

# *Report reveals Israeli officials secretly sent to Qatar to bolster security ties with U.S. military*

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A C-130 Hercules is seen on the flight line at al-Udeid Air Base, Qatar (Photo by US Air Force)

Washington, July 11 (RHC)-- Israeli military officials have secretly traveled to Qatar in a visit aimed at bolstering security cooperation with the American military. The visit came ahead of U.S. President Joe Biden's regional tour that aims to normalize ties between the occupying regime and the Arab countries in the region.

Citing unknown sources, the Middle East Eye said in a report on Saturday that Israeli military officials had secretly been dispatched to Qatar as part of a "security reshuffle that places Israel in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility."

The sources told MEE that at least one location where Israeli officials had traveled was al-Udeid, a US air base and the forward operating headquarters of all US forces in the West Asia region, also known as CENTCOM.

"There is dialogue, and it is a good dialogue," a Persian Gulf official with knowledge of the matter told MEE on condition of anonymity. However, the official did not mention the number of Israeli personnel currently in Qatar. The revelation of Israeli military officials traveling to Qatar underscores how ties are extending beyond traditional areas such as Palestine, particularly as the US works to enhance security cooperation between its Arab partners and Israel.

"The Abraham Accords, as well as the inclusion of Israel into the US Central Command, are forcing all Arab capitals to reassess what their relationship with Israel looks like," R Clarke Cooper, former assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs under the Trump administration and currently at the Atlantic Council, told MEE.

"Current considerations of military integration to address shared threats like Iran is a real-time example of such reassessment," he added.

In March, Qatari military officials - along with those from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan - reportedly held a meeting with US and Israeli counterparts in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm al-Sheikh to discuss a plan for joint missile defense.

The meeting took place against a backdrop of rising tensions across the West Asia region and what was claimed to be threats from Iran. Despite lacking formal ties, Israel and Qatar — two key US allies — maintain relations and are known to engage on issues, including the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

The Persian Gulf periphery state cut commercial ties with Israel in 2009, after the first of four wars between the regime's military and the Gaza-based resistance movement Hamas.

Unlike four Arab countries – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, which normalized their ties with Israel in 2020 – Qatar has conditioned its normalization with the regime on the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Saudi Arabia is yet to jump on the bandwagon, but the two sides have seen growing contacts and de-facto rapprochement in recent years, despite claims that it is committed to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which conditions normalizing ties with Israel on the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state within the 1967 borders.

The kingdom in November 2020 granted permission for Israeli airlines to use its airspace, hours before the first Israeli flight to the United Arab Emirates was set to take off.

The speculation is rife that Biden will be aggressively pushing for normalization between Riyadh and Tel Aviv during his trip to the region between July 13 and 16.

The U.S. president is scheduled to meet Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and other regional leaders during the high-profile visit, his first to Saudi Arabia since becoming the president last year.

Palestinian leaders, activists and ordinary people have repeatedly rejected Arab-Israeli normalization deals as "a stab in the back of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people."

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