

The UAE Welcomes Syrian President Assad and the First Lady

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Syrian President Assad is in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today on an official visit as Arab leaders continue to defy the directives issued by the US State Department. Momentum is building across the region to bring Assad back into the fold.

Assad and his wife, Asma, were personally greeted at the airport by UAE **President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan**. As Assad's plane entered Emirati airspace, it was flanked by a precision group of Emirati fighter jets, and after landing the pair were honored by a canon salute and the Syrian national anthem.



Syria's first lady Asmaa Al-Assad in the UAE with Syrian President

“Our discussions also explored ways of enhancing cooperation to accelerate stability and progress in Syria and the region,” Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed tweeted. Abu Dhabi restored diplomatic relations with Damascus in 2018.

The UAE had pledged over \$100 million in assistance to quake-hit Syria, dispatched a search and rescue team and provided thousands of tons of humanitarian aid.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Foreign Minister, visited Syria last month as the first senior Gulf official to do so since the quake.

Arab states such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Oman, and Tunisia have an interest in ending the isolation of Syria.

There was a time in the past, when Arab leaders obeyed Washington’s demands and orders. Those days are over, as the region has developed their own diplomatic skills and are using them in their own interest.

When the US launched their attack on Syria in 2011 for regime change, they utilized their assets in the region. Orders were handed out to Qatar and Turkey, both US allies who host US military bases, to supply the armed fighters, cash, logistics and weapons to facilitate a war in Syria which would eventually result in an uprising, and finally in regime change. The US-NATO plan failed. The Arab world learned a hard lesson: following US orders blindly will lead you to failure. They could have first studied the US failed war in Iraq.

A big message was sent from the region to Washington in March 2022 when Assad visited the UAE.

Saudi Arabia, the most powerful country in the region, has recently reached an agreement with Iran to restore full diplomatic relations. After the February 6 earthquake which devastated Turkey and parts of Syria, and killed 5,900 Syrians, Saudi Arabia was among the first countries to land humanitarian aid in Syria.

Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia said that when it comes to Syria “the status quo is not workable,” and that the world must “at some point” engage Damascus on issues like refugees and humanitarian aid.

The Arab world has argued that the US policy towards Syria has produced failure and destruction and the international community should set aside politics and remove sanctions to help Syrian earthquake victims who desperately need humanitarian assistance. US and EU sanctions continue to prevent the free flow of aid and monetary aid to families.

Despite the US objection, Abu Dhabi has rebuilt ties with Damascus several years ago and has delivered aid to Syria since the earthquake.

On February 7, Egypt’s **President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi** spoke with Assad by phone for the first time, and Jordan’s foreign minister made his first trip to Damascus on February 15.

On February 20, Assad arrived in Muscat for a working visit to Oman. The sultanate was the only state in the six-member GCC to maintain diplomatic relations with Damascus throughout the Syrian conflict and Muscat has supported Syria’s return to the Arab League.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the Omani capital Muscat

Oman sent a new ambassador to Syria in 2020, and **Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi** visited Damascus in January 2022.

Assad's welcome in Muscat shows interest at the highest levels of the GCC, and experts have argued that the Syrian president could not have gone to Oman without Saudi Arabia's approval.

Oman's Royal Air Force has conducted aid flights to Syria since the earthquake. Assad was greeted by **Sultan Haitham**, and the leaders travelled to Al Baraka Palace for talks, where Assad thanked Oman for its efforts to help with the earthquake recovery.

On February 26, Egypt House Speaker **Hanafi Gibali** traveled to Damascus as part of a delegation of senior Arab parliamentarians to discuss bringing Syria back to the Arab League. Syria was suspended from the organization in 2011.

The heads of the Iraqi, Jordanian, Palestinian, Libyan, Egyptian and Emirati houses of representatives, as well as representatives from Oman and Lebanon, traveled to Syria as part of a delegation from the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union. They met with Syrian parliamentarians and with Assad.

"We cannot do without Syria and Syria cannot do without its Arab environment, which we hope it can return to," said Iraqi parliament speaker **Mohammed Halbousi**.

On February 27, Egyptian **Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry** became the first Egyptian diplomat to make an official visit to Syria in a decade. Egypt will provide more aid to Syria and has already shipped 1.5k tons, Shoukry told reporters following meetings with Al Assad and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad.

“The goal of the visit is primarily humanitarian, and to pass on our solidarity – from the leadership, the government and the people of Egypt to the people of Syria,” Shoukry said.

On March 14 and 15, Assad was in Moscow for talks with Russian **President Vladimir Putin**.

In 2018, the US State Department laid out their foreign policy on Syria, and it hasn't changed, even though Biden was elected in 2020.

The US strategy was to isolate Assad by treating Syria like North Korea. **David Statterfield**, the acting assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, described how the US would remove Assad from power while speaking before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

“Syria needs reconstruction funds of between \$200-300 billion plus. The international community has committed itself not to provide those funds,” Statterfield said.

The US occupation forces control the oil fields which had provided Syria with all their domestic energy needs to heat homes, drive cars and provide electricity. Now that the US Army denies the Syrian people their own resources, the people have about 30 minutes of electricity in three intervals per day.

The US State Department's Syria policy is to prevent all reconstruction following the US attack on Syria since 2011, and now following the February 6 earthquake of 7.8 magnitude which has been called Turkish President Erdogan as the “Disaster of the Century”.

With a concerted effort led by the US at the UN, the international community can deny Syria's government the funding it would need to rebuild the country and the lives and livelihoods of 20 million people.

It is now up to the Arab world, not the western “international community”, to save the Syrian people and restore their human right to have shelter, income, education and a chance at happiness.

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