

Biden arrives in Israel to begin four-day tour courting dictators and war allies

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US President Joe Biden arrived in Israel Wednesday to begin a four-day trip whose major purpose is to align the main US client states in the Middle East, Israel and Saudi Arabia, with Washington's plans for war against Russia and Iran. After two days in Israel and the West Bank, he will move on to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to meet with Saudi leaders and with representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes the five other Persian Gulf sheikdoms as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

In pursuit of this military agenda, Biden is simply dropping the issues of "human rights" that have been used to screen the policies of American imperialism. In particular, Biden will hold a face-to-face meeting with the *de facto* Saudi ruler, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whom he once denounced as a "pariah" because of his role in ordering the murder of Saudi dissident and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

Israel too has been given a pass on murderous actions against the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza, although that is nothing new for the US government. Only a week before Biden left for his visit to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the State Department issued a report on the murder of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was shot to death by an Israeli sniper while she was reporting on Israeli military operations in the West Bank city of Jenin for *Al Jazeera Arabic*.

The report found that an Israeli soldier likely killed Abu Akleh, but the State Department claimed that there was no evidence the shooting was deliberate, despite the journalist wearing a bullet-proof vest and a sign clearly identifying her as press. Her death was merely a "tragic accident," the US government agency declared.

Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia has been prepared by a

whole series of diplomatic maneuvers and tap-dancing around the well-established fact that bin Salman sent the squad of Saudi security officers who grabbed Khashoggi when he visited the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, seeking a document to permit him to marry his Turkish fiancée.

They killed him and chopped up his body with a bone saw which they had brought to Turkey for that purpose, then disposed of the pieces so thoroughly that no physical evidence of his death has been recovered by Turkish authorities.

Over the past six months, French, British and Turkish leaders have visited bin Salman, while the Saudi ruler has visited Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, in each case bringing piles of cash taken from the \$100 billion in additional Saudi revenue from the runup in prices for the country's enormous oil exports.

Money has made the prince *persona grata* once again throughout the Middle East, and money brings Biden to Jeddah, seeking an increase in Saudi oil production to help bring down world oil prices and US gasoline prices. The price at the pump in the United States is both a major driver of wider inflation and a huge political problem for the Biden administration, facing an upsurge in the class struggle and a midterm election in less than four months.

A report in the *New York Times* July 13 suggested that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates would agree to a joint increase in production of about 1.25 million barrels a day, but that it would not be announced until a few weeks after Biden's visit in order to avoid the unseemly appearance of a blood-for-oil exchange.

Besides the immediate political and economic pressures, Biden is pursuing the more long-term strategic goals of American imperialism. It has not

gone unnoticed in Washington that neither Israel nor Saudi Arabia has jumped on the bandwagon of the war against Russia in Ukraine.

The Israeli government has to deal with both a large Russian-speaking minority within the country and close economic and political ties to Moscow, developed over a long period of time. The Saudi government is playing hard to get in relation to Ukraine, to gain leverage in its efforts to block Biden from reviving the seven-nation JCPOA nuclear pact with Iran, from which the Trump administration withdrew.

Discussions on Iran will undoubtedly occupy first place on the agenda in both Jerusalem and Jeddah. Washington is seeking to promote a more coordinated effort between Israel and the various Mideast sheikdoms, particularly in relation to preparations for air strikes against Iran, which would require Israeli or Saudi warplanes to cross a number of countries in order to reach their targets.

Biden will portray even the most minimal concession on human rights by the Saudi monarchy as a step in the right direction, while remaining silent on such barbaric events as the recent mass beheading of 81 prisoners, executed mainly for being political activists on behalf of the oppressed Shiite minority in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Aside from the ferocious internal repression of political dissidents, religious minorities and immigrant workers, the Saudi monarchy is up to its elbows in blood through its war against the people of Yemen. The Saudi military, with US backing, has been engaged in military intervention for more than seven years, seeking to overthrow the Houthi-led regime in Sana, which it accuses of being allied with Iran.

The two principal Saudi tactics have been indiscriminate terror bombing—with the United States supplying the bombs, the warplanes and the targeting information—and a naval blockade to shut off food supplies to the impoverished country, the poorest in the Arab world.

Biden and congressional Democrats in Washington have cried many crocodile tears over the crimes committed by the Saudi regime in Yemen, which are far worse than anything done by Vladimir Putin in Ukraine. But these atrocities will be swept under the rug in pursuit of the interests of American imperialism in the Middle East and globally.

There are many signs of mounting instability in the region, which could trigger another military explosion, side-by-side with the war in Ukraine. Russian and American forces are at close quarters in Syria, with a Russian air strike hitting near the US-held base at Tanf, close to the Iraq border, last month.

In Israel, the government of Naftali Bennett, a coalition of ultra-right, “center-left” and Arab parties, fell last month, forcing the calling of new elections for November 1, which could lead to a return to power by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

Interim Prime Minister Yair Lapid met Biden Wednesday and accompanied him on two ritual visits, to observe the operation of Israel’s “Iron Dome” anti-missile system, and to pay tribute to the millions murdered in the Holocaust, at the Yad Vashem memorial.

The Biden administration has continued the brazenly anti-Palestinian policies of Donald Trump, including legal recognition for Israeli settlements on the West Bank, keeping the US consulate in Jerusalem closed to Palestinians, and keeping the Palestinian mission in Washington D.C. closed.



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