



# Seeking a New Balance for U.S. Policy in the Middle East

## A Look at the Biden Administration's First 6 Months

By Brian Katulis and Peter Juul | September 7, 2021

The ongoing crisis in Afghanistan has raised concerns about how the United States can best manage and balance its interests and values in complicated places around the globe. The fallout from events in Afghanistan will impact America's approach in other key regions in the world, including the Middle East. As with its recent moves in Afghanistan, the Biden administration has signaled it seeks to decrease its military engagement in the broader Middle East.

The Biden administration's first six months in the Middle East focused on limiting direct U.S. involvement in the region, instead prioritizing the COVID-19 pandemic response and the economic crisis at home while starting to address key global challenges such as climate change and competition with China and Russia. One common mantra among some members of the new Middle East team in the Biden administration is "no more failed states," indicating modest and pragmatic goals for U.S. policy in the region. This new approach is more cautious than the previous administration's efforts in the Middle East, which took risks in its policies on Iran and sent decidedly mixed signals about America's overall posture in the region.

Looking ahead to the next six months and beyond, the United States is likely to face challenges on two main fronts. First, diplomacy with Iran over the revival of the nuclear deal has not produced a breakthrough at a time when Iran and its proxies continue to threaten U.S. troops and U.S. partners. These forces continue to undermine stability in key parts of the Middle East, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Yemen. Second, existing tensions between Israel and some of its neighbors, including Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and a range of groups operating from Syrian territory, could erupt into a wider conflict. Navigating these two fronts—Iran and the Arab-Israeli front—in a way that produces increased stability and reduces threats from retrograde groups will be one central strategic challenge for the Biden administration in the Middle East.

But the biggest emerging challenge facing the region remains the chronic human security challenges that threaten to produce even greater violence and unrest. First among these is the unfinished COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this summer witnessed record heat waves that led to widespread electricity shortages across key countries in the Middle East already experiencing poor services and governance hampered by endemic corruption. Furthermore, the looming climate crisis has already produced more acute challenges for water security in places such as Iran. Finally, broad deficits in freedom across most parts of the Middle East and North Africa—which remains dominated by autocratic governments—presents another overwhelming challenge to the goal of supporting democracy and human rights.

Early on, the Biden administration sought to put diplomacy first by working with European partners and other global powers to reengage Iran in diplomatic talks aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal.<sup>1</sup> It also appointed special envoys tasked with ending conflicts in Yemen and Libya as well as one to address multiple issues in the Horn of Africa. Those efforts all engaged regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This summer Biden hosted the leaders of Jordan, Iraq, and Israel.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Biden’s secretaries of State and Defense and their respective Middle East teams began engaging leaders and officials in Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other key partners to coordinate a new approach on the region.

The Biden administration also signaled its intent to rebalance America’s military posture in the Central Command area of operations as it conducted a global posture review. The most significant move made by the administration in this broader area of operations was a complete troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, an effort that has come with major complications still being managed by the United States. In addition, the Biden administration repositioned military assets and equipment from key parts of the Middle East. And even as the administration sought to rebalance its approach, it conducted military strikes against adversaries threatening U.S. troops and partner countries across the region, including strikes against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.<sup>3</sup>

The May conflict between Israel and Hamas drew the United States more directly into the Israeli-Palestinian issue than the Biden administration had initially planned. A prolonged political deadlock in Israel and continued divisions among Palestinians led this administration to adopt a restrained approach involving renewal of some U.S. aid stopped by the previous administration and the restart of diplomatic contacts with Palestinian Authority leaders.<sup>4</sup> The crisis that erupted in May drew the United States into a role of working with key regional actors such as Egypt and taking practical measures to end the conflict.<sup>5</sup> But the current environment on the Israeli-Palestinian front continues to face challenges from major gaps in basic human security, including the ongoing pandemic.

In sum, the conditions that produced popular uprisings across key parts of the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 remain present, as overwhelming economic, social, political, and human security demands could spark movements for change and generate instability. These challenges present an opportunity for the United States to recast its overall engagement with the Middle East to put a higher priority on diplomacy backed by a balanced security strategy, with a stronger focus on broader human security issues that will impact the region and inevitably affect the broader international system.

