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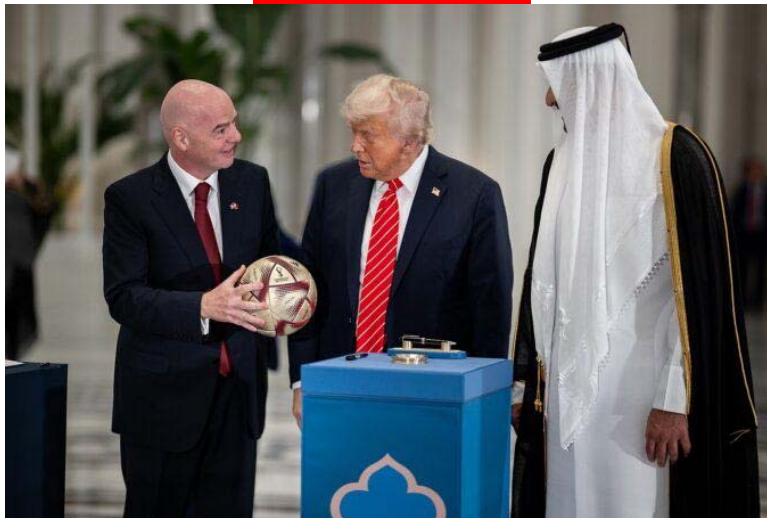
European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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17.05.2025

## **The Middle East And the Persian Gulf: Trump's Favorite Shopping Mall**



Photograph Source: The White House – Public Domain

Donald Trump's first official travel overseas in both his first and second presidential terms centered on the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. These trips have secured great wealth and investment for the Trump family enterprises that now include a meme cryptocurrency that allows crypto investors in the Gulf to enrich Donald Trump. The latest and boldest example of the region's largesse for Trump is the Qatari royal family's gift of a \$400 million luxury jet that could end up with Trump's presidential foundation when (and if) he leaves the White House.

The Middle East and the Persian Gulf are the center of the Trump organization's global business empire. Prior to Trump's arrival in the Gulf, his sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, have signed a number of deals in the region, trading on their family name and influence, to enhance the wealth of the Trump family. Even the prodigal son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has

acquired billions in investment from the Gulf states. On the eve of Trump's arrival in the Gulf, Abu Dhabi announced an investment of \$2 billion into World Liberty Financial, Trump's cryptocurrency company, with Trump's family earning tens of millions of dollars annually on the interest from that investment.

Final returns haven't been posted from the visit, but the communiques and announcements have thus far indicated that Trump also is pursuing a geopolitical reshaping of the region that could lead to a smaller U.S. military presence in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Trump started his visit to the Gulf with a surprise announcement that the United States will lift long-standing sanctions on Syria. He followed this with an unusual meeting between Trump and Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. Saudi Arabia has made a \$600 billion commitment to invest in the U.S. and, in return, the United States agreed to sell the Saudis an arms package worth nearly \$142 billion, one of the largest defense cooperation agreements Washington has made. Qatar has enhanced its international standing with its high-level diplomacy and discussions with the United States.

Presumably the Saudis and the Qataris in return will press Trump to recognize the needs and rights of Palestinians, which Trump completely ignored in his first term. In view of Trump's random acts and unpredictability, the Israelis must be concerned with how far Trump will go in solidifying U.S. relations with the Saudi and Qatari leaders. If nothing else, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu must be concerned with what appear to be early signs of a possible U.S. reshaping of its role and posture in the Middle East and the Gulf.

Trump's unpredictability is well-established but it is nevertheless surprising that his regional meandering is garnering great international attention despite Trump himself having no genuine understanding of the dynamics at work in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf and having appointed the worst and least experienced national security team in the history of the United States. Trump appears determined to reduce the U.S. military presence in the region, which U.S. presidents have tried and failed to do over the past fifteen years. Trump announced a ceasefire with the Houthis, which ended U.S. bombing in Yemen; called for an end to sanctions against the new Syrian government, which could lead to the withdrawal of around 1,000 U.S. forces in northeastern Syria; and endorsed a less fractious bilateral relationship with Iran, which could lead to the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iranian nuclear accords.

Trump may not end U.S. complicity with Israeli militarization, but he has signaled to Prime Minister Netanyahu that U.S. support cannot be taken for granted. Unlike Trump's first visit to the region in his first term, he did not include a stopover in Israel. On route to the region

in the second term, Trump announced that he had negotiated the Hamas' release of the last living American citizen being held hostage, without any discussions with Netanyahu, who was only informed of the deal after the surprise release. Netanyahu learned of the truce between the United States and the Houthis after the fact as well.

Former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, a hard-liner, conceded that "It certainly doesn't look like Netanyahu has Trump's ear right now—and if he has his ear, he doesn't have Trump's heart and mind." The fact that there are even tentative indications of a possible path to a new nuclear deal with Iran as well as even a limited revival of commercial ties between Iran and the United States must be particularly worrisome to Netanyahu and the right-wing zealots.

Israelis have always expected great support from presidents from the Democratic Party, but they understand that Republican presidents (e.g., Eisenhower, Reagan, Bush Sr.) have been willing to separate themselves from Israeli excesses when necessary. Democratic presidents have been beholden for support and resources from the Jewish-American community, and for that reason have avoided getting crosswise with Israel. Netanyahu has exploited this fact for the past three decades, which has frustrated Presidents Clinton, Obama, and Biden.

The Israelis know that Trump would like to build on the 2020 Abraham Accords from his first term, which comprised a series of bilateral relations that normalized relations between Israel and several Arab countries. The Accords did nothing to address the existential problem of Palestine, however, and Trump will not be able to expand the Accords to include Saudi Arabia without paying more attention of the Palestinian problem and the need for some solution. Trump himself has referred to a solution that addresses the needs of all the parties as the "deal of the century," which is designed to position himself for consideration of one of his major goals, a Nobel peace prize.

Nevertheless, while Trump pursues his economic and geopolitical deals in the Persian Gulf, one of the greatest tragedies in human history is unfolding as the Israelis pursue a genocidal campaign that is killing tens of thousands of innocent civilians and children, and traumatizing and ruining the lives of more than two million Palestinians who have been running for their lives for the past year and a half. The fact that the international community has demonstrated no ability to counter Israeli militarism reveals the absence of any global responsibility for this horror as it unfolds. Even Israeli military officials are acknowledging the fact that starvation is expanding across the Gaza strip, with Palestinian children paying a terrible price.

For the past two months, Israel has made sure that no food, water, medical materials and other essentials can reach the victims of its assault. Netanyahu has been given a free hand to

operate. Presidents Biden and Trump are responsible for providing the Israeli Defense Forces with the weaponry—including bunker-buster bombs and missiles still being used against hospital complexes—that comprise some of the most deadly war crimes of all.

MAY 16, 2025

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