

Are US-Saudi Relations Headed for a Reset?

Anna Murphy



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In a series of briefings, top White House officials announced that the Biden administration will change key policies on Saudi Arabia, including the halting of arms sales that are intended for offensive operations in Yemen and the alteration of diplomatic channels to ensure that President Biden directly communicates with King Salman and not his son, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. These changes are supported by months of President Biden's strong rhetoric indicating intentions to reshape US-Saudi relations during his presidency.

At the same time, the strength and duration of the US-Saudi partnership has historically superseded the policies of any individual president. This policy outlook examines the potential trajectory of US-Saudi relations over the course of Biden's first term in office. It analyses whether the Biden administration indeed intends to drastically reshape US-Saudi relations, and if so, if this ambition appropriately reflects the deep connections between the two states' security, strategic, and economic identities.

Background

On February 4th, Joe Biden spoke at the State Department for the first time as president. The address was prefaced by a press briefing from National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. Together, the two events offered some of the first tangible insights into the Biden administration's foreign policy priorities. As expected, the administration's intentions to challenge China and Russia were mentioned, but the [announcement](#) that stole the news cycle featured Yemen. Sullivan announced that the United States would be ending its support of Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen. Specifically, the US would stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia that were intended for offensive use in the ongoing war. President Biden went on to echo his inauguration speech by emphasizing that "America is back", and that the administration [plans](#) to "repair our alliances and engage with the world once again". Moreover, Biden expressed that the US would seek an end to the war in Yemen, aim to restart stagnant peace talks, and increase the presence of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in the war zone. He later announced the appointment of [career diplomat](#) Timothy Lenderking as the US Special Envoy for Yemen. Sullivan's announcement [specified](#) that the restriction of arms sales would only apply to the "types of offensive operations that have perpetuated a civil war in Yemen", and that Washington continued to stand by Riyadh's right of self-defence. This policy change has offered some answers to the questions surrounding the Biden administration's plans for the future US-Saudi relationship, a future US and international analysts have been speculating about since January. President Biden is inheriting a partnership with Saudi Arabia defined by support for the Kingdom's efforts to promote the Hadi government in Yemen, failure to respond to the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and a close personal relationship between former President Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

At first glance, the February 4th announcement may suggest that the Biden administration intends to dramatically and swiftly alter the relationship between the two states. However, as will be outlined in the policy outlook, this endeavour — if it is indeed the aim of the Biden administration — would not be achieved simply through bold rhetoric, the halting of specific arms deals, and the expansion of USAID in Yemen. Rather, the implementation of the policy changes outlined by Biden during both the presidential campaign and since taking office would require a dramatic and substantive divergence from the historical ties between the two states that have existed for decades, long before Trump was president. As such, the announcements of February 4th showcase two possibilities within the Biden administration's foreign policy with respect to Saudi Arabia: Biden's focus on the immediate and direct reversal of Trump's policies may showcase that he does not want to change the foundation of the US-Saudi relationship, mak-



Jen Psaki - White House Press Secretary
(EPA/Stefani Reynolds/POOL - Anadolu Agency)

ing the most recent announcements a symbolic move meant to score domestic political points. Or, Biden and his team truly intend to permanently alter Washington's relationship with Riyadh.

The first substantive insight into which of these intended trajectories is more accurate comes from the announcements of February 16th: White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki informed the White House Press Corps that the US and Saudi Arabia would experience a "[recalibration](#)" of relations. President Biden would no longer speak with MBS, but rather, would communicate directly with King Salman — with Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin taking over future communications with the Crown Prince. Psaki framed this shift as standard operating procedure, a realignment of communication channels conducive with the Biden administration's efforts to bring practices of foreign policy back to 'normal'. Yet, the move is, at the very least, a snub directed at the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia. If interpreted in accordance with some of the Biden administration's previous remarks — including President Biden's promise to "[make them pay the price](#)" for their role in the Khashoggi case and Yemen — it may indicate the intent to send a stronger signal to the Kingdom of what is to come.

In either scenario, questions remain as to the intent and practicality of the Biden administration's initial rebuke of MBS and Saudi Arabia. This policy outlook will analyse both possibilities for Biden's future actions and attempt to determine if the most recent changes to the two state's relationship reflect the onset of a substantive shift in the partnership or an extensive effort to remarket bilateral relations for domestic politics.

