



Biden and America's Bad, Unreliable Clients

Daniel Larison

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Peter Beinart wonders why Biden would be spending so much time trying to get a deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia when doing so is, as he puts it, “insane.” Here is his answer:

It seems to me much more plausible that their real motivation is they feel like this is the way to keep Saudi Arabia in the US camp rather than the China camp. One of the things that has really become clear in the Biden administration is that it sees the world fundamentally through a cold war prism. The most important thing it wants to know about any government around the world is: are they on our side, or are they on the Russian/Chinese side?

Beinart may be right that this is why Biden is doing this, but if this is the reason that makes it an even worse idea than it already was. Indulging bad clients so that they don't “defect” to a rival makes no sense. When a client is as much of a liability as Saudi Arabia is, there is no benefit to be had by keeping them on your side. Given how unreliable and untrustworthy the Saudi government is, there is also no guarantee that they will stay on your side no matter how many freebies you offer them. It would be much smarter to cut them loose now rather than shower them with more gifts in the vain hope that they will be useful later.

Bribing clients with major political and military favors perpetuates one-sided relationships where only the clients benefit. Client states are supposed to help the patron advance its interests. If they can't or won't do that, they shouldn't be receiving any benefits. The U.S. stands to gain nothing if Israel and Saudi Arabia normalize relations, and it would be on the hook to honor additional commitments to one or both of them at its own expense. That is why Jon Hoffman, Jordan Cohen, and Jonathan Ellis warned that Biden is heading for a disaster if he keeps pursuing this goal:

The Biden administration is wrong to consider such a tradeoff. There is no strategic incentive for the United States to grant policy concessions and/or increase security commitments to Saudi Arabia for formally normalizing relations with Israel.

If Biden is doing this because he thinks it is a clever way to “compete” with China for influence in the Middle East, he couldn’t be more wrong.