This brief offers highlights of the Biden administration's actions in the Middle East and North Africa in its first six months on five key fronts: human security, conflict resolution, Iran, Arab-Israeli affairs, and overall U.S. military posture and engagement in the region. It provides an assessment of where the administration has had success thus far and where it's fallen short. In addition, this brief looks ahead to the challenges the region will present moving forward.

---

## Human security

The Biden administration delivered targeted COVID-19 aid and other assistance aimed at helping the people of the region and supporting certain key governments. These initial moves were overshadowed by crises such as the spring conflict between Israel and Hamas and diplomacy and tensions with Iran. Still, the moves made by the Biden administration on the human security front represent important steps to engage the people of the region and address concerns that impact regional security and political dynamics.

### COVID response: A domestic and global policy priority with specific actions in the Middle East and North Africa

- More than 230,000 people across the Middle East and North Africa have died from COVID-19, with Tunisia, Iran, and Lebanon hardest hit as a proportion of their populations.<sup>6</sup> Over 56.4 million people in the region have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, with vaccination rates in the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Israel at 60 percent and higher.<sup>7</sup>
- The United States has provided more than 3 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to nations in the region. Tunisia received 1 million Moderna doses via COVAX—the international vaccine distribution mechanism—as well as 200,000 Pfizer doses delivered under private contract with the Tunisian government; 500,000 Pfizer doses have been directly delivered to Jordan; 500,000 Pfizer doses have been delivered to Iraq via COVAX; 500,000 Moderna doses have been delivered to the West Bank and Gaza via COVAX; and 302,400 Johnson and Johnson doses have been delivered to Morocco via COVAX.<sup>8</sup> In August, the U.S. State Department announced that it had provided 151,200 doses of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine to the people of Yemen.<sup>9</sup>

### Economic and aid engagement: Restarting some programs and initiating new efforts

- The Biden administration restored more than \$250 million in assistance to the Palestinians cut by the Trump administration; \$183 million for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency; \$150 million for economic assistance; and \$15 million for emergency COVID-19 response.<sup>10</sup>
- The U.S. International Finance Development Corporation announced the launch of the Joint Investment for Peace Initiative, a new program created by the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act that will focus on promoting investment in Palestinian-owned small- and medium-sized businesses that work with American and Israeli partners.<sup>11</sup>

In early August, the Biden administration announced \$100 million in additional economic support to Lebanon and \$165 million in addition humanitarian aid to Yemen.<sup>12</sup>

### Climate change: Planting the seeds for future cooperation

- Record heat waves struck the Middle East this summer, with temperatures reaching over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran over the summer.<sup>13</sup> Elderly and neglected power grids wilted under this heat, with electricity cuts and water shortages leading to protests in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.<sup>14</sup>
- Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry traveled to the region, visiting the UAE in early April to attend a regional climate forum in Abu Dhabi and traveling to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt in June to discuss climate issues and renewable energy with all three countries. Egypt will host COP27, the next iteration of the U.N. Climate Change Conference.<sup>15</sup>
- The leaders of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were invited to President Biden's April virtual climate summit. At the summit, the United States and UAE agreed to create the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate—an initiative that will be formally launched at the COP26 summit in Glasgow and includes Israel—while Qatar and Saudi Arabia agreed to establish a Net-Zero Producers Forum along with the energy ministries of the United States, Canada, and Norway.<sup>16</sup>

### Human rights: Voicing support as a priority, awaiting major actions

- During the Biden administration's first six months in office, a number of repressive Middle Eastern governments released political activists and human rights campaigners from prison. Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul, for instance, was released from prison in February, as were two other activists with American citizenship. In mid-July, Egyptian authorities released three activists and three journalists days after human rights criticism from the U.S. State Department.<sup>17</sup> Quiet U.S. diplomacy were part of the efforts to gain these releases.

---

## Conflict resolution

The Biden administration came into office seeking to lower tensions across the region, and it has been active in the diplomatic arena in Yemen, Libya, and the Horn of Africa. It has taken modest steps to engage on the Syrian conflict, with a focus on humanitarian aid delivery.

