# Affinity Partners’ OakNorth stake exposes Gulf capital’s strategic push into Western fintech



The purchase of an eight‑per cent stake in UK digital lender OakNorth by Affinity Partners, the private equity vehicle founded by Jared Kushner, crystallises an emerging pattern in global finance: sovereign and gulf‑backed capital entering Western fintechs not merely for returns but as instruments of strategic reach. According to reporting in the Financial Times and Reuters, the stake was bought from an undisclosed existing investor, and neither party immediately commented, leaving the transaction shrouded in deliberate opacity while prompting close attention from investors and political watchers alike. Industry observers say the deal is as much about access to OakNorth’s digital lending platform as it is about financial upside.

OakNorth’s own disclosures frame it as a fast‑maturing business. The bank reported pre‑tax profits of £214.8 million for 2024 and highlighted more than £2.1 billion of gross new lending in the year, while saying cumulative credit facilities since inception run to about £12.5 billion. OakNorth’s annual statement also flagged strong early demand in the United States after its mid‑2023 market entry, citing roughly $700 million lent in the US to date and positioning the firm as a high‑return, data‑driven lender. Some trade reporting has put the bank’s US lending at a higher figure, underscoring that publicly available numbers can differ during a period of rapid growth and cross‑border expansion.

That US push is concrete: OakNorth has pursued an acquisition in Michigan—Community Unity Bank—in a stock‑for‑stock deal that OakNorth and Community Unity announced in March 2025 as subject to customary regulatory approvals. The transaction, which Community Unity said will retain the local management team with its CEO expected to lead OakNorth’s US banking business, is presented by OakNorth as a stepping stone to scale its business‑lending capabilities in local markets. For Affinity Partners, access to a UK‑banking licence paired with an expanding US footprint creates a two‑track platform for cross‑border lending and product rollout.

Affinity’s involvement brings geopolitics into the picture. Reporting from Business Insider and other outlets documented that Affinity was initially anchored by a substantial pledge from Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund—reported to be around $2 billion—which institutionalised the firm’s role as a conduit for Gulf capital into Western markets. Financial Times and Reuters coverage has noted the sensitivities that follow: a former senior White House adviser at the helm of a firm backed by a Gulf sovereign fund invites heightened scrutiny, with commentators warning of potential regulatory, congressional and reputational scrutiny in the United States and Europe.

More broadly, the OakNorth transaction sits within a wave of Middle Eastern investment in fintech. Industry data compiled by research firms and reported in regional business outlets showed Middle Eastern fintech funding reached roughly US$4.2 billion in 2023, reflecting an intentional pivot by Gulf investors toward technology and away from hydrocarbon dependency. That strategic reorientation—part investment thesis, part economic diplomacy—helps explain why sovereign and quasi‑sovereign capital is targeting scaleable financial technology platforms that can plug into global distribution channels.

For investors, the deal is therefore high‑conviction but high‑complexity. OakNorth’s institutional backers, past valuations and reported profitability lend credibility to a thesis that international expansion and an eventual listing could unlock significant value. Yet the absence of disclosed terms for Affinity’s purchase, coupled with the political optics of Gulf capital allied with a firm linked to a former senior US official, creates regulatory and reputational risk. Market‑sensitive variables—interest‑rate movements, loan‑loss performance and macroeconomic cycles—remain material to OakNorth’s future earnings trajectory and to the timing or feasibility of any public offering.

