

US, European powers threaten Saudi crown prince after Khashoggi murder

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Mounting evidence that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the gruesome October 2 murder of Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* contributor Jamal Khashoggi has unleashed a political crisis of global proportions.

Over the weekend, Turkish officials again charged that Saudi Arabia sent a 15-man death squad to the Saudi consulate, armed with a bone saw, to murder and dismember Khashoggi and transport his remains out of Turkey. The daily *Sabah* wrote that Khashoggi's Apple watch, synced to the iPhone he left with his Turkish fiancée Hatice Cengiz outside the consulate, recorded his murder: "The moments when Khashoggi was interrogated, tortured and murdered were recorded in the Apple Watch's memory."

US intelligence officials endorsed the authenticity of these recordings, possibly taken from bugs planted by Turkish intelligence in the consulate. They told the *Washington Post*: "The voice recording from inside the embassy lays out what happened to Jamal after he entered. You can hear his voice and the voices of men speaking Arabic. You can hear how he was interrogated, tortured and then murdered."

These charges against America's closest Middle East ally, also the world's largest oil exporter at the heart of the global financial system, expose the brazen criminality of the entire financial aristocracy. A profound contradiction underlies the official response to Khashoggi's murder. US and European businessmen and politicians are deeply tied to the brutal Saudi regime, which underwrites both US war strategy in the Middle East and the capitalist financial system as a whole.

They are flocking to the "Davos in the Desert" conference planned for this month in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. The initial conference last year was attended by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Among those still slated to attend this year's conference are US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, and BlackRock investment firm CEO Lawrence Fink, whom *Barron's* magazine recently crowned the "New Conscience of Wall Street."

While conference attendees "cringe at lending their names

or prestige to Crown Prince Mohammed's gathering," the *New York Times* reported, the murder charges against Riyadh leave "many financiers and technology executives in a deeply awkward position. Some have made multibillion-dollar investments in Saudi Arabia; others are managing billions of dollars of Saudi money. They want to keep the money flowing ..."

At the same time, however, a debate is emerging in the imperialist capitals over whether to use the Khashoggi murder to push for a change in personnel at the top of the Saudi regime. After US senators threatened to invoke the Global Magnitsky Act yesterday, allowing Washington to impose sanctions on top Saudi officials, the Saudi stock exchange plunged 7 percent.

Speaking on CBS television yesterday, Donald Trump pledged "severe punishment" for the "terrible and disgusting" killing, while pledging to continue arming Saudi Arabia to the teeth. The Saudis "are ordering military equipment. Everybody in the world wanted that order," Trump said, adding: "I tell you what I don't want to do. Boeing, Lockheed, Raytheon, all these companies. I don't want to hurt jobs. I don't want to lose an order like that. And you know there are other ways of punishing, to use a word that's a pretty harsh word, but it's true."

"There are other things we can do that are very, very powerful, very strong and we'll do them," he said, without specifying what this meant.

The UK, German and French foreign ministries issued a joint statement calling for "a credible investigation to establish the truth about what happened, and—if relevant—to identify those bearing responsibility for the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi, and ensure that they are held to account. We ... expect the Saudi Government to provide a complete and detailed response."

The Saudi monarchy responded with an aggressive statement stressing its "total rejection of any threats and attempts to undermine it. ... The kingdom also affirms that if it is [targeted by] any action, it will respond with greater action." With Saudi Arabia providing key oil exports to the

world market to make up for supplies lost as Washington re-imposes sanctions on Iran, it warned that Saudi Arabia “plays an effective and vital role in the world economy.”

Turki Aldhakhil, the manager of Saudi Arabia’s *Al Arabiya* news, penned a piece threatening that Saudi Arabia could form a military alliance with Russia and slash its oil exports, sending oil prices to over \$100 a barrel and devastating the already crisis-ridden world economy. He wrote, “The truth is that if Washington imposes sanctions on Riyadh, it will stab its own economy to death, even though it thinks that it is stabbing only Riyadh.”

US and European threats are utterly hypocritical and mark a new stage in their decades-long campaign of bloody imperialist wars, occupations and intrigue in the Middle East, from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan, that have cost millions of lives and turned tens of millions into refugees.

They did not object as the Saudi regime executed hundreds of people per year and viciously attacked political opposition among working people. This year, Riyadh ruled it would decapitate the 29-year-old female political activist Israa al-Ghomgham, her husband, Moussa al-Hashem, and three others for the crime of organizing peaceful demonstrations against the monarchy. This provoked no observable change in US or European policy toward Saudi Arabia.

Seven years after working-class uprisings toppled US-backed dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, the NATO powers are united with the Saudi royal family in their fear of the working class in Saudi Arabia and beyond. One former diplomat bleakly told the *Washington Post* that Prince “Mohammed knew that if meaningful jobs were not found for Saudi Arabia’s young and highly educated population, and if the oil-dominated economy were not diversified, ‘they were doomed.’”

Current US calls for a change in personnel at the top of the Saudi monarchy aim to strengthen it against opposition at home, whip its foreign policy more closely into alignment with US interests, and in particular to block any move by Riyadh toward closer alignment with Russia or China.

The hypocrisy of attempts to wrapping this bloodstained agenda in the fraudulent banner of human rights was exemplified by former CIA director John Brennan’s column on the Khashoggi murder in the *Washington Post*, titled “The US should never turn a blind eye to this sort of inhumanity.”

Reports of Khashoggi’s disappearance, Brennan intoned, “have the hallmarks of a professional capture operation or, more ominously, an assassination.” Citing his long professional experience with Saudi officials, Brennan added: “I am certain that if such an operation occurred inside a Saudi diplomatic mission against a high-profile journalist working for a US newspaper, it would have needed the

direct authorization of Saudi Arabia’s top leadership—the crown prince.”

Who does Brennan think he is kidding, pretending to be repulsed by the “ominous” signs of an assassination? If he can recognize the hallmarks of state murder, it is because the CIA is the world’s leading expert in torture and killing. Its thousands of drone murders, its network of “black site” prisons and torture centers, and its bloody history of coups and provocations are infamous internationally, as proof that the single most dangerous force in the world is American imperialism.

Based on his selective outrage, Brennan outlined a plan for reacting to Khashoggi’s murder with a campaign against the Saudi regime similar to US threats against Russia.

Ideally, the Saudi regime would punish “those responsible,” Brennan wrote, but if it “doesn’t have the will or the ability, the United States would have to act. That would include immediate sanctions on all Saudis involved; a freeze on US military sales to Saudi Arabia; suspension of all routine intelligence cooperation with Saudi security services; and a US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution condemning the murder. The message would be clear: the United States will never turn a blind eye to such inhuman behavior, even when carried out by friends, because this is a nation that remains faithful to its values.”

The CIA’s grotesque invocation of American “values” as a justification for stepping up US intrigue in the Middle East is absurd on its face.

The task of dealing with the bloodstained Saudi monarchy belongs to the working class and oppressed masses of Saudi Arabia. Intrigues by the CIA and allied intelligence services trying to engineer a change in the Saudi regime’s ruling personnel, it can be safely predicted, will only produce more economic turmoil and bloodshed.



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