



Palestinians disappointed by Biden's visit the Palestinian Authority

July 25, 2022

Overview

► President Joe Biden devoted the third day of his visit to the Middle East to the Palestinian Authority (PA). He began by visiting the Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem, where he met with the directors of the East Jerusalem Hospitals Network, but without the presence of a representative from the ministry of health in Ramallah. After that he went to Bethlehem (not the Muqata'a in Ramallah) to meet with senior PA figures, and ended the day in a press conference with Mahmoud Abbas.

► While the Palestinians did not have high hopes or expect the visit would bring political achievements, **senior PA and Fatah figures were disappointed and frustrated** by Biden's short visit to Bethlehem and his stated positions. He promised financial aid, but the Palestinians had expected he would announce practical measures, such as taking the PLO off the American list of terrorist organizations, reopening the American consulate in Jerusalem and exerting pressure on Israel, none of which was forthcoming. The Palestinian public did not show particular interest in the visit and there were few protest demonstrations, and most of those that were held related to the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, the reporter who held American citizenship. Most of the Palestinians regarded the visit as useless and having no direct bearing on their lives.

► The members of Fatah's Central Committee, who met on July 19, 2022 without Mahmoud Abbas, thought the visit had been a failure and had not met expectations. They also criticized the PA's position, which was welcoming (Ramallah News, July 19, 2022). Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) criticized Mahmoud Abbas' cooperation with the United States. Hamas sources claimed that the Biden-Mahmoud Abbas meeting in Bethlehem proved the PLO leadership had to abandon the "illusion of peace" and adopt the path of "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorism], including "armed resistance." Other Hamas sources called on Mahmoud Abbas to change his policies or resign.

President Biden's Visit to the Palestinian Authority (PA)

The visit to the Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem

► President Biden devoted July 15, 2022, the third day of his visit to the Middle East, to the PA. He began by visiting the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives, the first visit of an American president to east Jerusalem. During the visit, which was conducted without senior PA (or Israeli) representation, he met with the directors of the East Jerusalem Hospitals Network.¹ In a speech he gave after the visit he promised to transfer \$100 million in aid to the east Jerusalem hospitals. The hospital directors stressed the importance of his visit (Facebook page of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, July 15, 2022).



**Biden visits the Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem
(Augusta Victoria Hospital Facebook page, July 15, 2022).**

The meeting with Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem

► From east Jerusalem Biden went to Bethlehem where he met with Mahmoud Abbas and senior PA figures. After the meeting they held a joint press conference but did not issue a joint statement. Mahmoud Abbas said the Palestinians expected the United States to make efforts to end [Israel's] "occupation and apartheid regime" and to stop the "settlement project," settler violence, to honor the status quo in the holy sites and advance the reopening of the American consulate in east Jerusalem. He also said he "extended his hand to the Israeli leadership to achieve a peace of courageous men" (Wafa, July 15, 2022).

¹ The East Jerusalem Hospitals Network is a network of six hospitals in East Jerusalem, founded with the support of Palestinian politician Faisal Hussein in 1997 with the objective of uniting health facilities in east Jerusalem and increasing their role in the Palestinian public health system. The hospitals are Augusta Victoria Hospital, As-Sawana, Makassed Hospital, Saint John Eye Hospital Group, Red Crescent Maternity Hospital (also called Palestinian Red Crescent Society Hospital), Princess Basma Centre for Children with Disabilities and St. Joseph's Hospital (Wikipedia).

► Biden said his "commitment to that goal of a two-state solution has not changed in all these years. Two states along the 1967 lines, where mutually agreed-to swaps, remain the best way to achieve equal measure of security, prosperity, freedom, and democracy for the Palestinians as well as Israelis...[Shireen Abu Akleh's] death is an enormous loss to the essential work of sharing with the world the story of the Palestinian people...[and] the United States will continue to insist on a full and transparent accounting of her death, and we will continue to stand up for media freedom everywhere in the world..." He elaborated on the financial and humanitarian aid the United States had given the PA since 2021 and declared the transfer of \$200 million to UNRWA in addition to the \$100 million for the hospitals (White House website, July 15, 2022).



