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[Mahir Ali](https://www.dawn.com/authors/322/mahir-ali) Published August 23, 2023

LATE last week, Joe Biden hosted the leaders of South Korea and Japan at Camp David to nudge them towards increased economic and “security” cooperation, as part of the US administration’s aggressive pushback against Chinese ambitions. Living memories of Japan’s brutal rule in Korea have stood in the way of bonhomie between the two staunch American allies. The push for closer coordination coincides with a US-endorsed resurgence in Japanese militarism, which plagued the region in the early 20th century.

A similar impetus is behind a parallel US push for a formal diplomatic deal between a repressive monarchy and a diminishing democracy in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia enjoys reasonably cordial relations with China. Its de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), knows that this — not least the Beijing-sponsored rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran — irritates Washington, and is leveraging it.

The Saudis are not shy of implying they could shift their source of military imports to China, even Russia, if America falls short. The conditions for a deal with Israel reportedly include a mutual defence pact, a civilian nuclear plan involving the enrichment of uranium, and Israeli ‘concessions’ to Palestinians that would preserve the possibility — rather, the fiction — of a two-state solution.

Many of Israel’s traditional friends among the American commentariat have been critical of the regime’s aggressive attempts to subjugate the judiciary, some even arguing that the US should curtail aid to Israel. A recent open letter from over 750 Israeli intellectuals to the American Jewish community urges it to stop supporting apartheid.

The US faces a few hurdles in facilitating Saudi-Israeli nuptials.

The judiciary’s future and the brutal occupation of Palestinian territories tend to be viewed as distinct issues. Mass mobilisations in Israel in defence of its discriminatory democracy have largely ignored the redoubled efforts towards ethnic ‘cleansing’. Israeli courts may have acted to restrict government excesses, but they are a part and parcel of the oppression since the 1940s, when the horrific Shoah segued into the Nakba.

Both words mean the same: catastrophe. The first, among the biggest crimes against humanity, ended in 1945. The second is ongoing, and it is almost inconceivable that the present regime would agree to ameliorate it, given its commitment to annexation of the West Bank by subterfuge. That, anyhow, is not something the Saudis demand as part of the price for a diplomatic deal.

Most Arab leaders have never cared much about the fate of the Palestinians, despite leveraging the occupation for political purposes. The Palestinian Authority falls into the same category, serving as a puppet dispensation for an administration that ignores it. No wonder it has lost the allegiance of most Palestinians. Back when the Abraham Accords were announced, the UAE claimed they had forestalled the annexation of the West Bank by the Netanyahu regime; under the current variant of the same disease, the transgressions have only gathered momentum.

None of this likely to faze MBS, whose mission to turn the nation named after his family into a sporting superpower is going gangbusters, with golf in the bag and men’s football almost in the net. Underlying patterns of repression remain intact despite dramatic superficial changes. Raves in the desert and concerts by scantily clad Western performers — alongside the latest Holly­wood movies, professional wrestling tournaments and horse racing — are no longer verboten. But even mild dissent on social media can earn you a decades-long prison term.

This week’s horrific revelations from Human Rights Watch about Saudi massacres of hundreds, and quite possibly thousands, of Ethiopian refugees on the Yemeni border — children, women and men — help flesh out a more complete picture of the regime’s nature. All too many European nations have a ruthlessly inhuman attitude towards would-be immigrants, including ignoring mass drownings in the Mediterranean. But none of them has thus far resorted to mass killings by gunshots.

It’s not very hard to imagine elements in Israel as well as some among the variegated range of border-control fanatics in the US viewing this evidence of pathological misanthropy with a degree of envious admiration.

On various other levels, the Saudis have been dealing with Israel for several years, although the collaboration has undoubtedly been stepped up in the past decade or so. And perhaps Benjamin Netanyahu missed an opportunity by failing to frame his judicial ‘reforms’ as a means of conforming with the Middle Eastern norm — after all, right across the region, judges tend to take their instructions from the powers that be.

There are numerous hurdles to an Israeli-Saudi conjugal union. But if and when it occurs, it’s less likely to be a shotgun wedding than a marriage made in heaven.

[mahir.dawn@gmail.com](https://mailto:mahir.dawn@gmail.com)

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