

Myanmar's Crisis & the World

Myanmar Junta Aims to Boost Ties to the Mideast to Evade Isolation

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Faced with escalating diplomatic isolation, Myanmar's military regime is promoting ties with countries in the Middle East in an attempt to expand beyond its current allies China, Russia and India.

On Wednesday, junta boss Min Aung Hlaing held phone talks with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah. The following day, the Saudi Ambassador and charge d'affaires ad interim of Qatar held talks with junta-appointed foreign minister U Than Swe.

While other countries have been downgrading diplomatic ties with the Myanmar regime and sanctioning it since the 2021 coup, Saudi Arabia appointed a new ambassador to Myanmar in March of last year and its neighbor Kuwait followed suit in January of this year.

As Kuwaiti Ambassador Mubarak M A Aladwani presented his credentials to Min Aung Hlaing earlier this year, the two discussed the promotion of diplomatic ties, trade, tourism and exchange of goodwill visits. The ambassador held separate talks with the junta's then-foreign minister Wunna Maung Lwin and International Cooperation Minister Ko Ko Hlaing on how the two countries could help each other on the international stage as well as Kuwaiti investment in the energy sector.

The discussions were followed six months later by direct talks between Min Aung Hlaing and Kuwait's prime minister. Observers say goodwill visits between high-ranking officials from both countries are the next step.

The Saudi ambassador also discussed promoting diplomatic ties and trade when he presented his credentials to Min Aung Hlaing last year. He and the junta's foreign minister discussed enhancing cooperation in the international arena, as well as promoting cooperation in the energy, investment, trade, labor, cultural and education sectors.

In his meeting with the junta's foreign minister, the Qatar diplomat also discussed strengthening ties between the two countries, and signing memorandums of understanding and agreements on the export of Myanmar agricultural and fishery products to Qatar, energy, hotels and tourism, and direct flights.

Myanmar, Kuwait and Qatar are dialogue partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by China, India and Russia.

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