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**Trump Gone: What does it mean for the GCC
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Introduction

Former Vice-President Joe Biden won the bid for the 46th Presidency of the United States, if Trump's objection did not change the outcome. Although the election was in the US, its reflection is global. Many countries, especially the [EU countries](#), were bidding for Biden, while leaders who have personal connections with Trump and his son-in-law deemed Trump to be the winner. The GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council composed of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman) can be divided into two groups in Biden's bid. The first group is the Saudi-led group (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain), who has good connections with Trump due to his 'America First' policy, which resulted with around [\\$100 billion](#) of arms deal. The second group either does not expect any advantages in the re-election of Trump or considers Biden's election as preferable. Qatar, for example, can benefit from Biden's Presidency since Trump has close connections with Qatar's rival leaders, Mohammad bin Salman and Mohammad bin Zayed. Kuwait and Oman would also prefer Biden's administration because of their parallel views of diplomacy and mediation.

What Biden's victory mean for the GCC countries?

1 Saudi Arabia

If anyone wanted Trump's re-election more than Trump himself, it would be Saudi Arabia leaders. Biden openly criticized the Crown Prince (and

de-facto leader) of Saudi Arabia for his records on the Saudi Arabian led-Intervention in Yemen as well the human rights violations inside the Kingdom. Additionally, Biden denounced the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi and promised that the Kingdom would be [punished, especially since the Crown Prince does not believe that the assassination was a rogue operation](#). Biden has already stated that the US will "make sure America does not check its values at the door [to sell arms or buy oil](#)." Considering these statements, Biden's presidency would be a harsh 4-years for Saudi Arabia. However, one should not neglect that Biden, as a candidate, made all these statements as a critique to the incumbent President, so these pre-election statements may not have concrete reality after his inauguration. That being said, the Kingdom may welcome an initiative under Biden's administration to stop the Yemeni war since it has "[become an expensive quagmire](#)."

The possibility of America returning to the Iranian Nuclear Deal, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), under Biden's administration after its withdrawal in May 2018, is another issue waiting for Riyadh to face. Saudi Arabia considers '[maximum pressure](#)' as the best solution to confine Iranian influence in the region, which is considered the sole source of destabilisation in the region. On the other hand, a possible Iran-US deal will be welcomed by the European powers due to its economic benefits, especially taking the economic recession caused by Covid-19 into account.

In short, Saudi Arabia (like the UAE and Bahrain) will indeed miss Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, allegedly was "[in Crown Prince's pocket](#)." Saudi-US relations, however, are deeper than any President can permanently affect as the Kingdom is one of the most significant trading partners for the US.

2 United Arab Emirates

In the current election term, UAE officials and social media accounts showed support for Trump's re-election. Therefore, one might expect that Biden's election will not be in UAE's favour. However, in the 2016 elections, UAE showed similar support to Trump's rival Hillary Clinton. This means that UAE's support for a specific leadership will not necessarily give a clear view on the 4-year-long relationship between the white house and the UAE. That being said, it is still true that the UAE leadership will miss Trump's son-in-law, Kushner, as he shared warm relations with UAE leadership.

The main aspect of the US- UAE relationship is the shared security associations. Since Iran, at least seemingly, is the leading security issue in the United Emirates, US considerations of re- enacting the JCPOA Iranian nuclear deal may not be welcomed by the UAE. That being said, if President- Elect Biden decides to re- implement the nuclear deal, the UAE will not spend its energy nor have the capacity to try to stop it, but if the UAE decides to respond, it may strengthen its relationship with non- Western powers namely China and Russia. However, either way it is expected that the US and its allies (EU) reassure that the Emirati security will not be undermined.