Oil for Security

Historically, the partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia has been based on an exchange of access to American security and arms for the vast reserves of Saudi oil. This foundation has been subjected to variations depending on a number of events in both countries; however, overall, it has remained intact. The current status of the oil-for-security trade-off offers a compelling in-

sight into this unique moment within US-Saudi relations: President Biden, both on the campaign trail and since taking office, has used some of the [harshest](#) language for an American president in recent memory in reference to Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, in particular. Condemning the Kingdom's role in the war in Yemen — referring to the “[murder of children](#)” —, the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, and other human rights abuses, Biden appears poised to alter the terms of a relationship that has long been a staple of the US' presence in the Middle East. Specifically, Biden has expressed intentions to do so through the halting of arms sales, one of the core elements of the US-Saudi relationship. The prospect of the US reducing the billions of dollars worth of arms sales to the Kingdom, or even conditioning them, as in the case of Yemen, is a significant turn of events. Journalists and analysts have been quick to suggest that Biden's first major foreign policy announcement as president may indicate plans for a fundamental change beyond the ebbs and flows of the US-Saudi relationship that has existed [since](#) 1945.

Yet, the conviction of the Biden administration's words and actions so far — perceived by some as perhaps the beginning of an unprecedented shift — may not be part of an effort to genuinely and drastically change the foundations of the US-Saudi relationship. Rather, they may fall in with the growing list of decisions made by President Biden in his first few weeks of office that are focused on reversing the specific policies of the Trump administration, particularly the ones made in his last moments as president. President Trump and MBS had an infamously close and public personal relationship, one that superseded human rights, including in reference to both the murder of Jamal Khashoggi or the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. As both events continue to be globally high profile cases they also represent an opportunity for Biden to make an impactful symbolic statement of his plans to reverse the mistakes made — in the eyes of the Democrats — during the Trump administration and — as he stated in his inauguration [speech](#) — jumpstart the “return to normalcy”. This does not suggest that the Biden administration's statements on February 4th are not sincere. However, they frame positive relations with Riyadh as a partisan issue, when Saudi Arabia actually has a long history of investment and partnerships with both political parties. As a result, his team's most recent policies should also be viewed in a partisan and symbolic light reflective of domestic issues, rather than as the beginning of a long-term effort to untangle the complex relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia and drastically shift a hallmark of American foreign policy.

Furthermore, the partisan nature of these announcements stands in contrast to other events occurring behind the scenes in Washington: An [article](#) published in Foreign Policy earlier this year detailed the return of powerful lobby groups hired to advocate for Saudi interests in Washington. The presence and financial backing of such groups are not new, but many of these lobbyists had cut ties with

Riyadh in 2018 following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. In recent months, however, these “foreign agents hired to lobby on behalf of Saudi interests” have returned and reportedly donated \$2 million to former President Trump and President Biden during their presidential campaigns. In fact, since the election, Saudi Arabia has allegedly prioritised organising efforts with firms that have influence over the Democratic Party, while also maintaining ties to the Republicans. The return of Saudi Arabia's financial lobby-based influence is notable because it offers evidence of the Kingdom's efforts — and perhaps concerns — to maintain as close ties with the United States as possible in light of an uncertain future. This expensive and continuous agenda stands in contrast to the somewhat nonchalant nature of the Kingdom's public response to Biden's election, in [which](#) Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud simply stated that the Kingdom expected “excellent relations” with the Biden administration. Moreover, the return of Saudi lobbying efforts across both political parties accurately illustrates the Kingdom's interest not in pandering to the Democrats or the Republicans, but rather, in maintaining institutional and financial ties with the United States regardless of the political party in power. That reality has been confirmed historically: while former President Barack Obama famously had icy personal relations with the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the two countries continued to bolster their strategic and financial partnership throughout the President's two terms. This stands in contrast to the bold rhetoric of the Biden administration, which clearly paints Saudi Arabia as a “pariah” allowed to act freely throughout the Trump presidency, as opposed to an ally supported by Washington regardless of the President. The return of the lobbying groups to both sides of the political aisle are an important reminder of that.



