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Biden's Saudi trip and the fraud of human rights imperialism

On Friday, President Joe Biden will meet with Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of the theocratic dictatorship of Saudi Arabia. It is less than four years since bin Salman masterminded the cold-blooded murder of Jamal Khashoggi, an American citizen and columnist for the *Washington Post*, one of the most widely read newspapers in the US.

Khashoggi's murder was an act of monumental criminality, sparking an international outcry. There was universal recognition that he was butchered in cold blood by the Saudi monarchy.



FILE - In this Dec. 15, 2014, file photo, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi speaks during a press conference in Manama, Bahrain. The Washington Post columnist, who wrote

critically about the Saudi crown prince, was killed inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. (AP Photo/Hasan Jamali, File)

Bin Salman is, by the Biden administration's own admission, a murderer. He is a man who would be arrested on sight in any country with the slightest commitment to the rule of law. Even the most intransigent opponents of capital punishment might make an exception for him.

And yet, disregarding the pleas of the murdered man's fiancée and family, Biden now publicly embraces Khashoggi's murderer. When he returns to the White House, he will track in on his shoes traces of Khashoggi's blood.

Biden's announcement has been met with no public outcry in the US media. Last month, the *Washington Post* editorial board called rumors of the trip "disappointing," but did not demand it be called off. It has since kept its mouth shut.

In February of 2021, the Biden administration issued a report concluding that bin Salman personally "approved" the 2018 murder of Khashoggi. Khashoggi was lured to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey to obtain documents related to his upcoming marriage. Once inside, he was killed by a group of assassins. A recording subsequently released by the Turkish government appeared to document his body being dismembered with a saw.

At a Democratic presidential debate in November 2019, Biden was categorical that were he elected president, his administration would stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia for use in its war against Yemen, and he would "punish" the Saudi officials who killed Khashoggi.

Biden was asked, "President Trump has not punished senior Saudi leaders. Would you?"

Biden replied:

Yes, and I said it at the time. Khashoggi was, in fact, murdered and dismembered, and, I believe, on the order of the crown prince. And I would make it very clear we were not going to, in fact, sell more weapons to them, we were going to, in fact, make them pay the price and make them, in fact, the pariah that they are ...

And I would also, as pointed out, I would end—end subsidies that we have, end the sale of materiel to the Saudis, where they're going in and murdering children, and they're murdering innocent people. And so they have to be held accountable.

In addition to the murder of Khashoggi, Biden was referring to the Saudi-led war in Yemen, in which the Saudi monarchy has deliberately targeted the civilian population, including through mass starvation. As one United Nations official concluded, “Civilians in Yemen are not starving, they are being starved.” The official called for Saudi Arabia to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

According to the US State Department, the “significant human rights issues” in Saudi Arabia include:

unlawful killings; executions for nonviolent offenses; forced disappearances; torture ... substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association ... inability of citizens to choose their government peacefully through free and fair elections; violence and discrimination against women ... criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity; and restrictions on workers' freedom of association, including prohibition of trade unions and collective bargaining.

This past March, just four months before Biden's trip, Saudi Arabia executed 81 people on a single day, the most in the kingdom's modern history.

Despite his election promises, upon taking office Biden expanded US arms shipments to Saudi Arabia to aid its war against the civilian population of Yemen, selling a further \$650 million in missiles to the kingdom in 2021.

Biden's meeting with bin Salman and continued backing for the homicidal war in Yemen is of a piece with his repudiation of his campaign pledge to “close this period of relentless war.”

Even as Biden was making his empty statements about Saudi Arabia, far-reaching plans were being mapped out to systematically arm Ukraine in preparation for the current US-led proxy war with Russia.

Biden has invoked this war to justify the abandonment of any pretense of distancing himself from Saudi Arabia's mass murder in Yemen and its killing of Khashoggi.

On Saturday, Biden published an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Khashoggi's former newspaper, titled, "Why I'm going to Saudi Arabia." In it, Biden largely dismisses any discussion of human rights and dispenses with the pretense that US foreign policy is altruistic. Instead, he defines Washington's policy goals in the Middle East entirely from the standpoint of "American interests."

The words "human rights" and "Khashoggi" appear only once in the piece. Instead, Biden justifies the trip, including the face-to-face with bin Salman, as being critical to the advancement of US mercantile and military interests—in Biden's words, "important American interests."

Biden explains, right off the bat, that he is traveling to the Middle East because "Its waterways are essential to global trade and the supply chains we rely on. Its energy resources are vital for mitigating the impact on global supplies of Russia's war in Ukraine."

He adds that while his "views on human rights are clear and long-standing," military and economic imperatives take precedence. He writes:

As president, it is my job to keep our country strong and secure. We have to counter Russia's aggression, put ourselves in the best possible position to outcompete China, and work for greater stability in a consequential region of the world. To do these things, we have to engage directly with countries that can impact those outcomes. Saudi Arabia is one of them, and when I meet with Saudi leaders on Friday, my aim will be to strengthen a strategic partnership going forward that's based on mutual interests and responsibilities.

In an op-ed published last month, Hatice Cengiz, Khashoggi's fiancée, issued an appeal to Biden to "cancel your trip and uphold your promise to pursue justice for Jamal." She said the trip "will significantly compound our grief and hopelessness."

She wrote, "[Y]ou condemn Russia for persecuting dissidents and committing war crimes in Ukraine." Why then, she asked, was the Saudi royal family "being given a pass?"

“Is that the price of oil?”

Clearly, it is.

The US media has packaged the US war against Russia in Ukraine as being driven purely by altruistic motives and that the United States is willing, through sheer benevolence, to expend limitless resources in the prosecution of a just war in defense of “democracy.”

To those gullible enough to believe that the US war against Russia has anything to do with “human rights” and opposing war crimes, Biden’s trip to Saudi Arabia should open their eyes. This episode makes clear, once again, that humanitarian concerns are not a factor in US foreign policy. They are mere packaging for public relations.

US geostrategic policy is motivated by Washington’s drive for global hegemony, central to which is the focus on destroying and subjugating Russia, itself the prelude to a military conflict with China.

Why, to quote his op-ed, is Biden “going to Saudi Arabia?”

Because he is a shameless hypocrite. Because he is capable of any crime.

In the name of oil, of money, of profits for his paymasters in the American oligarchy and the US arms industry, so they can fight a war with Russia, Biden is legitimizing the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and extending carte blanche to his killers.

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