Biden should be grateful to Trump's initiative in the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement, the joint statement between Israel, UAE and US. Biden would not need to spend any effort to make US Arab allies accept such an agreement. The question is though: will Biden's administration have any effect on the UAE's gains for their normalization with Israel that were promised by Trump?. Trump's carrot for the UAE normalization was the sale of F-35 fighter jets, which so far were only acquired by Israel in the Middle East from the Obama-Biden administration. Israel's approval, under Netanyahu's government, for the sale of F-35 jets would be a significant victory if achieved, though the first signals are that the Biden administration may [cancel](#) the sale. Considering the importance of the F-35 sales to the US economy, it may be expected to deliver this service, especially with the current economic recession. However, one should not forget the American policy of "Israel first" along with the US check- balance system (congress approval); the cancellation would still be possible even if Trump was re-elected.

Biden may be more aggressive in UAE's involvement in Yemen and Libya and their domestic violations of human rights than Trump was, but nothing severe is expected. UAE's policies, such as tolerance, respect, and fight against extremism, may gain even more memorandum during Biden presidency by re-using and emphasizing Israel's normalization and having many nationalities living in harmony in the UAE.

3 Bahrain

Bahrain, like its other Gulf allies (Saudi Arabia and the UAE), wished for

the re-election of President Trump for domestic democratic reasons. It fears Biden would not be as tolerant as Trump was with Bahrain's action towards its Shia majority and its political activists. As a tiny and relatively more impoverished country, Bahrain has a limited influence on regional politics. A Saudi Arabia-led army, the Peninsula Shield Force, was deployed in Bahrain during the peak of the Arab Spring to protect the Bahraini regime. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, moreover, achieved to show that this insurgent was [agitated by Iran](#) and thus easing the US pressure.

Again, Bahrain, like its Gulf allies, supported and lobbied for Mrs. Clinton in the 2016 election. However, this support did not stop Bahrain from visiting Washington and asking for support from Trump. Bearing the same logic, Bahrain will not spend time mourning after Trump but will look for a chance to ask for US support under the new administration. Bahrain's security is mainly attributed to the US naval base, which also exceeds any individual president's decision.

Biden, a supporter of Israel, will also welcome the normalization deal that President Trump signed. Moreover, as Bahrain is mostly considered a part of the Saudi-led group, it will be hard for Biden to take unilateral sanctions against it as he will have to either sanction all the members of the group or none, which makes the decision too difficult to take.

4 Qatar

Biden's win for presidency can be considered good news for Qatar, as opposed to the blockading countries. President Donald Trump's [tweet](#) about the Qatar blockade a day after the

incident could be read as the President's stance towards the blockade. Even though Trump took back his accusation of alleged Qatar's links with terrorist organizations, the Trump's strong relationships with the blockading countries indicate the approval of Qatari isolation in the region. The timing of the blockade also raised suspicions about the informal support of the President to the blockade, since it took place two weeks after Trump met with GCC states in Riyadh during his first abroad trip since his inauguration. The apparent reason for the blockade, the Qatar-Iran warm relations, will not be meaningful in Biden's term as he is no stranger to negotiations with Iran. Moreover, the US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence's [efforts](#) for the blockade contradicted the discourse of the President's antipathy of Qatar. Qatar's diplomatic and military position with the US continued without the President, such as the Taliban deal and the possibility of naming Qatar a major [non-NATO ally](#). Hence, it can be said that Qatar's relationship with the US under Trump's administration were not as negative as Trump demonstrated because they were already led by non-Trump actors. The peace agreement, facilitated by Qatar between the United States and Taliban, is a clarification of this argument. If it were President Trump who led the deal, he would have not missed the opportunity to take credit for himself, as he did in the North Korea Deal and the UAE, Bahrain and, Sudan's normalization deal with Israel. However, Trump's diffident attitude to a partnership with Qatar in the negotiations with Taliban could mean that he did not have a major role in initiating the deal.

