

Biden administration rolls out red carpet for Saudi prince implicated in Khashoggi murder

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Prince Khalid bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's deputy defense secretary and younger brother to the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (known as MBS), was given the red-carpet treatment in Washington this week, meeting with top US diplomatic, military and security officials.

The prince is the first senior member of the Saudi ruling family to visit the US since Democratic President Joe Biden took office last January. A month later, his administration released an assessment by the US intelligence agencies confirming what the entire world already knew: the savage October 2018 assassination and dismemberment of Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul could only have been carried out on the order of Crown Prince bin Salman. The Biden administration ordered sanctions against the assassins and the senior advisor who supervised their bloody work, but took no action whatsoever against MBS himself.

The crown prince's younger brother Khalid is no stranger to Washington. He was the kingdom's ambassador to the US between 2017 and 2019 during the assassination and its aftermath. When he first arrived in Washington, he threw a lavish dinner party at the Saudi embassy for CEOs like Blackrock's Larry Fink and Lockheed Martin's Marilyn Hewson, along with top US government officials. The evening featured a performance by Gladys Knight.

After Khashoggi was butchered by the Saudi death squad, the prince repeatedly denounced "malicious rumors" that the journalist had been abducted and killed at the Istanbul consulate, insisting that the royal family was only concerned for his welfare. Incontrovertible evidence—including Turkish audiotapes recording the death squad killing Khashoggi and then cutting up his body with a bone saw—made this pretense increasingly untenable. After intelligence reports surfaced that Khalid himself had played a key role in setting up the assassination, instructing Khashoggi that he could pick up documents he needed for his marriage at the Istanbul consulate and assuring him he would be safe, he quietly abandoned his diplomatic post. Now he is back and

receiving a royal welcome.

During his campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, candidate Biden vowed that his administration would make the Saudi monarchy "pay the price" for Khashoggi's savage murder and that he would turn its rulers into "the pariah that they are."

He further pledged that a Biden administration would not sell the Saudis armaments used in "murdering children" in Yemen. He passed over in silence the fact that when he was vice president in the Obama administration, the US funneled some \$100 billion in arms to the Saudis and provided extensive logistical support without which Riyadh could not have carried out their war crimes against the Yemeni people.

After he took office and ordered the release of the sanitized US intelligence report on the Khashoggi assassination, Biden declared that his objective was to "recalibrate and not rupture" US-Saudi relations. This week, the character of that "recalibration" has clearly emerged. While there was a shamefaced character to the encounter—there was no advance notice of the Saudi prince's visit—Khalid bin Salman was given a welcome that is unprecedented for a deputy defense minister from any country.

At the State Department, he held talks with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland and Counselor Derek Chollet. At the Pentagon, he met with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Mark Milley. He was granted audiences with National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and met with other senior members of the National Security Council dealing with the Middle East.

The official statements issued by the different US government agencies hosting the Saudi prince were all virtually identical. The State Department said that the discussions were on "regional security, support for Saudi Arabia to defend itself against cross-border attacks, and improving human rights."

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin tweeted: "Enjoyed seeing Saudi Vice MinDef during his meeting

w/@DOD_Policy. Emphasized US commitment to our defense partnership, expressed concerns over Iran's destabilizing activity, the importance of ending the war in Yemen ..."

The White House released a statement on the meeting with National Security Advisor Sullivan stating that the two discussed the "longstanding partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia, regional security, and the U.S. commitment to help Saudi Arabia defend its territory as it faces attacks from Iranian-aligned groups. They also discussed the importance of coordinating efforts to ensure a strong global economic recovery, to advance the climate agenda, and to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East. Mr. Sullivan emphasized the importance of progress in advancing human rights in the Kingdom."

This official double talk only makes clear that no number of assassinations, beheadings, torture and imprisonment of journalists and dissidents will alter the fact that Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy has served for three-quarters of a century as a pillar of US imperialist hegemony and social counter-revolution in the Middle East and today functions as a key partner in Washington's anti-Iranian axis.

The pro forma references to "advancing human rights" came at the end of each official statement, serving as window dressing for Washington's unwavering support for one of the most tyrannical regimes on the planet.

Similarly, while talking about ending the war in Yemen, every statement stressed US assistance to the defense of Saudi territory, an oblique reference to the sporadic rocket and drone attacks carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels against Saudi facilities in retaliation for a six-year Saudi-led war that has claimed a quarter of a million lives and brought more than 13 million Yemenis to the brink of starvation.

Claiming to aid in the defense of the Saudi monarchy's territory provides a means of continuing US arms sales to Riyadh, the US military-industrial complex's number one foreign customer, under the pretext that they are "defensive" weapons. Meanwhile, US military personnel and contractors continue to provide logistical aid without which the Saudi military could not carry out the slaughter in Yemen.

Arms contracts concluded under the Trump administration are being fulfilled by Biden. This includes a massive \$23 billion package for the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—a key participant in the Saudi-led assault on Yemen—which consists of F-35 combat aircraft, armed drones, and \$10 billion worth of bombs and missiles, hardly defensive material.

While Biden had pledged that US arms sales would be evaluated according to "American values," it is abundantly clear that principal "value" under consideration is that of the arms corporations' profits. They have reliable champions

within the state apparatus. Defense Secretary Austin was on the board of directors of Raytheon Technologies, one of Saudi Arabia's foremost arms suppliers, while his predecessor, Mark Esper, was a chief Raytheon lobbyist before joining the Trump administration.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Saudi prince's return to Washington is the lack of protest or outrage from within either the US political establishment or the corporate media over a principal accomplice in the brutal state murder of a journalist inside a consulate being treated like a visiting dignitary. The normalization of such crimes will only ensure that they will be repeated.

In back-to-back briefings on Tuesday and Wednesday, US State Department spokesman Ned Price read out statements on the Saudi prince's visit without a single reporter asking about his role in the butchering of Khashoggi.

During these same briefings, Price called attention to the determination of Secretary of State Blinken to "reaffirm the administration's emphasis on human rights when it comes to our China policy," regurgitating the propaganda about "genocide" against Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang, while adding a claim that LGBTQI accounts had been deleted from the China-based social media platform WeChat.

Washington's official welcome for Prince Khalid bin Salman exposes the hypocrisy of the Biden administration's "human rights" pretensions, and their selective invocation in the pursuit of "great power" confrontation with China and Russia.



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