



Joe Biden Wants You to Die for the Emirati Royal Family

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President Joe Biden made headlines with his preparations to visit Saudi Arabia and kowtow to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who candidate Biden pledged to treat as a pariah. Receiving less attention is the president's plan to take his ostentatious grovel from Riyadh to Abu Dhabi.

According to Axios: "The Biden administration and the United Arab Emirates are discussing a possible strategic agreement that would give the Gulf country certain U.S. security guarantees." Washington reportedly has sent a draft text, which would effectively turn American military personnel into mercenaries for the Emirati royals. Just as the UAE hires out most other difficult work to others, it wants the US to provide bodyguards for the oppressive regime.

By truckling to the Gulf kingdoms, the administration hopes to convince the royals to increase oil production. Washington has been too successful in driving Venezuelan, Iranian, and most recently Russian petroleum off the market and now is desperate to lower gasoline prices. It is a forlorn hope – the Saudis and Emiratis are enjoying the financial bounty of high oil prices – but the president, facing a potential midterm congressional wipeout in November, is attempting a sort of "Hail Allah" pass.

Indeed, the administration has been genuflecting in the direction of Abu Dhabi for months. The Saudis and Emiratis invaded Yemen in 2015 and Abu Dhabi spent years bombing civilian targets without consequence. Although UAE eventually backed away from active combat, it recently intervened in the battle for the northern city of Marib. So in January the insurgent group Ansar Allah, popularly known as the Houthis, finally started shooting back, creating hysteria in UAE.

The royals evidently believed that they were entitled to kill others without consequence and expected America to act. Thus, they were *most* displeased when Washington failed to rush military units to the Mideast for their protection. So in February Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., head of US Central Command visited UAE to abase himself before the royals, obligingly declaring that "the purpose of my visit is assurance." Along with him came the promised deployment of a guided missile destroyer and F-22 squadron. Nothing is too good or too much for oil-rich aggressors.

In April Secretary of State Antony Blinken met UAE Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed in Morocco and also did a full kowtow, begging for forgiveness. Obviously, it was not enough for the US to sell billions of dollars' worth of weapons and assist in an aggressive, murderous war against a poor neighbor. The US also was expected to protect the Emiratis from the natural consequences of their criminal conduct by sending military forces on demand. Known for spreading millions of dollars around Washington, D.C., the UAE's ambassador, Yousef Al Otaiba, indicated that Abu Dhabi was pleased with Blinken's submissive performance.

Then last month the administration sent a top-heavy delegation to offer condolence after the death of UAE President Khalifa Bin Zayed. Headed by Vice President Kamala Harris, the group included Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, and CIA Director William Burns. It was another example of ostentatiously fawning over the royals, leaving no doubt which government appeared dominant in the relationship. Said Blinken: "We look forward to working closely together to build on the extraordinary partnership between the United States and the United Arab Emirates that grew under His Highness Sheikh Khalifa's presidency, and continuing our dialogue to advance a more peaceful and secure region and world."

Now the Biden administration apparently wants to formalize UAE's defense dependence. Put bluntly, Americans will be expected to die for the Al Nahyan dynasty. That's viewed as the natural way of the world in Abu Dhabi, but why also in Washington?

The American people will be the obvious losers of turning Uncle Sam into a supplicant to corrupt Medieval dictatorships. No doubt, some people will benefit. Arms merchants will sell more weapons. Think tanks will collect more Emirati contributions – think of the many well-funded conferences to be held on topics related to "strengthening the US-UAE alliance." Retired military and diplomatic personnel will be in greater demand as lobbyists, to help overcome any discordant complaints about human rights and such.

However, what is in it for Americans outside of Washington? Any increase in oil production is likely to be small and temporary. It would be simpler for the US to lift sanctions on Venezuela, which have hurt that nation's people more than the Maduro government, and show some political courage in restoring the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran, allowing that country's oil back onto the international market. Washington and Brussels also should focus on ending the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which could lead to the lifting of sanctions on Moscow.