### Yemen: Signaling peace as a priority but finding diplomatic pathways difficult to navigate

- The Biden administration appointed veteran diplomat Tim Lenderking as special envoy to Yemen and publicly stated that it was ending U.S. support for “offensive operations” carried out by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, though it remains unclear how this is defined. Lenderking has shuttled back and forth to the region multiple times in his efforts to end the fighting, notably observing in early June that the Houthis “bear major responsibility for refusing to engage meaningfully on a ceasefire.” However, these policy efforts have not moved the conflict closer to resolution.<sup>18</sup>

### Libya: Working toward greater stability and renewed political engagement

- The Biden administration appointed U.S. Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland as special envoy for Libya, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken participated in the Second Berlin Conference on Libya. The conference and subsequent bilateral discussions reaffirmed U.S. and international support for planned December national elections. While foreign mercenaries have yet to depart the country as stipulated under the terms of the 2020 cease-fire deal, other elements—such as the reopening of the coastal road between the towns of Misrata and Sirte—have gone forward.<sup>19</sup>

### Horn of Africa: Engaging preventative diplomacy aimed at stopping broader tensions

- The Biden administration named former U.N. Undersecretary-General Jeffrey Feltman as special envoy for the Horn of Africa, tasked with mediating regional disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the Tigray conflict.<sup>20</sup>
- Secretary of State Blinken imposed visa restrictions on individuals involved in the fighting in Tigray as well as “wide-ranging restrictions on economic and security assistance to Ethiopia,” while the U.S. Agency for International Development announced the provision of an additional \$149 million in humanitarian aid for the region.<sup>21</sup>
- The Tigray conflict continues to escalate, with the Ethiopian government mobilizing paramilitaries despite international calls for negotiation. Egypt and Sudan have both requested U.N. Security Council intervention over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, saying negotiations with Ethiopia over the project have failed.<sup>22</sup>

## Syria: No major strategic shifts

- At the U.N. Security Council, the United States led a successful diplomatic effort to renew Syria's cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism for an additional year. In addition, Secretary of State Blinken announced \$436 million in additional humanitarian assistance to Syrians in Syria and neighboring countries. Syria remains divided between the Assad regime; an enclave around Idlib run by an al-Qaida-affiliated group; a Turkish zone along the northern border; and a U.S.-backed Kurdish zone in the country's northeast.<sup>23</sup>

---

## Iran: Diplomacy and regional security tensions

The Biden administration has made rejoining the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran a central pillar of its approach to the Middle East and made some significant progress toward that goal in indirect talks earlier this year. However, it has also had to contend with Iran's continued destabilizing security role across the region.

- Indirect talks to revive the nuclear deal started in Vienna on April 6. Though some progress had been reported by mid-June, Iran put the talks on hold until after the new Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, assumed office in August.<sup>24</sup>
- In February and June, the U.S. military carried out two sets of airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for rocket and drone attacks by those militias against U.S. military facilities in Iraq. More recently, the United States, United Kingdom, and Israel held Iran responsible for a lethal drone attack on an oil tanker off the coast of Oman.<sup>25</sup>
- Secretary of State Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met with Iranian-American activist Masih Alinejad after the Department of Justice charged four Iranian officials with a plot to abduct her.<sup>26</sup>
- Biden administration officials have warned that nuclear talks with Iran cannot go on forever, with Iran further violating the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal and barring inspectors from the key enrichment plant at Natanz.<sup>27</sup>

---

## Arab-Israeli affairs: Crisis management overshadows broader regional openings

Unlike its predecessors, the Biden administration entered office without ambitious plans on the Arab-Israeli front beyond undoing the negative policies of the Trump administration. Fighting in Gaza in May forced the administration to pay closer attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, and the advent of a new Israeli government holds the potential for a reset of bilateral relations.

- The Biden administration announced some \$388.5 million in aid to the Palestinians, including the resumption of funding cut by the previous administration. This funding includes \$183 million for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency; \$150 million for economic assistance; and \$38 million for humanitarian assistance.<sup>28</sup>
- During the most recent conflict in Gaza, the Biden administration engaged in quiet diplomacy with Israel and Egypt to bring about a cease-fire after 11 days of fighting. Biden consulted with Palestinian Authority Mahmoud President Abbas and dispatched Secretary of State Blinken to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, and Egypt.<sup>29</sup>
- The new Naftali Bennett-Yair Lapid government in Israel has taken steps to improve relations with Jordan, and Israeli courts have attempted to forge a compromise in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem—the flashpoint for last spring’s fighting. Palestinian Authority President Abbas faces renewed political challenges at home after the death of a West Bank dissident in the custody of Palestinian security forces.<sup>30</sup>
- The August visit of new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Washington, D.C., to meet President Joe Biden was aimed at putting bilateral relations on a smoother track than they have been over the past decade. Immediately following this visit, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in an effort to improve ties and coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. This meeting represents the type of step-by-step approach the Biden administration is likely to adopt in handling Israeli-Palestinian relations.