Saudi Arabian King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud attends an oath ceremony in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 08, 2020.
(Saudi Kingdom Council - Anadolu Agency)

The Biden Way of Doing Things

The nature of US-Saudi relations will depend in large part on the Biden administration's diplomatic approach, as well as the individuals that make up the president's team. At the core of this expectation is President Biden's personal style of diplomacy. As expressed in Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's introduction to Biden's first speech at the State Department, the 46th president has been [advertised](#) as the individual with the most foreign policy experience ever to hold office. Whether in Congress and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or as Vice-President to President Obama, there is a long and documented history of Biden's approach to foreign policy. One such [analysis](#) of this track record emphasises the personal and relationship-based nature of Biden's diplomatic profile. Unlike some of the doctrine-based approaches to foreign policy demonstrated by former Democrat and Republican presidents alike, Biden is described as both valuing individual relationships and having decades-worth of these relationships around the world to demonstrate this. In some ways, this outlook is not unlike that of President Trump's [well-known](#) prioritisation of personal relationships with certain global leaders over a specific foreign policy doctrine. Moreover, a similar framework has been used to describe the modus operandi of Saudi Arabia: since his catapult into the public sphere, MBS has been seen as the public and operational face of Riyadh's foreign policy. As this rise occurred largely after Biden served as vice president to Barack Obama, the two leaders do not presently have a personal relationship. Despite that, President Biden's attitudes towards the Crown Prince have been made abundantly clear. In addition to expressing opposition and outrage in response to a variety of Saudi's actions over the last four years, Biden has called MBS a "[thug](#)".

This track record provides crucial context for the February 16th announcement. Press Secretary Jen Psaki's briefing that Biden would not directly communicate with MBS is a public and symbolic snub of the Crown Prince, but it



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) meets with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (R) in Riyadh (Saudi Kingdom Council- Anadolu Agency)

who seems poised to partially frame his foreign policy in accordance with personal relationships. Therefore, the announcement indicates two possible moves from the Biden administration: first, the President values relationships and his refusal to speak with MBS showcases a lack of desire to develop any personal connection with the de facto leader. Second, Mohammed Bin Salman is famous for his close partnership with Donald Trump and his even-closer friendship with Jared Kushner. Biden's focus on MBS as an individual reflects a carefully calculated effort to identify the Crown Prince as the root of his problems with Saudi Arabia, a designation that would allow him to gain political points at home by contrasting his actions with his predecessor, while also suggesting that the problematic actions of Saudi Arabia over the last four years can be attributed to the Crown Prince, and not the King or the Kingdom overall.

In this effort, President Biden treats Saudi Arabia almost like a company with a rogue employee: the dismissal of communications with MBS allows him to condemn the past actions of the country but attribute them to one individual, allowing Washington to maintain its relationship with Riyadh while standing by its condemnation of past events. This strategy is but one possibility of the Biden administration's plans for Saudi Arabia. But whether it is an impactful side-lining of a country's de facto leader or merely a remarketing of relations, Biden's refusal to directly work with MBS will undoubtedly prompt significant response from the Crown Prince and the Kingdom.

However, the expected dynamics of US-Saudi relations for at least the next four years naturally will also be influenced by the bureaucratic makeup of the Biden administration, best demonstrated through Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. Both men — representing two of the senior positions in the administration and expected-loudest voices in determining regional policy — played key roles in the Obama administration. Notably, both Blinken and Sullivan were central figures in the creation and negotiation of the JCPOA, which was arguably the [pinnacle](#) of Obama's foreign policy achievements. While Washington's relationships with Tehran and Riyadh shifted dramatically during the Trump administration, the retention of some of the top advisors from the Obama-era confirms expectations that the current administration will hold many institutional commonalities with the 44th administration.

These two realities create an interesting dynamic in which Biden's personal approach to diplomacy creates the expectations of a troublesome and potential divergence from MBS' Riyadh. At the same time, the retention of Obama-era figures at the core of Biden's foreign policy team indicates that the Biden administration's methodology will ultimately keep Saudi Arabia close by in order to promote Washington's interests in the region. The latter will be particularly true if the administration aims to promote dialogue between Riyadh and Tehran in the future; Biden may be

unwilling and unable to 'teach MBS a lesson' if Washington hopes to orchestrate a partnership similar to that of the Obama era.

