

United States - Biden in the Middle East: Gross Imperial Spectacle

Tuesday 19 July 2022, by [FINKEL David](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2022).

To be scrupulously fair to Joe Biden: No one who may have expected that Biden's presidency would represent a new direction in U.S. policies toward Palestine or the region's dictatorships can claim they were deceived — any such hopes were only self-delusion.

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Nothing in his record, his rhetoric, or his endless political campaigns suggested any progressive content in Biden's attitudes regarding the Middle East. Why would that somehow change after this veteran political hack was elevated to Chief Executive Officer of U.S. imperialism?

This doesn't make the spectacle of Biden's tour any less stomach-turning, to say nothing of the celebratory coverage. As Orly Noy of the valuable online Israeli newsletter +972 puts it:

"(D)espite the blatant violations of human rights, media outlets around the world continue to buy into Israel's distortions, often portraying the reality on the ground as a struggle between two equally powerful entities, rather than as a nuclear-armed state against a population that is criminalized for even the smallest acts of protest and resistance. President Biden, who is visiting Israel this week, will see and say very little about this reality."

Beth Miller, an organizer for Jewish Voice for Peace's political action arm JVP Action, adds:

"When Biden lands in Israel, the Israeli army will be in the midst of carrying out the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in Masafer Yatta — the single largest forced expulsion of Palestinians since 1967. As he shakes hands with leaders in Saudi Arabia, he will effectively be ignoring over seven years of Saudi Arabia's horrific war on Yemen, where nearly 400,000 Yemenis have died."

Not coincidentally, Biden's trip also coincides with Washington's entirely predictable complicity in the Israeli coverup of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh [1].

Given that what actually happened was immediately obvious — the clearly identified Palestinian-American journalist was shot in the head, undoubtedly by an Israeli sniper — the U.S. "investigation" had no choice but to find that the bullet was "probably" Israeli but that the facts are "inconclusive" and responsibility can't be determined, blah blah. (With this slapdash whitewash now done, perhaps Palestinian and Israeli journalists and human rights organizations on the ground might be able to conduct a genuine inquiry, but it's unclear whether that's possible.)

If it's possible to exceed this atrocity, Biden in Saudi Arabia will renew U.S. friendship with the royal house of what he'd once called a "pariah" state after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman directed the 2018 kidnap, torture-murder and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist and Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Neither this, nor the recent mass executions of 81 Saudi prisoners, nor the near-genocide in Yemen, can detract from the immediate task of begging the Saudi rulers to graciously open their oil taps to bring down gasoline prices a few cents in advance of the U.S. November midterm elections.

Confronting Iran

On the larger strategic front, of course, the objective is to consolidate the alliance of one gang of murderers against another — Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf kingdoms versus the Iranian regime and its client forces in Syria and Lebanon.

By many accounts, some of which might be true, Iran has been coming closer to nuclear weapons capability since Trump unilaterally pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Program of Action, negotiated with Iran by the six permanent UN Security Council member states plus Germany). This would provide the pretext for some kind of U.S.-Israeli military action.

Falling deeper into Trump's trap, when the Biden administration moved to rejoin the JCPOA it did so conditionally, maintaining brutal U.S.-enforced sanctions on Iran unless Tehran bows to terms that probably no Iranian government could accept — unless there were ironclad U.S. promises of permanent sanctions relief that no one would trust this treacherous superpower to keep.

With the current negotiations threatening to unravel, and Iran facing the threat of a growing regional war alliance, the U.S. State Department pretends to be shocked and alarmed that Iran is aligning with Russia in Putin's murderous war against Ukraine — and allegedly preparing to supply the Russian effort with attack drones and the training to use them. (If this is a surprise, it's for what it says about the current condition of the Russian military, but that's a different discussion.)

This writer's guess (hopefully not overoptimistic) is that the immediate threat of a shooting war with Iran is low, even though the Israeli government has long hoped to provoke one. But it looks like a longterm simmering crisis, coming on top of the global hunger disaster triggered by the war in Ukraine, inflation and dangers of world economic recession, and the ever-present unfolding environmental catastrophe.