---

## U.S. military: Beginning to reposition in the region while still engaged in threat response

With widespread consensus in foreign policy circles that the Middle East lacks the strategic importance of Europe or the Asia-Pacific region, the Biden administration has made early moves toward reducing and rightsizing America’s military presence in the region. At the same time, however, it has launched strikes against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria while utilizing American bases in the Gulf to execute the evacuation airlift from Afghanistan.

- President Biden and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi agreed to formally end the U.S. military’s “combat mission” in Iraq by the end of 2021. However, few U.S. troops will leave Iraq and most will remain in the country on a training and advisory mission.<sup>31</sup>
- Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin pulled at least 11 Patriot and THAAD missile batteries from Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia since the start of the Biden administration. At the same time, the U.S. military forged preliminary agreements with Saudi Arabia for access to bases in the country’s west.<sup>32</sup>
- In February, Secretary Austin launched a broader global posture review to “to ensure the footprint of American service members worldwide is correctly sized and supports strategy.”<sup>33</sup>

---

## Conclusion

In its first six months in office, the Biden administration has shown a clear desire to limit direct American engagement in the Middle East in favor of a focus on higher foreign policy priorities such as Asia and Europe and the global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though it has made some high-profile moves such as starting talks to revive the Iran nuclear deal; renewing diplomacy to end the fighting in Yemen; and extending cross-border humanitarian access to Syria for another year, in general, the Biden team has adopted an approach that seeks to limit the costs of U.S. engagement. In so doing, however, it risks putting the United States in a reactive strategic position, beholden to events instead of seeking to proactively shape trends through diplomacy and other forms of engagement.

The Biden administration’s inclination toward a hands-off approach may end up placing the United States in a crisis management mode similar to the one that overtook the Obama administration from 2014 to 2016 in reaction to the rise of the Islamic State group. If the Iran nuclear deal cannot be revived—which seems more likely now than six months ago—tensions between Tehran and Washington will remain high. On a more fundamental level, though, the region’s basic human security problems will not go away, particularly those likely resulting from climate change. As a result, even the more modest and pragmatic goals the Biden team has set out for itself in the Middle East will require strategic reengagement in a region that’s been largely on the back burner during the administration’s first six months in office.

*Brian Katulis is a senior fellow on the National Security and International Policy team at the Center for American Progress. Peter Juul is a senior policy analyst on the National Security and International Policy team at the Center for American Progress.*

*The authors would like to thank Mara Rudman, Gordon Gray, and Rudy deLeon for their suggestions in helping shape up this issue brief.*

