

# Restricted Operations

*What the United States actually did at five posts between Wednesday 21 and Friday 23 October 2026, what the intelligence memo says, and what is still unknown.*

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Over the weekend of 24 to 25 October 2026, headlines said the US was "evacuating" embassies across the Middle East because of Iran. Part of that is accurate. Part of it runs together two different steps. For anyone with family, staff or travel plans in the Gulf, the difference matters.

## Two different steps

The State Department has two separate tools here.

- Ordered departure. Non-emergency staff and family members are told to leave. They have no choice.
- Restricted operations. The embassy stays open with a smaller footprint. Staff are reduced, but those who remain are not ordered out.

## Saudi Arabia: ordered departure

On Wednesday 21 October 2026, the State Department ordered non-emergency personnel and family members to leave the US Embassy in Riyadh and the consulates in Jeddah and Dhahran (Associated Press; Axios). The department pointed to the threat from Yemen's Houthis, who have resumed missile and drone fire at Saudi Arabia. The travel advisory for Saudi Arabia is Level 3, rising to Level 4 near the Yemen border.

## Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar and the UAE: reductions, no ordered departure

On Friday 23 October 2026, the department reduced staff at the embassies in Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. AP reports that all four were already under restricted operations, that they remain open, and that "staff in the other four countries are not compelled to depart." The advisories were reissued the same day. Jordan, Qatar and the UAE are at Level 3. Lebanon is at Level 4, "do not travel."

Jordan's advisory is the only one of the four whose text, as I read it, names "Iranian efforts to target U.S. government officials in the region."

## The memo

Also on Friday 23 October 2026, Director of National Intelligence Jay Clayton sent a one-page, unclassified memo to Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Axios published it and AP obtained it. The key lines, as quoted by AP:

"[We] have received intelligence that Iran has substantially increased efforts to target U.S. personnel."

"The lethal plotting efforts by the Iranians against U.S. citizens have reached advanced stages in both the Middle East and certain other countries."

Note the words. The memo says "personnel" and "citizens." Several headlines said "diplomats." According to Axios, the memo names no targets, no countries outside the Middle East and no method. Clayton offered to downgrade as much of the intelligence as possible so it could be shared with more of the people at risk.

A US official told Axios: "We decided that due to the threat of Houthi attacks and Iranian terror plots, we need to reduce our footprint and keep only essential staff."

### What it does not say

- US officials have denied that the drawdowns are linked to any planned new US or Israeli strikes on Iran (AP).
- President Trump said at a rally in Florida on Friday 23 October 2026: "We may do another little Epic Fury, or they'll agree." Read that as a statement of options. It is not an announcement.
- Reports that Iran has also warned Germany come from one channel citing Iranian media (single source, not yet confirmed). I have left them out of the analysis above.

### What I take from it

The US government is treating a specific intelligence warning as real and acting on it with graded, public steps: an ordered departure where the Houthi threat is closest, and quieter reductions elsewhere. I think that is what a serious government does, and I am glad to see it done carefully.

For readers in Israel with relatives or colleagues at these posts or travelling through the Gulf this week:

- Read the current advisory on [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) yourself rather than a headline about it. Each country page shows the level and the date.
- US citizens can enrol in the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to get embassy alerts.
- Watch the line in all four reissued advisories: "Additional staffing posture adjustments may be imposed." It means the picture can change quickly.

May ה' guard everyone serving far from home, and bring them back safely.

### Sources

- Axios, "Scoop: U.S. intel memo warns of 'advanced' Iranian plots to kill officials abroad," Barak Ravid, 23 October 2026 (memo embedded).
- Associated Press (Matthew Lee), "U.S. is reducing staffing at 4 Middle East embassies over increased threats from Iran," 24 October 2026, via PBS NewsHour.
- US State Department travel advisories for Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar and the UAE, reissued 23 October 2026 ([travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov)).
- Also reported by Reuters, NBC News, BBC and CNN, 23 to 24 October 2026.

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