Yemen and Saudi Arabia

So far, the best insight into whether Biden's plans for US-Saudi relations reflect a symbolic move for domestic political points or the foundations of a permanent shift in dynamics may come from Yemen. Secretary of State Blinken recently outlined several major changes to Washington's policy in Yemen, including the end of support for Saudi offensive operations in the country and the [reversal](#) of the designation of the Houthi rebel group (Ansar Allah) as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO).

The United States, during the Obama administration, initially backed Riyadh's involvement in Yemen [through](#) logistical and intelligence support, as well as billions of dollars' worth of arms sales. In doing so, Washington and several of its allies, including the United Kingdom and France, faced criticism for their role in what has grown to be a seemingly endless conflict and devastating humanitarian crisis. In particular, the US has been criticised for the use of American-made weapons by Riyadh in attacks that have caused large numbers of civilian casualties. A particularly poignant example of this backlash followed an incident in August of 2018 in which a [bomb](#) made by the American company Lockheed Martin hit a school bus in Yemen, killing 51 people, including 40 children. Later in 2018, following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the escalating human rights concerns in Yemen, the US Congress succeeded in passing a bipartisan bill that aimed to halt American support for Saudi intervention in Yemen. However, President Trump, in a powerful symbolic and practical move, vetoed the bill.

Drawing from this recent history as well as the Biden administration's early actions, Washington appears poised to distance itself as much as possible from the blind support for Riyadh that defined the Trump administration. As mentioned, the direct reversal of Trump's designation of Ansar Allah as an FTO showcases how Biden's actions with respect to Saudi Arabia may prioritise reversing some of the best-known features of the Trump administration's Yemen policy verbatim as opposed to integrating the reversal or adaptation of Trump's policies into a broader effort to promote an end to the conflict and start diplomatic negotiations.

However, President Biden clearly intends to also reverse some of the policies that originated from the Obama era, most notably, the support of Saudi offensive operations. The significance of the announcement that the US would no longer be providing arms intended for Saudi's offensive

efforts in Yemen should not be exaggerated as the commencement of a complete divorce between the two states, however, should be recognised as a major shift reflecting a divergence from policies that existed prior to the Trump presidency. Furthermore, the appointment of a US Special Envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, and the promise to increase USAID's presence in the conflict all indicate a plan to change Washington's policies. This potential was also demonstrated during the February 4th briefings through Secretary Blinken and President Biden's remarks revealing their intent to facilitate a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The contrast between this message of aspired-neutrality and brokerage of peace talks — whether realistic or not — with the historical support of the Saudi offensive through arms and intelligence is also notable. Overall, therefore, Biden's early actions seem to suggest that he does intend to offer significant efforts to fundamentally change the nature of the two states' relationship with respect to Yemen. However, it is unclear whether Yemen marks the beginning of an overarching shift in relations or an anomaly based on the current unpopularity of this specific conflict.

Jamal Khashoggi and the Sincerity of the Biden Administration

Saudi Arabia's track record on human rights both within and outside of its borders is no secret. Throughout the course of the two countries' relationship, the United States approach has ranged from turning a blind eye towards some of Riyadh's actions to actively participating alongside them in these endeavours. In 2021, Saudi Arabia's human rights policies are at the public forefront of US-Saudi relations. Throughout the 2020 presidential campaign, President Biden largely framed his plans for relations with Saudi Arabia through the [lens](#) of human rights. Speaking repeatedly about Riyadh's role in Yemen, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and the leadership of the Crown Prince, Biden has centred his administration's plans to distance themselves from Saudi Arabia on both holding Riyadh accountable for past actions and separating Washington from these instances in the future. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi embodies this outlook: Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines [announced](#) that the Biden administration intends to declassify the US intelligence report on the assassination. This announcement, which has been supported and [streamlined](#) by the chairman of the House intelligence committee Adam Schiff, increases the possibility of the US openly blaming Saudi Arabia, specifically MBS, for Khashoggi's murder.