Right: Biden meets with Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem. Left: Biden and Mahmoud Abbas hold a joint press conference (Wafa, July 15, 2022).

Palestinian protests

► Generally speaking, the American president's visit drew very little attention from the Palestinian public. To most ordinary Palestinians it seemed useless and without a direct influence on their lives. A reporter for the al-Ghad TV station in Ramallah said the visit did not interest the Palestinian street because it was merely a political act (al-Ghad TV, July 10, 2022). Most Palestinians did not have high expectations, and an Internet poll conducted by the al-Quds website found that 95% thought the visit would not herald a breakthrough in Israel-PA relations, and only 4% thought it would (al-Quds, July 14, 2022). Palestinian political commentators claimed the Biden-Mahmoud Abbas meeting was symbolic and had no political significance (QudsN Twitter account, July 14, 2022).

► Immediately before and during the visit there were a few protest demonstrations, and those that were held related mainly to the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, the al-Jazeera reporter who held American citizenship and was killed by gunfire. The demonstrations were contained by the PA security forces. In preparation for Biden's visit to Bethlehem, Palestinian activists

Painted a large picture of Shireen Abu Akleh on the border security fence near the Rachel Crossing, with the word "Justice" (Wafa, July 6, 2022). Signs were hung in the streets of Bethlehem calling for "justice" in the investigation of Shireen Abu Akleh's death and condemning the "apartheid regime" (Paldf Twitter account, July 13, 2022).



A picture of Shireen Abu Akleh painted on the border security fence in Bethlehem (Wafa, July 6, 2022).

► Demonstrators in Ramallah waved signs with pictures of Biden with the captions, "Unwelcome" and "Go out;" they also burned a picture of him.



Right: Protesters in Ramallah during Biden's visit (Paldf Twitter account, July 15, 2022). Left: Protesters in Ramallah burn Biden's picture (QudsN Twitter account, July 15, 2022).



Protest demonstration in Nablus (QudsN Twitter account, July 4, 2022).



Palestinian police prevent protesters from approaching Biden's planned route (Paldf Twitter account, July 15, 2022).

Reactions to Biden's Visit

The PA and Fatah

► On the eve of the visit, PA sources noted they were not optimistic regarding the outcome.

Azzam al-Ahmed, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and Fatah's Central Committee, said Biden had to keep the promises he made to the Palestinians during and after his presidential campaign, when he said he would reopen the American consulate in east Jerusalem, remove the PLO from America's list of terrorist organizations, reopen the PLO offices in Washington, DC, and adhere to the two-state solution and legitimate international resolutions. He also said that if the visit failed and commitments were not met, the Palestinians would implement decisions made at the Central Council meeting² relating to ties to Israel (al-Andalou News, July 7, 2022).

► According to an editorial in the Jerusalem daily newspaper *al-Quds*, the expectations for Biden's visit to the Middle East were low and there was no real possibility he would bring something with him for the Palestinians because "everyone knew" the objective of the visit was to confirm American support for Israel (the "occupation"). There would be no political issues on the agenda, and he would meet with Mahmoud Abbas only to be polite (*al-Quds*, July 8, 2022).

► After the visit and despite praise from senior PA figures, most people were disappointed and frustrated. The expectation that Biden would declare practical measures, such as removing

² During the PLO Central Committee meeting held between February 9 and 12, 2022, one of the decisions made was to end the PLO's commitments to Israel, the first of which was to suspend recognition of the State of Israel until Israel recognized a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders and east Jerusalem as its capital, stop construction in the settlements, and suspend security coordination with Israel in every sphere.

the PLO from the United States' list of terrorist organizations, reopening the American consulate in east Jerusalem and exerting pressure on Israel, had not been met.

