

WASHINGTON, July 19 (Reuters) - President Joe Biden held Oval Office talks on Monday with Jordan's King Abdullah, a key U.S. ally in a volatile region, in the first of three face-to-face meetings expected soon with Middle East leaders.

Abdullah, who faced down a challenge to his authority in April from his half-brother, Prince Hamza, met Biden for the first time since the U.S. president took office in January. Biden called the king a "good, loyal, decent friend."

"You've always been there, and we will always be there for Jordan," Biden told reporters during a picture-taking session. He said he wanted to hear about developments in the Middle East from the king.

"You live in a tough neighborhood," he said.

Abdullah said his region has many challenges. "You can always count on me, my country and many of our colleagues in the region," he told Biden.

In the meeting, Biden announced the delivery of more than 500,000 COVID-19 vaccines to Jordan and the two leaders discussed the U.S.-Jordan defense relationship and Syria's humanitarian crisis, the White House said in a statement.

"President Biden commended the important role Jordan plays in the wider stability of the region," it said

They also discussed Middle East peace efforts and Biden voiced his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Jordan's engagement with the new Israeli government, the White House said.

Tensions remain high following the 11-day war in May between Israel and Hamas militants in Gaza.

Abdullah plays a unique role in the Middle East, seen by U.S. officials as a moderate and pragmatic leader who can play a mediating role.

I met today with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan to express my gratitude for his steadfast friendship and consult with him on a range of challenges and opportunities in the Middle East. The U.S.-Jordan strategic partnership is as important as ever. pic.twitter.com/FN9oNiHxtJ

— President Biden (@POTUS) [July 19, 2021](#)

Image source: Twitter

He is the first Middle East leader to visit the Biden White House, to be followed on July 26 by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. U.S. and Israeli officials are working on scheduling a meeting soon between Biden and new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who recently replaced Benjamin Netanyahu.

Jordan's image as an island of stability in the turbulent Middle East was called into question after Prince Hamza was accused of a plot to destabilize the country in April.

Biden has offered full support to Abdullah, who was joined at the White House by his wife, Queen Rania.

Abdullah will have a working breakfast with Vice President Kamala Harris on Tuesday at the vice president's residence. He will also meet Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the State Department.

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