Such a move would undoubtedly spark anger from Riyadh and increase tensions in the already uncertain relationship. However, this is as much a political move — intended to counter Trump's fierce defence of MBS despite

international calls for his condemnation — as it is a plan to hold Saudi Arabia responsible for human rights and international law violations. Yet, the real test of Biden's intentions in declassifying these documents comes not from this action, but in future responses to Riyadh's violations of human rights. While the report may be released in 2021, Khashoggi's death is now a reality of the past, and the likelihood of the Biden administration seriously altering relations with Saudi Arabia based on this report is low. However, if the Biden administration chose, the event would represent both a powerful symbol and the jumping-off point for future actions against Riyadh with respect to human rights. Thus, the latter possibility would represent a real insight into whether Biden plans to merely vocalise his opposition to the Trump administration's stances on Saudi Arabia, or proactively change the foundations of the relationship, a relationship historically based on strategic and economic cooperation, often at the cost of human rights. This possibility does not just exist in the abstract; there is a myriad of opportunities documented by international organisations and media outlets with respect to human rights violations in and outside of Saudi Arabia. These offer greater insight into Biden's outlook on Riyadh's human rights policies than the now-famous Khashoggi case. For example, MBS' crackdown on dissidents and reported efforts to silence opposition abroad has led to reports of alleged "[death squads](#)" active in countries around the world. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has [severely](#) cracked down on several women rights' activists under the leadership of MBS. And, of course, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains a prominent example of Riyadh's troubled relationship with human rights. While these make up only a few cases, they are some of the most high-profile ones and represent a sort of test for the Biden administration to determine if they plan to simply draw attention to the failures of Trump in this issue and continue to turn a blind eye to other areas of concern, or if they truly intend to live up to the bold promises of Biden's campaign and fundamentally change the core of this historic partnership.

The February 16th announcement that Biden will exclusively communicate with King Salman should once-again be brought up here. The aforementioned incidents of human rights violations have largely implicated Mohammed Bin Salman. While they are far from the only human rights violations documented or suspected with regards to the Kingdom, the most recent incidents — namely the Khashoggi killing — are some of the most high-profile cases worldwide in recent memory. MBS' suspected direct role in the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi has been widely discussed in a variety of formats, including prominent [documentaries](#) and government reports. Because MBS is so closely and publicly linked to these latest abuses, the Biden administration appears poised to identify him as the primary culprit in these events. The President and his team throughout the presidential campaign heavily criticised Saudi Arabia. However, they were most vocal with respect to the Crown Prince. While the entire nation was

painted in a negative light, King Salman was certainly not the figure that bore the brunt of Biden's forceful words and name-calling. As a result, the recent move to take MBS out of the diplomatic equation may indicate an effort to focus Biden's grievances with the Kingdom on one powerful and symbolic figure. In other words, while Saudi Arabia has been complicit in human rights violations for decades — a reality that has been unchecked, if not bolstered by American support — the Biden administration seems focused on MBS' particular style of offence. The Crown Prince's own actions, however, have not helped his case, particularly in the instance of Jamal Khashoggi.

Interestingly, the Biden administration and some members of Congress' discourse on the Khashoggi case also offers insight into the misleading nature of some senior politicians' intended approach to Riyadh: There is a common implication among the Democrats that the releasing of the Khashoggi file or dramatic change in rhetoric towards Saudi Arabia represent powerful changes in US policy. The tone in such [analysis](#) appears to imply that the nature of the two states' relationship is an imbalanced one, in which Washington sets the expectations of the partnership and Riyadh follows. As such, analysis of the US-Saudi partnership has ranged from advocating for the rejection and shaming of Saudi Arabia to [arguing](#) that American abandonment would prompt the Kingdom to desperately seek partnerships with China or other competitor states. This outlook reflects a problematic misconception within US analysis that fails to understand the nature of the two states' historical partnership: While Saudi Arabia relies heavily on the US for security and strategic support, the Kingdom has been a crucial asset for Washington in not only preferential access to oil reserves but in a variety of other ways. The implication that Riyadh's future is weighted on the singular decision of President Biden — demonstrated thus far in strong rhetoric and the reversal of Trump's policies — fails to acknowledge the deep connections between the two states across the branches of the American government, but also through the private sector.