► Official sources, such as **Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas**, claimed the visit to the PA had been significant. He said "Palestine" was the first Arab country Biden had visited since he entered office, the visit was symbolic and sent Israel the message that the Palestinian cause was at the heart of the regional conflict. He added that the position of the current administration was more progressive than the one that preceded it. He noted that Biden had visited east Jerusalem without an Israeli escort and had ended the visit in Bethlehem (Wafa, July 16, 2022). **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said in a speech that the visit had been important. He said they were still waiting for it to have serious political results and for the end of Israel's unilateral actions (Dunia al-Watan, July 17, 2022).

► Nevertheless, most senior PA and Fatah figures expressed disappointment, claiming the visit had brought nothing new. They also spoke about what they were planning to do next:

◆ **Deputy Fatah chairman Mahmoud al-'Aloul** said that although Mahmoud Abbas had spoken of the Palestinian position, aspirations and determination to achieve rights and freedom, Biden's speech did not relate to the core issues or the sensitive topics they wanted to hear discussed (Wafa, July 15, 2022). On another occasion he said that the Palestinian leadership had made it clear to the American administration that they could not agree to the continuation of the present situation, and in the near future they would decide what would be done next (Wafa, July 16, 2022; Masdar News, July 16, 2022).

◆ **Azzam al-Ahmed, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and Fatah's Central Committee**, said the speeches made by the Arab leaders at the Jeddah summit conference stressed the centrality of the Palestinian cause for the Arab world, the two-state solution and the Arab peace initiative. He said that gave more reason to be optimistic than Biden's visit, who had not presented anything new. As for the Palestinian's next steps, he said they were planning to consult with the Arab states at the Algerian summit meeting to find ways to exert pressure on the United States for it to exert pressure on Israel in turn to stop expanding the settlements in Palestinian territory (al-Jazeera Mubasher, July 17, 2022.)

Hamas

► According to sources in Hamas, the Mahmoud Abbas-Biden meeting proved the PLO leadership had to abandon the "illusion of peace" and adopt the path of "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorism], including "armed resistance." Others in Hamas called on Mahmoud Abbas to change his approach or step aside:

- ◆ **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, speaking at a protest demonstration in Gaza, said the American president had brought nothing with him except unlimited support for Israel ("the Zionist entity"), its security and prosperity, and a bundle of empty promises for the Palestinians. That, he said, was despite all the American claims about the importance of international law, respecting rights and democracy (Palestine Online, July 14, 2022).



Khalil al-Haya gives a speech at a rally attended by senior figures of the various Palestinian organizations (Safa, July 14, 2022).

- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said in a statement that all Biden's speech contained was bias in favor of the "occupation." He said they called on the PLO leadership to abandon the "illusion of peace and adopt the path of overall resistance as the path to liberation and the return [of the Palestinian refugees]" (Hamas website, July 15, 2022).
- ◆ **Jasser al-Barghouti, in charge of Hamas' "national ties" in the West Bank**, said the results of Biden's visit again proved that the Palestinian people had no choice but to agree to the program of national "resistance," which all Palestinians agreed on [sic] (Watan News Agency, July 15, 2022).

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

► The PIJ said Biden followed in Trump's footsteps and was working to perpetuate all his decisions regarding Israel and Jerusalem.

◆ **PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah** said the Palestinians had known beforehand what the results of Biden's visit to the Middle East would be, because his objective was to secure the interests of the United States and Israel ("the Zionist enemy"). Therefore, the Palestinians had to raise their motivation and make the "resistance" stronger to enforce a new situation on the ground (Paltoday, July 14, 2022).

◆ **Khaled al-Batash, a member of the PIJ's political bureau**, called Biden's visit "one of the most dangerous," because Biden had in effect confirmed the acts of former president Trump, who had given Jerusalem to Israel as its capital. As for the meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, he said nothing serious had come out of it and it was clear the Americans had not come to the Middle East to look for a solution for the Palestinians, restore their rights or revoke Trump's decisions (Palestine On line, July 19, 2022).

