



## Biden's visit to two pariah states

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Joe Biden has ended his four day trip to the Middle East with little to show for it except a further soiled reputation as a champion of human rights.

The two states he visited, Israel and Saudi Arabia, are still vital to America's continued hegemony over the region, a domination shaken but not overthrown by events over the last decade. The disrupting factors have not only been the aftershocks of the Arab Spring in Libya, Sudan and Syria and the hostility of enemy states like Iran but also the defiance shown by US allies like Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

America's weakening clout was clearly seen in his second destination, Saudi Arabia, under its feisty Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He has increased the Kingdom's independent role within the region, waging a bloody war in Yemen against the Houthis, who are backed by Iran. Internally, whilst carrying out cosmetic reforms such as allowing women to drive cars, he has locked up his opponents, including the very Saudi woman activist who campaigned for the reforms.

He has been particularly vindictive to journalists who criticised him. The most egregious case for America was that of Jamal Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist, and dual US-Saudi citizen whose home was in Virginia. A fierce critic of the Crown Prince, he was lured into the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul, brutally murdered and his dismembered body disposed of.

During his 2020 presidential campaign, Biden pledged to turn the repressive kingdom into a global 'pariah' unless Khashoggi's killers were brought to justice. No chance of that. A year ago, US intelligence concluded that it was bin Salman himself who approved the operation 'to capture or kill' the journalist.

Now, Biden has turned from stern critic on the campaign trail, courting liberal voters concerned with human rights, into a hard faced international relations 'realist'. Though he claims he told bin Salman that he holds him responsible for the journalist's murder, he bumped fists with him. This underlined that his real priorities were to shore up America's standing in the Middle East and to urge the Saudis to increase oil production to rescue the world economy from escalating fuel prices. It seems his results on both scores were negligible.

Another proof that, for this President, power politics trumps ethics every time, is his response to the death of another journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose murderers Biden has done nothing to name and shame, because they are Israeli. The renowned Al-Jazeera journalist, a Palestinian and a US citizen, was shot in the head by an Israeli sniper, whilst covering raids on the Jenin refugee camp in which several demonstrators have been killed. Biden refused to meet her family on his trip but invited them to Washington, thus avoiding queering the pitch with his Israeli hosts.

The reason for the US president's silence was on display the moment he touched down at Ben Gurion Airport, to be welcomed by the interim Israeli Prime Minister, Yair Lapid. Biden exclaimed, 'You don't need to be a Jew to be a Zionist. The connection between the Israeli and American peoples is bone deep'. Not to be outdone, Lapid praised him as a 'great Zionist'. 'Your relationship with Israel has always been personal', he said, calling the president 'one of the best friends Israel has ever known'. Both men are right on this score.

The latest fruit of Biden's Zionism was a 'Jerusalem Declaration' he and the Israeli prime minister signed. This

extends the massive \$38 billion Memorandum of Understanding agreed with Obama for Israel's defence. The Palestinian issue was not mentioned in the main text of the declaration, but only in a codicil affirming "the (US's) longstanding and consistent support of a two-state solution" which, as a senior US official highlighted, was not signed by Israel.

The declaration also said that both sides commit to never allowing Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon. Lapid took the opportunity afterwards to stress that Israel did not concur that this could be done by diplomatic means. In other words, he reaffirmed Israel's right to strike Iran's nuclear facilities. The two leaders will express support for the Trump era 'Abraham Accords', signed in 2020 between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Even though Biden did briefly meet Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian National Authority, PNA, his priorities show that pursuing the indefinitely postponed 'two state solution' is way down the list and comes a distant second to reinforcing ties to their oppressors. Under Trump, US contributions, which make up a large part of the PNA budget, were slashed to pressure Mahmoud Abbas to come on board with the 'ultimate deal' negotiated by Trump's son-in law, Jared Kushner, with then Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Biden has restored those payments to ensure the PNA can keep organisations like Islamic Jihad under control.

Part of the Trump legacy that Biden is still pursuing is cajoling more Arab states to recognise Israel and to drop all active support for the Palestinian cause. Trump's plans involved creating a pro-Israel axis in the region, including the Saudi, Jordanian and Emirati monarchies. To this must be added the Egyptian military dictatorship, which subsists on an enormous, combined pension from the USA and Saudi Arabia and holds thousands of political prisoners in its jails, suffering torture and ill-treatment without a word of complaint from Washington.

Meanwhile, Israel is determined to keep the Palestinians in a state of apartheid-style separation and economic immiseration with repeated terrorisation by IDF raids. Seven million, out of a total 14 million Palestinians, live as exiles in the surrounding states of the region. Those still living within the borders of 1948 Palestine are roughly equal in number to Israel's Jewish citizens.

The fact that those Palestinians within the territories controlled by Israel have vastly inferior political rights and economic wellbeing but have been denied the right to self-determination, is irrefutable proof that Israel is a racist settler state, that is trying to obliterate the Palestinians as a nation. This project can only be sustained by murderous force, testified to by comments by Israel's last Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, hailed as more liberal than Netanyahu, yet who could say in 2013, "I have killed lots of Arabs in my life ? and there is no problem with that".

#### Jenin's resistance

A major source of continued resistance is in Jenin, in the West Bank, where Shireen Abu Akleh, was murdered. In recent months, Israel has launched a wave of raids across the West Bank, igniting clashes with Palestinian militants at least 25 of whom have been killed.

Western sponsors of Israel, sensing the swing of their own public opinion against Israel, especially after the blitzkrieg on Gaza and the dropping of any pretence of negotiations for the chimerical two-state solution, have begun a campaign of lies claiming those who support Palestine are antisemites. This was seen in the ferocious campaign against the lifelong antiracist Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, the banning in various countries of the BDS movement and the German government's ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

Nevertheless, as the fate of Apartheid South Africa showed, a reactionary racist project will not last forever. One day, 'from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' as a secular and socialist state for both Palestinians and Israeli Jews willing to live in peace and equality.