## Endnotes

- David E. Sanger, Steven Erlanger, and Farnaz Fassihi, "U.S. and Iran Agree to Indirect Talks on Returning to Nuclear Deal," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/02/world/europe/us-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.
- Annie Karni, "Biden praises Jordan's King Abdullah as a loyal friend in a 'tough neighborhood,'" *The New York Times*, July 19, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/19/us/politics/king-abdullah-jordan-biden.html>; Michael Collins and Maureen Groppe, "US to end combat mission in Iraq by end of year, Biden announces in meeting with Iraqi prime minister," *USA Today*, July 27, 2021, available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/07/26/biden-meet-iraqi-prime-minister-amid-troop-redeployment-talks/8075835002/>.
- Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Carries Out Airstrikes in Iraq and Syria," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/27/us/politics/us-airstrikes-iraq-syria.html>.
- Lara Jakes and Isabel Kershner, "Seeking to Restore Palestinian Links, Blinken Risks New Frictions With Israel," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/world/middleeast/blinken-israel-netanyahu.html>.
- David Ignatius, "Biden learned from his predecessors' mistakes in the Middle East — and probably saved lives," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2021, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/21/biden-learned-his-predecessors-mistakes-middle-east-probably-saved-lives/>.
- Our World in Data, "Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths, Aug 24, 2021, available at <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?zoomToSelection=true&time=latest&facet=none&pickerSort=asc&pickerMetric=location&Metric=Confirmed+deaths&Interval=Cumulative&Relative+to+Population=false&Align+outbreaks=false&country=QAT~EGY~IRN~BHR~IRQ~ISR~JOR~KWT~LBN~LBY~MAR~OMN~PSE~SAU~SYR~TUN~ARE~YEM> (last accessed August 2021).
- Our World in Data, "Number of people fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Aug 24, 2021."
- USAID Middle East, @USAID Middle East, July 30, 2021, 12:56 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/USAIDMiddleEast/status/1421152762507653121>; U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, "Tunisia Receives First Direct Purchase of Pfizer Vaccines in Africa," April 2, 2021, available at <https://tn.usembassy.gov/ambassador-blome-joins-minister-mehdi-to-receive-pfizer-vaccines-purchased-directly-by-tunisia/>; U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Facebook, August 14, 2021, available at <https://www.facebook.com/USEmbassyBaghdad/posts/10159515278219304>; U.S. Palestinian Affairs Unit, @USPalAffairs, August 24, 2021, Twitter, 8:01 a.m., available at <https://twitter.com/USPalAffairs/status/1430138193127657506>; Samantha Power, @PowerUSAID, July 25, 2021, 4:18 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/PowerUSAID/status/1419391615127498758>.
- U.S. Embassy to Yemen, @USEmbassyYemen, August 29, 2021, 1:46 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/USEmbassyYemen/status/1432036834469728257?s=20>.
- Antony J. Blinken, "The United States Restores Assistance for the Palestinians," U.S. State Department, April 7, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/the- united-states-restores-assistance-for-the-palestinians/>; Jim Zanotti, "The Palestinians: Overview, 2021 Aid, and U.S. Policy Issues" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2021), available at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/IF10644.pdf>.
- U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, "DFC Announces Joint Investment for Peace Initiative to Promote Middle East Peace," June 28, 2021, available at <https://www.dfc.gov/media/press-releases/dfc-announces-joint-investment-peace-initiative-promote-middle-east-peace>.
- Morgan Chalfant, "Biden pledges \$100 million in aid to Lebanon on anniversary of Beirut blast," *The Hill*, August 4, 2021, available at <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/566329-biden-pledges-100-million-in-aid-to-lebanon-on-anniversary-of-beirut>; Lisa Barrington and Jonathan Landay, "U.S. gives \$165 million in new Yemen aid, urges others to follow," Reuters, August 9, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-announces-165-million-new-aid-yemen-2021-08-09/>.
- Anchal Vorchha, "The Middle East Is Becoming Literally Uninhabitable," *Foreign Policy*, August 24, 2021, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/24/the-middle-east-is-becoming-literally-uninhabitable/>.
- Louisa Loveluck, Kareem Fahim, and Sarah Dadouch, "Power outages cripple parts of the Middle East amid record heat waves and rising unrest," *The Washington Post*, July 24, 2021, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/middle-east-electricity-crisis/2021/07/23/d4dfd9f4-de74-11eb-a27f-8b294930e95b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/middle-east-electricity-crisis/2021/07/23/d4dfd9f4-de74-11eb-a27f-8b294930e95b_story.html); Farnaz Fassihi, "I Am Thirsty! Water Shortages Compound Iran's Problems," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/21/world/middleeast/iran-protests-drought-violence.html>.
- Fiyaz Mughal, "Kerry's last minute UAE climate visit a marker of future relations," *Times of Israel*, April 6, 2021, available at <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/kerrys-last-minute-uae-climate-visit-a-marker-of-future-relations/>; U.S. Department of State, "Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry's Visit to the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Arab Republic of Egypt," June 16, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/special-presidential-envoy-for-climate-john-kerrys-visit-to-the-united-arab-emirates-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-and-arab-republic-of-egypt/>; John Kerry, "Briefing with John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate," U.S. State Department, July 1, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-john-kerry-special-presidential-envoy-for-climate/>.
- U.S. Department of State, "About the Leaders Summit on Climate," available at <https://www.state.gov/leaders-summit-on-climate/about/> (last accessed August 2021); The White House, "FACT SHEET: President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate," April 23, 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/23/fact-sheet-president-bidens-leaders-summit-on-climate/>.
- Tamara Qiblawi and Kara Fox, "Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul released from prison," *CNN.com*, February 11, 2021, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/10/middleeast/hathloul-saudi-released-intl/index.html>; Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Saudi Arabia frees two jailed activists with U.S. citizenship on bail," February 5, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/saudi-rights-int/saudi-arabia-frees-two-jailed-activists-with-u-s-citizenship-on-bail-idUSKBN2A51I2>; Ivana Saric, "Egypt releases journalists, activists after U.S. expresses human rights worries," *Axios*, July 18, 2018, available at <https://www.axios.com/egypt-releases-journalists-activists-us-rights-7a8269f5-baae-42b7-a2ee-addc7a62220f.html>.
- Jack Detsch, "Biden Taps Career Diplomat as Envoy to Yemen," *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2021, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/04/biden-taps-career-diplomat-as-envoy-to-yemen/>; President Joe Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World," The White House, February 4, 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>; U.S. State Department, "U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Lenderking Returns from Travel to Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and Jordan," June 4, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-special-envoy-for-yemen-lenderking-returns-from-travel-to-saudi-arabia-oman-the-uae-and-jordan/>.