A particularly insightful example of this inaccurate assessment comes from the argument that Biden would be able to distance the US from Saudi Arabia in an unprecedented way due to the fact that Washington no [longer](#) relies on Riyadh for oil. Over the past few decades, the US has increased its own capacities for the production of oil; this reality does impact the historical quid pro quo between the two states. However, no state is more aware of the need for Riyadh to change its economic trajectory than the Kingdom itself. Under the leadership of the Crown Prince, Saudi Arabia has launched a full-fledged effort to diversify its economy and maintain its global influence through ensuring long-term investments in sectors outside of oil. This effort, known as the Saudi 2030 Vision, has prompted the creation of the Future Investment Initiative — also known as Davos in the Desert. This platform, which invites leading businesses and investors from around the world

to the Kingdom, became particularly recognised worldwide in 2018 when many of the guests boycotted the event following the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. However, only a few years later, these potential investors have returned to Davos in the Desert in flocks. Moreover, what matters most for the scope of this analysis is who these [guests](#) are: leading Wall Street [executives](#) and top American private equity firms make up the featured attendees of the 2021 event. The guest list, a powerful example of the only growing interest in future investment in Saudi Arabia from the business community, paints a starkly different image from the rhetoric of the Biden administration. Yet, when it comes to American policy, these two have always been intertwined, even if not officially. At the very least, the actions of the American [business](#) community — and the billions of dollars of investment that come with them — are notably absent from the strategies of the Biden administration's alleged efforts to challenge MBS and Riyadh's global influence on the basis of human rights. While the public and private sectors are, of course, separate, the influence of the Biden administration over the latter in any significant push to fundamentally reshape a partnership would be far-reaching.

As such, the February 16th announcement finds itself strangely contrasting the realities of global investments and relationships in the future of Saudi Arabia. While President Biden may no longer wish to speak to MBS directly — allegedly a marker of return to proper diplomatic procedures — other prominent figures worldwide certainly intend to. As Davos in the Desert demonstrates, symbolic snub or not, MBS represents the public face of the Kingdom. He will continue to not only cultivate relations with global political leaders but will also be at the forefront of the Kingdom's financial diversification endeavours — a pursuit that directly involves the elite of the American business community. This reality means that Biden's effort to remove MBS from the picture may be an effective diplomatic stance; it may also reflect a genuine insight into how his administration intends to conduct foreign policy. However, it fails to account for the fact that the Crown Prince will continue to be the public face of the Kingdom for years to come, a reality that will only increase given the age of King Salman and the development of both the Future Investment Initiative and other efforts spearheaded by the Crown Prince to keep Saudi Arabia relevant and competitive in the global sphere.

Moreover, this money and investment appeal is power: while the specific contents of the US-Saudi Arabia quid pro quo relationship are definitely changing, the money involved in this transactional partnership is certainly not. While it would be premature to suggest any concrete actions from the Biden administration with respect to this facet of the US-Saudi relationship, its exclusion from some analysis of Washington's expected approach to Riyadh fails to acknowledge the influence of Saudi Arabia across the US public and private sectors.

Conclusion

On February 4th and 16th, the Biden administration announced changes to US-Saudi relations that included the halting of arms sales intended for offensive use in Yemen and the official announcement that diplomatic communications between the President and Saudi Arabia would no longer include Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Both policies showcase potential shifts in the relationship between Washington and Riyadh as the Biden administration attempts to readjust its global operations in the post-Trump era. President Biden had been particularly critical of Saudi Arabia, especially MBS, during his campaign for president, and the recent events may indicate substantive efforts to fundamentally change the nature of the two countries' partnership that has endured severe international criticism for decades. At the same time, the Biden team has been swiftly and publicly working to retract some of the prominent changes in US foreign policy that occurred during the Trump administration. In addition to these changes, the close relationship between MBS and both the former President and his son-in-law Jared Kushner was a well-known and deeply controversial alliance. This partnership resulted in the adamant American defence of MBS following the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi and the continued support of a war in Yemen that has resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. This policy outlook analysed the changes to the US-Saudi relationship that have occurred in Biden's first month as president, as well as the expected shifts in dynamics between the two states in the years to come. While Biden will undoubtedly work to distance himself from any personal relationship with MBS and emphasise his intent to change Washington's relationship with Riyadh in a number of matters, this outlook emphasises the grounding of many of these policies in American domestic political affairs. Moreover, it highlights the role of Biden's personal relationship-based approach to diplomacy — and how this will negatively impact MBS — but contrasts it with the extensive efforts of Wall Street and the global business community to maintain Saudi Arabia's role worldwide. Overall, the Biden administration may in fact make efforts to alter this historic partnership between the two states, but its policies thus far indicate either a lack of intent or action to ensure that this shift ever takes place.