Back in Israel, team Biden has tossed a bone to the crumbling Palestinian Authority leadership, promising a meeting with PA president Mahmoud Abbas. We can expect the faint echo of a U.S. renewal of support for the "two-state solution," while blocking the slightest initiatives — whether by Palestinians, progressive voices in the U.S. Congress, or anyone else — that might conceivably help advance it. The purpose on the ground is to consolidate the PA's role as the local police adjunct of Israeli repression.

This comes at a point when far-right Zionist mobs are rampaging through occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli settlements are expanding without limit, and the military is carrying out mass arrests and killings in Jenin. In any case, successive U.S. administrations' "two-state" gestures for some time now have transcended the boundaries of hypocrisy and entered the realm of comedy.

The Broader Picture

There's a wider set of issues in the reconfiguration of regional forces and the strategic orientation of U.S. imperialism in the contest to rule the world. Analyzing the full picture is beyond the limited scope of this article, but some of it is laid out by Israeli analyst Dr. Moshe Terdiman in Haaretz, July 10, 2022: "Biden's Americas is Returning to the Red Sea Basin."

Biden's visit is said to have "another goal that has not received any attention: To restore U.S. influence in one of the world's most important trade routes, and in several of the key countries along its shores — which it lost to Russia and China over the past 18 months."

For one thing, the United States lost influence in Ethiopia when it sided with Egypt and Sudan over Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam project — "the largest hydroelectric plant in Africa, which seriously threatens Egypt's water, food and economic security." Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed regime turned to a military cooperation agreement with Russia, and also received assistance "by drones from China to bomb the Tigrayans and their allies who are threatening his rule."

At the same time, the Sudanese coup regime "was driven into Russia's arms" when U.S. aid was suspended, and then publicly supported Russia when it invaded Ukraine. Further, "Eritrea was pushed into China's and Russia's embrace after the United States imposed sanctions on the Eritrean army, the country's ruling party and two senior government officials in November, 2021 over the involvement of the Eritrean army in the Ethiopian civil war."

Eritrea then joined the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, resulting in a \$15.7 million pledge of Chinese aid and interest in developing Eritrea's coast, not to mention contacts "currently underway between Russia and Eritrea to establish a Russian logistics base of the coast of Eritrea."

China's broader interest in the Horn of Africa ranges from expanding railroad connections to Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposing "that ethnic, religious and regional conflicts be resolved in a way that would create a unified, stable and harmonious development environment in the Horn of Africa." (That's pretty rich in itself, considering what's happening to the Chinese Uighur people.)

All this in turn helps explain why the United States is redeploying 450-500 troops to assist the embattled government of Somalia, while "investing considerable efforts in negotiations on ratifying the agreement between Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia for the return of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, with a Saudi commitment to ensure the freedom of navigation of Israeli ships in the region" and Israeli flights over Saudi territory to the Far East.

Overall, "U.S. activity contributes to restoring influence in the Red Sea Basin and to the construction of a new geopolitical space that extends from India to France...Israel is meant to play a central role within this space, stemming from its location between the eastern Mediterranean Basin and the Red Sea and Gulf states, and resulting from its military strength, its commitment to freedom of navigation and to dealing with the Iranian threat to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea."

There are many more details of course, but all this helps to explain why Palestinian freedom really doesn't matter — including, for example, the total absence of "freedom of navigation" for Gaza fishermen in their own coastal waters.

Indeed, all the regimes in this swirl of regional and imperial rivalries — Egypt and Sudan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Russia and China, Israel and the United States — are engaged in the most vicious and anti-democratic oppression. May the rulers sink together in the Red Sea.

David Finkel

P.S.

• July 15, 2022:
<https://solidarity-us.org/biden-in-the-middle-east/>

As Biden travels to the Middle East, the State Department confirms U.S. complicity in the Israeli coverup of the murder of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

Footnotes

[1] see The Murder of Shireen Abu-Akleh:
<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc219/the-murder-of-shireen-abu-akleh/>