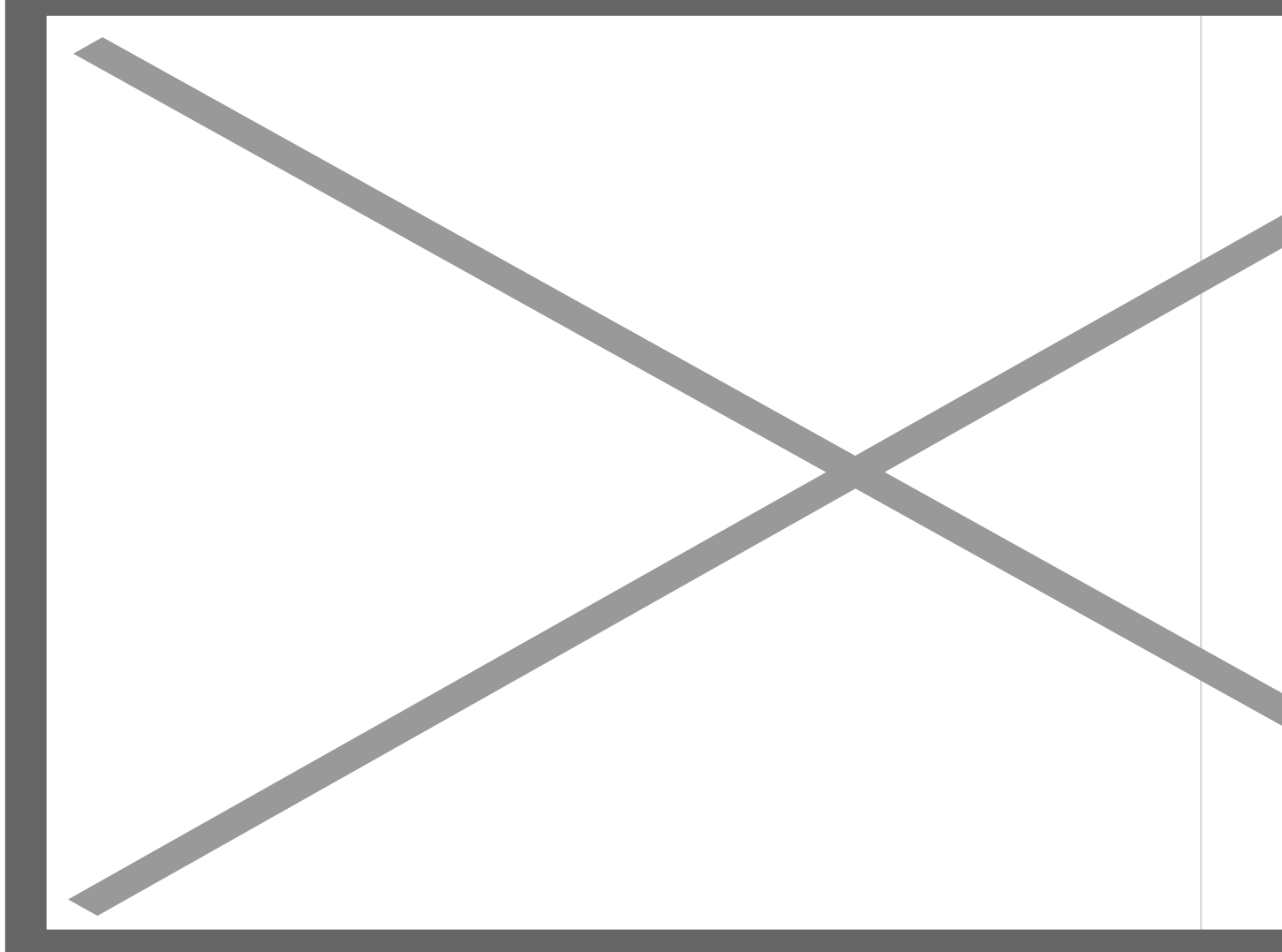


Report says Joe Biden continues the policies of Trump in the Middle East

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U.S. President Joe Biden leaves St. Edmund's Catholic Church after attending Mass in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, on July 9, 2022. (Photo by AFP)

Washington, July 11 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden has sharply been criticized by analysts for following the policies of his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, in the Middle East as he is due to pay visits to Israel and Saudi Arabia next week.

Biden is scheduled to take a direct flight from Tel Aviv to his meetings in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on his first trip to the Middle East since entering the White House. Israel and Saudi Arabia do not allow direct flights between them.

The U.S. president wrote in a Washington Post opinion piece on Saturday that he aims to "strengthen a strategic partnership" with Saudi Arabia. The trip, which is considered a strong signal of Saudi Arabia's forward movement to opening relations with Israel, has sparked anger among critics, who say what they view is largely a continuation of the Trump administration's handling of relations with the Saudis.

"If there is a difference, it's a difference of rhetoric," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN). While he has been eager to criticize a range of his predecessor's policies, Biden fully embraced one key pillar of Trump's Middle East policy — the Abraham Accords.

His officials reportedly tried to move away from the term Abraham Accords in the early days of the administration, but quickly changed tack, hosting a summit in Israel's Negev desert in March to celebrate the accords with its signatories.

The deals were brokered by the Trump administration in 2020 to normalize relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Morocco.

Arab nations had made it clear they would not negotiate with Israel until Palestinians received an independent state of their own. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, however, normalized their ties with Israel in 2020.

Palestinian leaders, activists and ordinary people have repeatedly rejected Arab-Israeli normalization deals as "a stab in the back of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people." Biden's trip to the Middle East is expected to include further promotion of the Abraham Accords, according to experts.

A senior Israeli official told reporters on Wednesday that the Biden administration is "invested in that (the Abraham Accords), I would say increasingly so, expanding that circle." "And if we can get the Saudis to move in that direction, that is an important game changer in the region," the official added.

The president is also under fire for a planned meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). During his presidential campaign, he called for Saudi Arabia to be made a "pariah," over the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post and a critic of bin Salman at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

His administration last year released a long-awaited declassified intelligence report saying the crown prince approved Khashoggi's killing. The kingdom is also under fire over its human rights record including the devastation of the war in Yemen and the arbitrary detention of political dissidents.

Still, Biden's allies argue that the meeting is necessary, given Saudi Arabia's influence in the global oil market, at a time of high energy prices. But his critics had earlier warned him about the political cost of the visit with the condemned crown prince.

Biden, however, defended his trip to the kingdom, in a Washington Post op-ed Saturday, saying that his upcoming meetings there are in America's interest. He also claimed that his policies have helped achieve a more "stable and secure" Middle East over the past year and a half.

The Democratic president said that his administration had “reversed the blank check policy” on Saudi Arabia that he inherited from Trump.

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