On the other hand, unlike the Trump administration, Biden may push

the blockading countries to find a solution and lift the embargo. Predictably, the Biden administration would continue announcing Qatar as a non-NATO major ally, which is already on the table. The early telephone call of Emir Tamim bin Hamad al Thani to President-elect Biden and VP-elect Kamala Harris is a sign that Qatar-US relation would be accelerated in the new term of presidency which will be in Qatar's favour. Besides, Qatar would support reinitiating the nuclear deal with Iran if the Biden administration decides to re-enact it. Therefore, it could be said that Qatari-American relations will increase during Biden's Presidency.

5 Kuwait

Kuwait follows neutral, mediating, and peaceful policies in the region; therefore, a change in US administration may not affect Kuwait-US relations in general. As a matter of fact, Kuwait's mediating position in the Gulf Crisis can be strengthened even more in the new term. The conflicting situation of Trump's administration denoted that the President aimed to keep [the stalemate position](#) of the Gulf crisis, which made mediation harder for Kuwait. A US encouragement for a solution would help Kuwait mediate more comfortably. Moreover, going back to Obama's term policies will ease the security concern of Kuwait as well. Furthermore, this could be a chance for the new Amir to recognize his position as a mediator inside the Gulf after the late Amir Sheikh Sabah. If achieved, the mediator's role will be institutionalized, and the State of Kuwait will gain this title beyond any individual Amir.

Even though Biden desires all countries in the region to normalize relations with Israel, no pressure is

expected from President Biden towards Kuwait. It is alleged that Trump pushed Kuwait to join the countries that signed the normalization agreement, but Kuwait instantly and publicly [denied](#) their intention in doing so. Considering Kuwait's unwillingness to recognize Israel, the tolerant attitude of Biden would be positive for Kuwait. On the other hand, the deal with Iran (JCPOA) could empower Shias in the region. Even though the Kuwaiti administration is tolerant of the Kuwaiti Shias, Iran (and Shias' empowerment in Iraq) could affect Kuwait's internal affairs. Consequently, albeit some suspicions on sectarian dynamics, Kuwait would embrace Biden at the office more than Trump.

6 Oman

The presidency of Biden has already been perceived as a sign of easing International tension in the region. One of the most critical issues can be the Iran deal, in which Oman has already been considered the mediator. Biden's administration would reactivate this ['Backchannel'](#) with Iran. Even though Oman lost Sultan Qaboos last year, the new sultan's parallel policies would also denote Oman's willingness to be a part of the solution in the deal with Iran. Unlike Trump's sanction-supporting administration, Biden's tolerance to Iran would positively affect the Omani economy.

On the other hand, passing this regional test would strengthen the position of Sultan Haitham after the veteran Sultan Qaboos, who ruled for half a century. Besides, unlike its neutral policies in the last decades, Sultan Haitham could [change](#) the strategy of Oman's foreign policy regarding regional dynamics. Dissident

approaches of Oman against Saudi intervention in Yemen and hostility of the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia against Iran raises the possibility of this policy shift. Thus, it could be said that Iran's deal with the US could economically, politically, and strategically alter the position of Sultan Haitham's Oman in the region.

Conclusion

Biden's victory will lead the GCC states to revisit their domestic and international policies. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain might avoid human rights violations, especially involving people who can be under the spotlight of the US and the West such as journalists and civil right activists. This caution may also affect Saudi and UAE led international operations, like in Yemen, as Biden accused Trump of issuing Saudi Arabia a ['blank check'](#) and promising that the America's priorities will be set in [Washington not in Riyadh](#). However, Biden's Presidency may not be as hard as these three countries expect it to be because their relationships go beyond any individual President due to the economic and security agreements that they have had for around 70 years. One also should not forget the rhetoric that a non-incumbent president candidate (challenger) uses against the incumbent one. The incumbent president is more in real politics and needs to consider many aspects of the country's foreign policies and relations, especially trade and the US economy. While a candidate can talk more freely about prioritising 'American values' over oil and money since he is still not in office. Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman, on the other hand, will welcome Biden's Presidency, as their politics were not in line with those of Trump's.

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