- 19 Ned Price, @StateDeptSpox, May 10, 2021, 1:50 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/StateDeptSpox/status/1391812806593454081>; Antony J. Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken Remarks to the Press Before the Berlin II Conference on Libya," U.S. State Department, June 23, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-remarks-to-the-press-before-the-berlin-ii-conference-on-libya/>; VOA News, "Libya Conference Focuses on Elections, Security," June 24, 2021, available at <https://www.voanews.com/europe/libya-conference-focuses-elections-security>; United Nations, "Mercenaries 'impede' peace, must leave Libya to allow elections," July 30, 2021, available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096752>; Ayman al-Warfali and Angus McDowall, "Libya's combatants declare key coast road open," Reuters, July 30, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/libyan-joint-military-committee-declares-key-road-open-2021-07-30/>.
- 20 Antony J. Blinken, "Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa," U.S. State Department, April 23, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/special-envoy-for-the-horn-of-africa/>.
- 21 Antony J. Blinken, "United States' Actions To Press for the Resolution of the Crisis in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia," U.S. State Department, May 23, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/united-states-actions-to-press-for-the-resolution-of-the-crisis-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia/>; USAID, "United States Strengthens Efforts to Fight Famine in Tigray, Ethiopia With More Than \$149 million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance," July 30, 2021, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jul-30-2021-united-states-strengthens-efforts-fight-famine-tigray-ethiopia-more>.
- 22 William Davison, "The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War" (Washington: International Crisis Group, 2021), available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-of-africa/ethiopia/dangerous-expansion-ethiopias-tigray-war>; Mathieu Rosemain, "France's Macron calls for talks to end conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray," Reuters, July 31, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/frances-macron-calls-talks-end-conflict-ethiopias-tigray-2021-07-31/>; Edith M. Lederer, "Egypt, Sudan urge UN action on Nile dam, Ethiopia says 'no,'" Associated Press, July 9, 2021, available at <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-business-egypt-sudan-bb3e5fb7a6f60b20c47ca5d8cf2eb2a>.
- 23 Samantha Power, @PowerUSAID, July 9, 2021, 1:04 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/PowerUSAID/status/1413544657259270147>; Antony J. Blinken, "U.S. Support for the People of Syria," U.S. Department of State, June 29, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-the-people-of-syria/>; Kareem Fahim, "In Syria's war without end, refugee tent camps harden into concrete cities," *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2021, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/idlib-syria-war-refugees/2021/07/19/db8d514e-e0e2-11eb-a27f-8b294930e95b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/idlib-syria-war-refugees/2021/07/19/db8d514e-e0e2-11eb-a27f-8b294930e95b_story.html).
- 24 Sune Engel Rasmussen, "U.S., Iran Begin Indirect Talks to Revive 2015 Nuclear Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-iran-begin-indirect-talks-to-revive-2015-nuclear-deal-11617706280>; Associated Press "Progress reported at Iran nuclear talks," June 20, 2021, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/06/20/diplomats-iran-nuclear-talks-495247>; Karen DeYoung, "Iran will not return to nuclear talks before new government is formed in Tehran," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2021, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/iran-will-not-return-to-nuclear-talks-before-new-government-is-formed-in-tehran/2021/07/14/d5de1c60-e4e3-11eb-a41e-c8442c213fa8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/iran-will-not-return-to-nuclear-talks-before-new-government-is-formed-in-tehran/2021/07/14/d5de1c60-e4e3-11eb-a41e-c8442c213fa8_story.html); Natasha Bertrand and Nicole Gaouette, "Hopes of revived Iran nuclear talks dim amid delays as new hardline president takes office," CNN, August 6, 2021, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/06/politics/iran-nuclear-talks-pessimism-delay-raisi/index.html>.
