

U.S. president plans controversial trip to Saudi Arabia

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Washington, June 13 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden is planning to go ahead with his visit to Saudi Arabia next month despite many lawmakers advising him to cancel the trip. A report in Reuters, citing a source familiar with the planning, said on Sunday that the White House was likely to announce the high-profile trip this week.

“We are working on a trip to Israel and Saudi Arabia for a (P)GCC+3 Summit,” a senior administration official was quoted as saying by NBC News. “We are working to confirm dates. When we have something to announce, we will.”

On Sunday, Biden said he had “not yet” decided if he will travel to Saudi Arabia, amid opposition from Democratic Party legislators and human rights groups. Biden earlier this month confirmed he was planning a trip to Riyadh in a startling volte-face that many have linked to Washington’s energy needs in the wake of sanctions on Russia’s energy sector.

Biden’s visit to Saudi Arabia, a country he once vowed to make a “pariah,” has in recent weeks stirred up a hornet’s nest in the power corridors of the U.S., with many lawmakers advising him to call off the visit.

In an open letter, a coalition of rights groups called on the U.S. president not to go ahead with the trip in the absence of human rights commitments by Riyadh, warning it could encourage “further violations.”

The oil-rich country’s leadership faces accusations of rampant human rights abuses, especially against religious minorities. The country’s de-facto ruler, crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman, also stands accused of ordering the brutal killing of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate in 2018.

The chairman of the US House intelligence committee, Adam Schiff, was quoted as saying last weekend that if he were Biden, he wouldn’t go to Saudi Arabia.

Biden’s U-turn on Saudi Arabia comes in the wake of a worsening crisis in the global energy market and soaring oil prices, fueled by the war in Ukraine.

There is also speculation that Biden during the trip intends to take steps to help normalize relations between Riyadh and Tel Aviv, following in the footsteps of his predecessor. The Wall Street Journal reported that the Saudi regime aims to invest millions of dollars in Israel, which could pave the way for the official normalization of ties between the two sides.

Since the beginning of Russia’s military operation in Ukraine and the ensuing spike in oil prices, the US president has made great efforts to control fuel prices as well as isolate Russia.

The Biden administration has tried to pin the economic woes in the country on Russia, blaming the Russian leader Vladimir Putin for destabilizing global food supplies and pushing the cost of groceries at home.

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