



By: TA | AP Brief

American diplomats begin to return to the Mideast embassies



American diplomats and at least some of their family members are beginning to return to U.S. embassies in the Middle East after many were **ordered to leave** their posts during the early days of the war with Iran.

Although most embassies are not returning to full strength immediately, starting this week the State Department has begun to lift certain staffing and other restrictions on personnel.

The changes are not necessarily reflective of a shift in the **Trump administration's policy** toward Iran — now focused on economic rather than kinetic military warfare.

Instead, the changes are mainly due to the legalities of human resources policy, which limits the time diplomats may be away from post while still being paid and collecting benefits for themselves and their families.

On Friday, the day the Iran war hit its six-month mark, embassies in Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain announced they would allow diplomats' family members to return, although in Bahrain and Kuwait it applies only to those older than 18.

Earlier in the week, all family members of U.S. government employees in Israel, as well as those who are over 21 of those who work in Lebanon, were given the go-ahead to return.

These embassies were all placed on “ordered departure” or “authorized departure” status in March as Iran began retaliating for U.S. and Israeli attacks by targeting U.S. interests, including embassies and military facilities, and creating chaotic situations in countries around the region.

Hardships among the workforce

Ordered departure means that all nonessential personnel and families must leave the country. Authorized departure means that staff deemed nonessential and their families may leave.

However, regulations time-limit those statuses, which were beginning to expire six

months after being initiated, meaning affected diplomats and their families would be losing their housing and other benefits, creating significant hardships among the workforce.

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To deal with this, the State Department created a new status — that of “restricted operations” — which is designed to allow the embassies to resume normal functions.

On a case-by-case basis, each affected embassy will make its own determination on appropriate staffing, the presence of families and pay and benefits.

Diplomats and their families were ordered to leave embassies in another five countries in the region early in the war, and changes in status at some of them also were anticipated soon.

“We remain committed to supporting our workforce and their families throughout this process and will provide updates through appropriate channels as decisions are made,” the department said.