◆ **Muhammad al-Hindi, a member of the PIJ's political bureau** and head of the PIJ's political department, said Biden had followed in Trump's footsteps in widening the circle of normalization [of the Arab states' relations with Israel], assuring the regional control of the "occupation" and ignoring the Palestinian cause (QudsN, July 14, 2022). On another occasion he said Biden's main objective in Israel had been normalization with Saudi Arabia, and the other meetings were "marginal." He added that normalization with Saudi Arabia, limited as it was, was a dangerous message with a significant negative influence on the Islamic world (PIJ website, July 14, 2022).

Political commentators and editorials

► Palestinian political commentators also made it clear the visit had disappointed the Palestinians, noting that Biden had not presented any initiative, work program or time table that would help to reach a solution. Thus, in effect, with the exception of declarations of financial aid, his visit completely lacked a political dimension and all that remained was a theoretical discussion about the two-state solution (QudsN Twitter account, July 14, 2022).

► According to an editorial in the Jerusalem daily newspaper *al-Quds*, the visit presented no political horizon for a solution, especially because the two-state solution was rapidly becoming a relic of the past in view of Israel's "violations," such as construction in the settlements, annexing land, attacking [Palestinian] property and the holy sites, etc. What the Palestinians had to do now was to rely on themselves and the Arab-Muslim world, and not believe American promises, which had no foothold in reality (*al-Quds*, July 15, 2022).

► On the other hand, according to an *al-Quds* editorial on July 16, 2022, entitled "Positive aspects of Biden's visit...but!" the visit was also positive. Biden expressed support for the two-state solution and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with geographical continuity within the 1967 borders and with an exchange of territory if necessary. He also said the Palestinians deserved a life of respect, security and prosperity. The American administration also announced the renewal of aid, which was welcome news. The visit was important because it could be the beginning of a new phase in the Middle East (*al-Quds*, July 16, 2022).

► **Dr. Yusuf Rizqa, a senior Hamas figure** and former minister of information and Muslim endowments in Isma'il Haniyeh's government, wrote in his daily column in the Hamas-affiliated *Felasteen* that the Biden-Mahmoud Abbas meeting had lasted less than an hour and was held only for the sake of protocol. It was held in Bethlehem, not Ramallah or Jerusalem, and the location was also significant. It was a meeting of someone whose interests were far from Palestine. It was a nice, easy visit from someone who happened to be in the neighborhood and had yielded no practical results, just a stop on the way to visiting Tel Aviv and Riyadh (Palestine Online, July 16, 2022).

► **Issam Shawar, a Hamas-affiliated political commentator** from Qalqilya, wrote an op-ed piece in which he said that when Joe Biden was asked about the two-state solution, he said he was still committed to it, but time did not allow for it. That is, the two-state solution or advancing it was no longer at the top of the American administration's list of priorities, and in fact the two-state solution had been discarded by the Israelis, the Arabs, and what remained of the international quartet, behind the backs of the Palestinians (Palestine Online, July 17, 2022).

► **Fayiz Abu Shamala, a Hamas-affiliated political commentator** from Khan Yunis, said the "Jerusalem declaration" was no less dangerous for the future of the Middle East than the Balfour Declaration, because the Balfour Declaration gave the land of Palestine to the Zionists, while the Jerusalem declaration exceeded the boundaries of "Palestine," gave Israel "sovereignty" and hegemony to the entire Arab region, and allowed Israel a free hand to fashion the region according to its aspirations. He said the response had to be an alliance of all the forces that rejected defeat and subordination, the first and foremost of which was Iran (Palestine Online, July 14, 2022).



Right: "The American position on the Palestinian cause" (Palestine Online Twitter account, July 19, 2022). Left: The objective of Bidens' visit is normalization of Arab relations with Israel (cartoon by Hamas-affiliated Omayya Joha on alresala.net, July 16, 2022).



"Oh yeah, everything looks fine from here" (al-Quds, July 14, 2022).