Seen from a distance, the Affinity‑OakNorth transaction is a compact case study in the 21st‑century fusion of finance and foreign policy. According to coverage and corporate statements, the deal reflects the continuing attractiveness of Western fintechs to overseas sovereign investors, the strategic value of cross‑border digital banking platforms, and the political questions that inevitably follow. Whether this becomes a template for wider cooperation between Gulf capital and Western fintech innovators—or a cautionary example of the pitfalls that accompany such ties—will depend on how regulators, markets and the parties themselves navigate transparency, governance and the shifting geopolitics of capital.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/jared-kushners-firm-buys-8-stake-uk-lender-oaknorth-sky-news-reports-2025-08-15/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[4]](https://oaknorth.co.uk/press/oaknorth-pre-tax-profits-surge-to-215m-272m-as-it-surpasses-12-5bn-15-7bn-in-lending-and-continues-its-us-expansion/), [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.communityunity.bank/2025/03/17/community-unity-bank-to-be-acquired-by-oaknorth/), [[4]](https://oaknorth.co.uk/press/oaknorth-pre-tax-profits-surge-to-215m-272m-as-it-surpasses-12-5bn-15-7bn-in-lending-and-continues-its-us-expansion/), [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.businessinsider.com/jared-kushner-private-equity-firm-funding-from-saudi-arabia-report-2022-4), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/jared-kushners-firm-buys-8-stake-uk-lender-oaknorth-sky-news-reports-2025-08-15/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.entrepreneur.com/en-ae/growth-strategies/new-lucidity-insights-report-highlights-the-middle-east-as/488573), [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/jared-kushners-firm-buys-8-stake-uk-lender-oaknorth-sky-news-reports-2025-08-15/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/), [[4]](https://oaknorth.co.uk/press/oaknorth-pre-tax-profits-surge-to-215m-272m-as-it-surpasses-12-5bn-15-7bn-in-lending-and-continues-its-us-expansion/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/jared-kushners-firm-buys-8-stake-uk-lender-oaknorth-sky-news-reports-2025-08-15/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ainvest.com/news/jared-kushner-affinity-partners-strategic-cross-border-play-oaknorth-fintech-power-move-geopolitical-implications-2508/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/41d561de-051a-45f7-90c0-3dbc33973e9e> - Financial Times reports that Jared Kushner’s private equity firm, Affinity Partners, is set to acquire an eight per cent stake in UK digital lender OakNorth from an undisclosed shareholder. The article outlines OakNorth’s strong 2024 performance, noting nearly £215 million pre‑tax profit and rapid lending growth as the bank pursues a US expansion, including acquisition activity. It highlights Affinity’s Gulf sovereign backing and the geopolitical sensitivities attached to Kushner’s post‑White House business dealings. Observers warn of potential regulatory and political scrutiny, while OakNorth’s investor roster and past valuation are cited as indicators of the deal’s strategic and financial significance ramifications.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/jared-kushners-firm-buys-8-stake-uk-lender-oaknorth-sky-news-reports-2025-08-15/> - Reuters reports that Affinity Partners, founded by Jared Kushner, has bought an eight per cent stake in OakNorth, citing Sky News. The piece notes the deal was purchased from an unidentified existing investor and that neither party immediately commented. It summarises OakNorth’s recent expansion into the United States since mid‑2023, its backing by investors including SoftBank and Singapore’s GIC, and references a 2019 valuation of about $2.8 billion. Reuters highlights OakNorth’s near‑£215 million pretax profit in 2024 and discusses how the transaction fits broader trends of Gulf capital flowing into Western fintech, raising questions about governance and potential political scrutiny.
4. <https://oaknorth.co.uk/press/oaknorth-pre-tax-profits-surge-to-215m-272m-as-it-surpasses-12-5bn-15-7bn-in-lending-and-continues-its-us-expansion/> - OakNorth’s official press release and 2024 annual report announce pre‑tax profits of £214.8 million for the year, together with over £2.1 billion in gross new lending. The release highlights cumulative credit facilities of around £12.5 billion since inception and notes strong US demand, with approximately $700 million lent in the United States after the bank’s mid‑2023 market entry. OakNorth emphasises high returns on equity and ranking among the top one per cent of banks globally by performance metrics, framing these results as evidence of its profitable, data‑driven lending model and a platform for continued international expansion and strategic cross‑border ambitions.
5. <https://www.communityunity.bank/2025/03/17/community-unity-bank-to-be-acquired-by-oaknorth/> - Community Unity Bank’s announcement states it entered a definitive agreement to be acquired by OakNorth in a stock‑for‑stock transaction subject to regulatory approval. The press release explains the deal will accelerate OakNorth’s US expansion and retain Community Unity’s team, with CEO Greg Wernette expected to lead OakNorth’s US bank. It recounts Community Unity’s founding in 2023 as an Oakland County community bank focused on small business lending and describes OakNorth’s rationale for the acquisition: to scale US business lending using OakNorth’s data‑driven platform, broaden product offerings, and strengthen local customer relationships in Michigan, subject to customary closing conditions and approvals.
6. <https://www.businessinsider.com/jared-kushner-private-equity-firm-funding-from-saudi-arabia-report-2022-4> - Business Insider summarises reporting that Jared Kushner’s Affinity Partners secured a $2 billion investment from Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund in 2021. The article recounts how Kushner travelled to the Middle East to solicit backing, and notes internal PIF concerns about Affinity’s inexperience and reputational risks, which were reportedly overruled by the fund’s board chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Business Insider explains the context of the pledge amid post‑White House activities by Kushner and highlights subsequent scrutiny and media reports about the propriety of Gulf sovereign investment in a firm run by a former senior US government adviser.
7. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/en-ae/growth-strategies/new-lucidity-insights-report-highlights-the-middle-east-as/488573> - Entrepreneur Middle East, citing a Lucidity Insights report, states that Middle Eastern fintech startups raised US$4.2 billion in 2023, marking a peak for the region. The article outlines the rapid maturation of MENAT fintech ecosystems, crediting supportive government policy, sovereign fund investment and rising startup activity for the surge. It highlights notable companies such as Tabby and Tamara, increased deal flow, and a growing pipeline of scale‑ups and unicorn candidates. The piece positions the inflow of capital as part of a strategic shift by Gulf investors toward technology and diversification away from oil‑linked assets, reshaping regional economic landscapes and narratives.