

Journalist reported tortured and slain in Saudi consulate in Istanbul

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan demanded Monday that Saudi Arabia's monarchical regime prove that the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi left its consulate in Istanbul after entering it a week ago to obtain a document he needed for his intended marriage to a Turkish woman.

Erdogan's demand came in the wake of reports by Turkish security forces that they have hard evidence Khashoggi was tortured and killed and his body chopped into pieces and taken back to Saudi Arabia after he entered the consulate on October 2. Turkish sources told the Reuters news agency on Saturday that the disappearance was the result of "premeditated murder."

Friends had attempted to persuade Khashoggi, who has lived in self-imposed exile in the United States for the past year, that it was too dangerous to go into the Saudi government-controlled facility. He had responded that the regime would not do anything against him in Turkey.

On the day he went in, he instructed his fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, to call an adviser to Erdogan if he did not reemerge within four hours.

The man she called, Yasin Aktay, a former member of parliament for Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), told CNN: "Our security officials are investigating the issue in every detail. We have some concrete information; it won't be an unsolved crime. We could determine his entrance but not any exit. That's confirmed. We asked them [the Saudis], they say, 'he left,' but there is no such thing on the camera footage."

Further details and speculation about the disappearance of Khashoggi have filled the Turkish press. The pro-government daily *Hurriyat* carried a front-page headline: "Did they take him out by cutting [the body] into pieces?"

The paper quoted the head of the Turkish-Arab Media Association, Turan K??lakç?, as saying that 15 Saudi agents, who had arrived in Turkey and entered the consulate shortly before Khashoggi's disappearance, left

shortly after he entered the premises.

"On that day (October 2), 15 people entered the consulate before Khashoggi and got out an hour later. It is thought that he was killed once he got in and his body was dismembered, distributed to 15 people and taken away," K??lakç? said.

Other Turkish newspapers reported that the police are searching for several vehicles, including a black minibus with darkened windows that left the consulate shortly after Khashoggi had disappeared.

Erdogan's statement Monday stressed that Turkish authorities were pursuing their investigation and that the Saudis "cannot save themselves by simply saying 'he has left.'"

"If he has left, you must prove this, you will prove this, even if it is with visuals," he said, adding that Turkish police were investigating "arrivals and departures" of "people who came from Saudi Arabia."

The "visuals" described by Erdogan are apparently fairly clear: closed-circuit television footage shows Khashoggi entering the consulate, but never leaving it.

Erdogan heads a regime that has jailed more journalists than any other on the planet. His concern over the Khashoggi affair is bound up with the tense relationship between Ankara and Riyadh over a whole number of regional crises, in particular, the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar, with which Turkey is allied. At the same time, the Turkish government is anxious not to provoke a complete severing of ties with Saudi Arabia, which it views as a source of investment under conditions of Turkey's deep economic crisis.

Washington has remained circumspect about Khashoggi's disappearance. President Donald Trump responded to a shouted question as he left his helicopter on the White House lawn Monday, saying he was "concerned."

"Right now, nobody knows anything about it. But

there's some pretty bad stories going around. I do not like it," Trump said.

The Trump administration has deepened a long-standing relationship with the Saudi monarchy, which, under Obama and previous presidents, has overlooked massive human rights violations in the interests of propping up a dictatorial regime that serves as a linchpin of US imperialist domination of the Middle East. It has also helped prop up US financial interests by guaranteeing the domination of oil prices in dollars, while providing hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of contracts for US arms corporations.

To further this relationship, the US ruling class and the corporate media promoted the image of the monarchy's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (known as MBS)—the prime suspect in Khashoggi's disappearance—as a “reformer.” He was feted on a whirlwind tour of the US last April, hosted not only by the Trump administration, but also by the likes of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates and Apple CEO Tim Cook.

If the disappearance of Khashoggi has provoked more attention than Saudi Arabia's mass beheadings and the routine execution and imprisonment of anyone who challenges the monarchical dictatorship, it is not only because of the brazenness and brutality of the apparent butchering of a Saudi citizen inside an overseas consulate.

Khashoggi's journalistic career, which spans more than 30 years, has always been bound up with the interests of the Saudi monarchy and its intelligence services. He was a readily available source for the Western media to interpret the monarchy's actions in a favorable light.

New York Times foreign affairs correspondent Thomas Friedman, who wrote a series of fawning columns praising MBS as a visionary reformer and savior of the Middle East, identified Khashoggi as one of his sources in a piece published on Monday. Friedman went so far as to say that if the charges of the Saudi regime murdering him were true, it would be worse than Riyadh's war on Yemen, which has killed over 16,000, and threatened millions with starvation.

The obscenely sycophantic Friedman concluded that he was “praying for Jamal,” because if it was true Khashoggi had been murdered by the regime, Western leaders and investors could desert the great “reformer,” MBS.

In addition to his services as an interlocutor with the Western media, Khashoggi was also a longtime aide to Prince Turki al-Faisal, the Saudi intelligence chief and later ambassador to the United Kingdom and the United

States. One Turkish newspaper suggested that he had left the kingdom with secret intelligence documents.

Khashoggi's decision to flee Saudi Arabia for the US came as the Crown Prince consolidated his power and initiated the mass detention last year of leading figures within the royal family and the Saudi ruling class at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh, where many were reportedly tortured and forced to fork over significant shares of their fortunes.

In the US, Khashoggi was given a column in the *Washington Post* to express fairly mild criticisms of MBS's rule. The last such column he wrote for the paper, however, criticized Saudi Arabia's prosecution of the near-genocidal war against Yemen, backed by indispensable military-logistical support from the Pentagon. The war, aimed by both Riyadh and Washington at precluding any expansion of Iranian influence in the region, has sharply divided the royal family, elements of which have blamed MBS for drawing the kingdom into a quagmire.

Whatever Khashoggi's services to the Saudi monarchy and US imperialism, his reported torture, murder and butchering at a government consulate in Istanbul, if true, represents an act of savagery that exposes the essence of Washington's closest ally in the Middle East and, more generally, US policy throughout the region.

One only need ask what the reaction would have been had a similar fate befallen a Russian, Iranian or Venezuelan national to understand the unbridled hypocrisy of the “human rights” pretensions of US imperialism.



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