Cravenly crawling to Abu Dhabi also makes a mockery of the president's human rights agenda. Freedom House rates UAE as not free, scoring lower than Egypt, Vietnam, and even *Russia*. The State Department detailed the royals' crimes:

"Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture in detention; arbitrary arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention, by government agents; political prisoners; government interference with privacy rights; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including censorship and the existence of criminal libel laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including very restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to change

their government peacefully in free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government restrictions or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; existence or use of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual activity between adults; and outlawing of independent trade unions or significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association."

Despite the president's call to democratic arms and routine human rights denunciations of China and Russia, the situation in UAE is getting worse. Human Rights Watch issued a new report which noted that "since 2011, UAE authorities have carried out a sustained assault on freedom of expression and association, arresting and prosecuting scores of independent lawyers, judges, teachers, students, and activists, and shutting down key civil society associations and the offices of foreign organizations, effectively crushing any space for dissent."

Abu Dhabi imposed some legal changes late last year, but these "reforms" actually increased repression. Explained HRW: "The laws continue to prohibit criticism of rulers and speech that is deemed to create or encourage social unrest, imposing severe penalties for vaguely defined charges. They maintain provisions that criminalize defamation and both verbal and written insults, whether published or made in private, as prosecutable offenses. New provisions criminalize 'false' and 'misleading' information, sharing information with foreign groups or countries, and 'offending foreign states.' Protests and demonstrations would still be prohibited."

The Emirati regime also is aggressive abroad, undermining American interests. The Emiratis helped fasten or sustain dictatorships on Egypt and Bahrain, underwrote Jihadist forces in Syria and Libya, blockaded and threatened Qatar militarily, initiated a disastrous, destabilizing war against Yemen, and probably encouraged last year's presidential coup in Tunisia. UAE is as malign an actor as Iran, protected by the illusion that it is a friend of America.

As for UAE's security, its problems are largely self-inflicted. Yemeni missile strikes were retaliation, justified militarily – thousands of Yemeni civilians have died from Emirati and Saudi airstrikes and even more from the blockade of Yemen – though wrong morally as directed against civilian targets. With the renewal of the ceasefire in Yemen, all parties should forge a peaceful settlement, which would be aided by Abu Dhabi giving up its annexationist ambitions over Yemeni territory.

The Abrahamic Accords formalized UAE's relationship with Israel, building a more effective anti-Iran coalition, thereby relieving the US of any need to guarantee the Emirates' security. Viewed as more capable militarily than Saudi Arabia – Defense Secretary Jim Mattis dubbed Abu Dhabi "Little Sparta" – UAE should take over responsibility for its own defense. UAE's ruling family does not deserve a bodyguard courtesy America's taxpayers.

These days the ultimate policy trump on most foreign issues is China. If the US doesn't spend and defend wildly, the latest country du jour might consummate a relationship with Beijing. The best response would be: so what? China trades more than the US with American military allies such as South Korea. China will trade more than does the US with most other nations. That is economic reality. At the same time, Beijing is very unlikely to issue security guarantees. And if

it does, Washington should sit back and enjoy the geopolitical show. Let China take on all costs and risks of satisfying ungrateful, oppressive, disruptive dependents like the UAE.

Rather than fold when then Crown Prince MbZ refused to meet with McKenzie on the latter's recent trip, the US should have deployed some sticks. Washington could have announced the halt to further arms sales, withdrawal of American civilians who service US-supplied weapons, decision to return responsibility for Abu Dhabi's defense to Abu Dhabi, and launch of an investigation to determine whether Emirati war crimes in Yemen warrant designating UAE as a state sponsor of terrorism (like Yemen's Ansar Allah once was labeled). Those steps would have reminded Abu Dhabi which country was the superpower and might have loosened the oil tap. This approach would certainly have been better than risking Americans' lives for criminal regime so antithetical to US values.

Joe Biden is looking an awful lot like Jimmy Carter these days. Unlucky in circumstance, hapless in strategy, incompetent in performance. In the Persian Gulf Biden is sacrificing his basic moral principles, with little practical gain in the offing. He should at least save his self-respect and treat UAE's rulers as they deserve, like thugs, aggressors, and war criminals.

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