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Obama to host Middle East allies for talks on the Syrian crisis



President Barack Obama will host leaders from key U.S. allies Jordan, Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the coming weeks, amid turmoil in Syria, the White House said Friday. The U.S. administration said Jordan's King Abdullah II will meet with Obama on April 26 for talks "Jordan's political and economic reforms, the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and additional regional issues of mutual concern." Obama will then host Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on May 16 for talks on "Syria, trade and economic cooperation, and countering terrorism. "As friends and NATO allies, the United States and Turkey are partners in addressing a range of critical global and regional issues," a statement said. Jordan is a key U.S. ally in the region and, as one of two Arab states at peace with Israel, has been involved in past efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The meeting with Erdogan will be the first since Obama helped restore ties between Israel and Turkey during his visit to the Jewish state last month. During that visit, Obama convinced Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to apologize to Turkey over a deadly Israeli raid on an aid ship bound for Gaza in 2010, which had soured relations between the two U.S. allies. Turkey and Jordan have strongly backed the two-year-old revolt against Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, and both countries host large numbers of Syrian refugees. Obama will host Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan of the United Arab Emirates on April 16, and will meet with Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani on April 23. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will meanwhile head back to the Middle East early next week for his third trip in a month to see if there might be a way to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. Expectations are growing that the U.S. administration is ready to resume some kind of shuttle diplomacy to rekindle the moribund peace process, which has stalled since late 2010 amid bitter recriminations on both sides.