

Saudi regime admits Khashoggi was killed in its Istanbul consulate

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The Saudi Arabian monarchical regime finally admitted late Friday that dissident Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* correspondent Jamal Khashoggi was killed on October 2 inside its consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. The acknowledgment comes after more than two weeks in which Saudi officials insisted that Khashoggi left the consulate unharmed and that they had no knowledge of his whereabouts.

The admission that Khashoggi was in fact killed was presented by the country's chief public prosecutor in a statement delivered on national television. It was made in the face of detailed reports by Turkish investigators that a 15-man team of Saudi intelligence agents, with close ties to the heir to the throne and de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was flown into Istanbul to assassinate Khashoggi. The journalist was viewed with hostility by the Saudi regime because of his criticisms of the crown prince and the murderous US-backed war being waged by Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

Khashoggi had visited the consulate on September 28 to finalise divorce proceedings from his Saudi wife so he could marry his Turkish fiancée. He returned on October 2 to pick up documents.

Turkish officials say that audio and video recordings in their possession show that the journalist was seized by the hit squad and brutally tortured and murdered, after which his body was dismembered and taken out of the building in suitcases by the Saudi operatives. The remains may have been flown to Saudi Arabia, though Turkish police have been conducting searches in forested areas on the outskirts of Istanbul.

The alternative version of events advanced by the Saudi regime is a fantastic and brazen attempt to substantiate its absurd claim, echoed by the Trump administration, that “rogue killers” carried out the

murder without the knowledge of the crown prince or other key figures in the Saudi ruling elite. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held meetings with Saudi King Salman and the crown prince on Tuesday, during which they agreed that an “accounting” of what had happened to Khashoggi would be presented.

The prosecutor asserted that the intelligence team had gone to Istanbul because Khashoggi had indicated an interest in returning to Saudi Arabia. A discussion “developed in a negative way” and “led to a fight and a quarrel between some of them and the citizen.” The fight purportedly “aggravated to lead to his death and their attempt to conceal and cover what happened.” The Saudi monarchy, he declared, “expresses its deep regret at the painful development and stresses the commitment of the authorities in the Kingdom to bring the facts to the public.”

The prosecutor stated that 18 unnamed people had been arrested in connection with Khashoggi's death. It appears that this group will be the patsies offered up by the regime as the “rogue” elements who carried out the killing and sought to conceal it from the government.

Five top-ranking Saudi officials have been removed from their positions but not charged with any crime. They are the crown prince's advisor Saud al-Qahtani, deputy intelligence chief Major General Ahmed as-Assiri and three other generals in the country's military-intelligence apparatus. The official Saudi news outlet reports that the king has ordered an unspecified restructuring of the General Intelligence Presidency, the country's main intelligence agency.

The commission to pursue the investigation and oversee the reorganization is reportedly to be headed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman himself.

Almost universally, the Saudi narrative is being dismissed in the US political and media establishment

and around the world as a crude attempt at cover-up based on an improbable patchwork of lies.

Ahead of the US congressional elections, the Democratic Party and publications such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are seeking to exploit the situation to denounce Trump for his well documented financial relations with the Saudi monarchy and his endorsement of its cover-up of the murder of Khashoggi.

Times correspondent Nicholas Kristof wrote in an op-ed piece published this week: “The United States should quietly make clear to the Saudi royal family that the Mad Prince has gone too far— not just with this murder, but also his war in Yemen, his confrontation with Qatar, his kidnapping of Lebanon’s prime minister—and will forever be tainted. A murderer belongs not at state dinners but in a prison cell.”

Such rhetoric from the Democratic Party-linked faction of the American establishment is the height of hypocrisy. The brutal, semi-feudal dictatorship in Saudi Arabia has been backed by US imperialism for over 80 years. The near-genocidal war that Saudi Arabia is waging against the people of Yemen was launched in 2015 with the full support and assistance of the Obama administration.

Moreover, Donald Trump is far from alone in the American capitalist class in reaping benefits from relations with the Saudi royal family. The Clinton Foundation, for example, has received up to \$25 million in Saudi donations since it was founded in 1997.

For all the feigned indignation over the criminality revealed in Khashoggi’s murder, the US government and ruling class will come together to ensure the stability of the Saudi regime. It is one of American capitalism’s main assets in the Middle East and among the top international purchasers of American military hardware.

More immediately, the Trump administration intends to rely on Saudi Arabia to increase its oil production to prevent major price rises when harsh new US sanctions go into effect against Iran on November 5, following Washington’s unilateral renunciation of the 2015 “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” under which the Iranian regime curtailed its nuclear program.

Washington will be particularly concerned over any sign that the fall-out from the assassination fuels what

is already burgeoning discontent in Saudi Arabia and mounting demands for sweeping social change. Seven years after the revolutionary movement that swept the Mubarak dictatorship from power in Egypt, the oil-rich country looms large as a potential scene of mass political upheaval.

To the extent that calls are made by factions within the US ruling class and the state for token democratic reforms in Saudi Arabia, and even for the sidelining of the crown prince, the sole motivation is fear of a social explosion against the monarchy and a desire to dampen unrest and prop up the regime.



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