- 25 Phil Stewart, "U.S. warplanes strike Iran-backed militia in Iraq, Syria," *Reuters*, June 28, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-carries-out-air-strikes-against-iran-backed-militia-iraq-syria-2021-06-27/>; Nancy A. Youssef and Rory Jones, "U.S. Blames Iran for Drone Attack on Israeli-Linked Tanker," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-blames-iran-for-drone-attack-on-israeli-linked-tanker-11627848609>.
- 26 Secretary Antony Blinken, @SecBlinken, July 19, 2021, 8:08 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1417275150463033346>; Jake Sullivan, @JakeSullivan46, July 23, 2021, 5:37 p.m., Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/JakeSullivan46/status/1418686775824891904>.
- 27 Nicole Gaouette and Michael Callahan, "Blinken warns talks with Iran can't go on indefinitely," CNN, July 29, 2021, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/29/politics/blinken-iran-talks/index.html>; David E. Sanger, Lara Jakes, Farnaz Fassihi, "Biden Promised to Restore the Iran Nuclear Deal. Now It Risks Derailment," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/31/us/politics/biden-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.
- 28 Blinken, "The United States Restores Assistance for the Palestinians"; Jim Zanotti, "The Palestinians: Overview, 2021 Aid, and U.S. Policy Issues" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2021), available at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/IF10644.pdf>.
- 29 David Ignatius, "Biden learned from his predecessors' mistakes in the Middle East — and probably saved lives," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2021, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/21/biden-learned-his-predecessors-mistakes-middle-east-probably-saved-lives/>; Ned Price, "Secretary Blinken's Travel to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Cairo, and Amman," U.S. State Department, May 24, 2021, available at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blakens-travel-to-jerusalem-ramallah-cairo-and-amman/>.
- 30 Amy Spiro, "Jordan's king: I was 'very encouraged' after meeting with Bennett, Gantz," *Times of Israel*, July 25, 2021, available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-king-i-was-very-encouraged-after-meeting-with-bennett-gantz/>; Nir Hasson, "Sheikh Jarrah Eviction Case: Court Offers Palestinians 'Protected Residents' Status," *Haaretz*, August 2, 2021, available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-sheikh-jarrah- eviction-case-court-offers-palestinians-protected-residents-status-1.10071018>; Jack Khoury, "Family of Palestinian Activist Blames Prime Minister Shtayyeh for His Death," *Haaretz*, June 28, 2021, available at <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-family-of-palestinian-activist-blames-prime-minister-shtayyeh-for-his-death-1.9949882>.
- 31 Jane Arraf, Eric Schmitt, Annie Karni, "Biden says U.S. will end its combat mission in Iraq as prime minister visits the White House," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/07/26/us/politics-news#iraq-prime-minister-biden>; Jane Arraf and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. to Announce Troop Drawdown From Iraq, but Little Is Expected to Change," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2021, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/24/world/middleeast/iraq-biden-us-forces.html>.
- 32 Gordon Lubold and Warren P. Strobel, "Biden Trimming Forces Sent to Mideast to Help Saudi Arabia," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-trimming-forces-sent-to-mideast-to-help-saudi-arabia-11617279687>; Katie Bo Williams, "Saudi Expanding US Military Access to Airfields, Port, to Counter Iran," *Defense One*, January 25, 2021, available at <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2021/01/saudis-expanding-us-military-access-airfields-port-counter-iran/171609/>.
- 33 Jim Garamonde, "Global Posture Review Will Tie Strategy, Defense Policy to Basing," DoD News, February 5, 2021, available at <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2495328/global-posture-review-will-tie-strategy-defense-policy-to-basing/>.