coexistence and sharing of expertise and resources."

Herzog and his wife Michal visited the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi as part of his official visit.

While meeting the Israeli president at Expo 2020 Dubai On his first visit to the UAE.

We discussed aspects of trade, investment and technological cooperation.. we welcomed their participation in the largest international cultural event, Expo 2020. [pic.twitter.com/LiBnCxa2ob](https://pic.twitter.com/LiBnCxa2ob)

– HH Sheikh Mohammed (@HHSkhMohd) [January 31, 2022](#)



Mohammed Al-Khajja, the UAE's ambassador to Israel, and Amir Hayek, Israeli ambassador to the UAE, and several senior Israeli officials accompanied Herzog.

Dr. Yousif Al-Obaidli, director-general of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Center, accompanied the president and his accompanying delegation on a tour of the mosque's halls and external corridors.

They were briefed by one of the center's cultural tour specialists about the mosque's message "that underscores notions of coexistence, tolerance, and openness to cultures, emanating from the nation's late founder's rich legacy," according to a statement on WAM.

They also learned about the mosque's history, components, and aesthetic features of Islamic art and architecture.

Finishing a very moving, historic visit to the UAE at the invitation of a great leader, HH Sheikh [@MohamedBinZayed](#). There is huge potential for our two nations. Together, we can truly lead the Middle East toward a new horizon of peace, prosperity, and cooperation. [pic.twitter.com/xX0n6gD00m](https://pic.twitter.com/xX0n6gD00m)

–   Isaac Herzog (@Isaac\_Herzog) [January 31, 2022](#)

The Israeli leader was presented with two of the center's publications at the end of the visit.

One was "Spaces of Light" and showcases the winning photographs from the "Spaces of Light" photography award, which is held annually by the center in celebration of the aesthetics and visual culture of the mosque.

The other was "Houses of God" and is about places of worship in Islamic history, including the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque.











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Israel supports UAE security needs, president says on first visit  
UAE foreign minister discusses strategic partnership with British MP

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## [UAE foreign minister discusses strategic partnership with British MP](#)

Mon, 2022-01-31 22:32

LONDON: The UAE's foreign minister received the British minister for Middle East and North Africa in Abu Dhabi on Monday, Emirates News Agency reported.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and James Cleverly discussed the

strategic partnership between their countries, issues of mutual interest, and the latest developments in the region so as to enhance its security and stability.

Cleverly expressed his strong condemnation of the Houthi militia's terrorist attacks on civil areas and facilities in the UAE.

The minister also stressed the significance of working to boost security and stability in the region.

Sheikh Abdullah welcomed Cleverly's visit and emphasised the solid and strategic relations between the UAE and the UK, which are based on a long history of fruitful work, joint coordination, and keenness to promote security and stability in the region.

The minister for Middle East and North Africa also visited the UK's pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020 during his visit to the UAE.



"It showcases the creativity and innovation that global Britain offers. (It also writes poetry using artificial intelligence!)" Cleverly posted on Twitter.

Earlier, the British minister discussed joint work to tackle illicit financial flows with Minister of State Ahmed bin Ali Al-Sayegh.

He also reaffirmed UK commitment to regional security during a meeting with Anwar Gargash, diplomatic adviser to the UAE President.



James Cleverly meets Anwar Gargash in the UAE. (@JamesCleverly)



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Israeli president meets UAE vice president on first official visit

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## [Biden tells emir he will make Qatar major non-NATO ally](#)

Mon, 2022-01-31 22:26

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden promised Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, on Monday that he will soon designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally, granting special status to a key friend in a turbulent region.

During a meeting in the Oval Office, Biden said he planned to notify the US Congress soon of the designation, which is granted by the US to close, non-NATO allies that have strategic working relationships with the US military. "Qatar is a good friend and reliable and capable partner. And I'm notifying Congress that I will designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally to reflect the importance of our relationship. I think it's long overdue," Biden told reporters with the emir sitting at his side.

Qatar is the 18th country to receive this designation, the last being Brazil in 2019. The designation provides international partners with benefits in defense trade and security cooperation, including eligibility for loan programs and priority delivery for certain military sales.

This afternoon, I'm hosting Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar for a bilateral meeting at the White House. I look forward to discussing a range of issues, including security and prosperity in the Middle East, global energy supplies, Afghanistan, and more.

– President Biden (@POTUS) [January 31, 2022](#)

"We're very happy and proud of this great relationship," said Qatar's ruling emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. "We will continue working together to find ways and means to bring peace in our region."

Qatar is the world's largest supplier of liquefied natural gas and may divert supplies to Europe if the Ukraine conflict disrupts Russian gas deliveries to the continent.

Biden and Tamim also used Monday's meeting to discuss Middle East security and the situation in Afghanistan, where humanitarian conditions have deteriorated in the aftermath of last year's US military withdrawal and Taliban takeover. The leaders also discussed the status of US efforts to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Biden administration officials heaped praise on Qatar for assisting the US military evacuation of thousands of US citizens and Afghans during the chaotic ending to the American war with the Taliban. Qatar continues to operate flights for those fleeing Afghanistan and has served as a way station for the US as it processes visas for thousands of people fleeing Taliban control. Qatar's ambassador in Kabul even personally escorted convoys of evacuees to the airport to help ensure their safe passage.

Had fruitful discussions with President Biden @POTUS in which we exchanged views on regional and international developments. The strategic partnership between our countries is bringing peace and stability to our region.

- تميم بن حمد (@TamimBinHamad) [January 31, 2022](#)

Tamim was also meeting separately with Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and discussing arms sales and other military issues with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, an official told reporters.

Biden said he and the emir had a lot on their agenda on Monday including strengthening commercial and investment cooperation.

He hailed a new deal that Qatar Airways Group signed with Boeing that he said will create "tens of thousands of good-paying jobs."

Boeing Co. secured a launch order from Qatar Airways for a new freighter version of its 777X passenger jet and a provisional order for 737 MAX jets in a Washington ceremony on Monday.

Earlier today, I had a productive meeting at the Pentagon with @SecDef Lloyd J. Austin III which will further advance our strategic military partnership. The joint efforts of Qatar and the United States are fully oriented towards regional and international peace and stability.

- تميم بن حمد (@TamimBinHamad) [January 31, 2022](#)

Biden said the UAE defeated a ballistic missile attack launched by the Houthis from Yemen on Sunday. "We've been in daily contact with UAE to address those threats," he said.

He said he had directed the Pentagon's Austin to do everything he could to communicate the support of the US for the UAE, Saudi Arabia and throughout the Gulf region.

*(With Reuters and AP)*



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Biden to meet Qatar leader as Europe energy crisis looms  
Qatar emir to meet with Biden in Washington Jan 31: White House