

Amid crisis over Khashoggi murder

# US State Department “socialists” discover the war in Yemen

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23 October 2018

Anyone who carefully follows the publications of the various pseudo-left organizations in the United States will note how reliably they track the political line of the *New York Times* and other Democratic-Party aligned media outlets. These corporate media, in turn, reflect the positions of definite factions within the US intelligence establishment.

This is clearly seen in the response by *Socialist Worker*, the publication of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and *Jacobin*, which is closely aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), to the state murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. These publications respond like political weathervanes to shifting currents within US imperialist policy-making and intelligence circles—in this case, growing dissatisfaction with the current ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The Obama administration gave bin Salman the OK to launch a war in March of 2015 to defeat Houthi rebels and reinstall the deposed US-Saudi puppet regime of Abd-Rabbu Monsour Hadi. Since then Washington has provided crucial military, logistical and intelligence assistance for a savage bombing campaign against civilian targets that has killed somewhere between 16,000 and 50,000 Yemenis, brought some 1.4 million people to the point of famine and caused a world record cholera epidemic affecting a million people.

The Trump administration has continued and deepened the Obama policy, forging even closer relations with the Saudi dictatorship and negotiating a \$1.2 billion arms deal as part of a united front of Washington, the Sunni Gulf states and Israel against Iran.

For more than three years, *SocialistWorker.org* and *Jacobin* have been virtually silent on the war being waged by a coalition of Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia against Yemen. A Google search of *Socialist Worker* shows a total of only eight articles since the outbreak of the war. A search of *Jacobin* yields a mere six articles. (The *World Socialist Web Site*, in comparison, has published dozens of articles, commentaries, Perspective columns and historical pieces exposing one of the greatest war crimes of the 21st century.)

In all but ignoring this made-in-the USA war crime, the ISO

and the DSA have followed the lead of the major corporate media.

Now, however, amid the flurry of criticism of the crown prince following the murder of Khashoggi, a US resident and columnist for the *Washington Post* with close ties to US intelligence, the *New York Times*, the *Post* and the major TV news outlets have suddenly discovered the war in Yemen and even, though rarely, mentioned Washington's role. Their newfound interest in the war is entirely cynical—a means of placing pressure on the House of Saud and the Trump administration to either rein in the crown prince or replace him with a different member of the royal family.

The ISO and *Jacobin* have followed suit. Hence the appearance on October 15 of the article “Will the Saudi regime get away with murder?” on *Socialist Worker*. The piece, by an unnamed “activist and writer from Saudi Arabia,” mentions the war in Yemen while focusing on Khashoggi's longstanding ties to the Saudi monarchy. It states: “Since his self-exile, Khashoggi has transformed himself from a loyalist who as late as 2016 celebrated the execution of dissidents and praised the disastrous US-backed war for ‘saving Yemen’ into an ardent critic of Saudi Arabia's ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (commonly referred to as MBS).”

The writer adds that Khashoggi was “well-connected in Washington—someone these elites can see and identify with.” The author continues: “But there may also be a developing sentiment that MBS is out of control and becoming an unreliable ally. He is responsible for a series of international and domestic crises that not only further destabilize the region, but his own rule.”

This shift within intelligence circles was signaled in a more public manner by Bernie Sanders, who gave a speech at Johns Hopkins University on October 9, one week after Khashoggi's disappearance, titled “Building a Global Democratic Movement to Counter Authoritarianism.” Sanders focused on the Saudi regime, denouncing it for its internal repression and for “devastating the country of Yemen in a catastrophic war in alliance with the United States.”

*Jacobin* has published three articles on the Khashoggi killing

that touch on the war in Yemen. The first (“Bernie’s New Internationalist Vision”) hails Sanders’ foreign policy speech as a genuine call to action against war and authoritarianism—while admitting that Sanders has voted repeatedly in favor of US military intervention and spoken of the need to maintain American military supremacy.

The second, by Branko Marcetic, cites statements by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham denouncing the Saudi government and speculates on the possibility of a “rift in US-Saudi relations” that is “long overdue.”

The third, posted October 17 (“How We Can End the Saudis’ War in Yemen”), also by Marcetic, argues that the way to end the war is to pressure 10 Democrats who previously voted against a Senate resolution calling for the US to end its participation in the war to reverse their vote. In all these articles, the pseudo-left publications write as advisers to factions of the state.

There are definite political reasons why the pseudo-left promoters of “human rights” imperialism downplayed the slaughter in Yemen for more than three years. Both the ISO and the DSA supported the war for regime-change in Libya, which ended with US-backed Islamist terrorists torturing and killing deposed ruler Muammar Gaddafi, and they back the ongoing war for regime-change in Syria—neocolonial wars that have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and destroyed both countries.

They have accordingly directed their moral indignation against not the US and its allies, first and foremost Saudi Arabia, but rather against the Syrian regime and its backers, Russia and Iran, which they have conveniently labeled “imperialist” powers. Saudi Arabia’s internal repression and its bloodbath in Yemen, carried out with the indispensable aid of Washington, cut across their pro-imperialist narrative. Hence the virtual silence from these quarters.

To the extent that they have criticized the foreign policy of the Trump administration, they have done so largely from the right, in line with the *New York Times* and the Democratic Party—denouncing the administration for not arming the Syrian “rebels” with weapons capable of shooting down Russian warplanes and for insufficiently escalating the attack on Syrian President Assad and the confrontation with Russian President Putin.

They line up behind those factions of the US intelligence establishment that see Russia as the most pressing obstacle to the establishment of US dominance in the Middle East, which is seen, in turn, as crucial to imposing US hegemony over the Eurasian continent. Their assigned task is to provide a “left” rationale for US imperialist war and cultivate a pro-war constituency within sections of the upper-middle class whose political views are dominated by the politics of race, gender and sexual orientation.

Now, however, in the wake of the murder of Khashoggi, there are signs that the winds are shifting in relation to the crown

prince. With the war in Yemen deadlocked and the Saudi regime facing a growing social and economic crisis—the *Wall Street Journal* warned last week about bin Salman’s “debt binge”—there is increasing concern over the 33-year-old prince’s recklessness and impetuosity and the lack of control over his actions exercised by the Trump administration.

John Brennan headed the CIA under Obama when the US gave its blessings to the Saudi-led assault on Yemen. He also presided over Obama’s drone assassination program, which killed hundreds of Yemenis. But on October 12, Brennan published a column in the *Washington Post* denouncing the crown prince’s “inhumanity.” He concluded with a demand for US sanctions against all Saudis involved in the killing, a freeze on US military sales, suspension of all “routine” intelligence cooperation and a US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution condemning the murder.

*Bloomberg* published a commentary on October 17 that concluded with a quote from a long-time friend of Khashoggi and adviser to Turkish President Erdogan, who stated, “Jamal may have been seen as the focal point of an alternative governing power.”

*Foreign Affairs* on October 18 posted a piece by Daniel Benjamin, appointed in 2009 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as coordinator for counterterrorism at the US State Department, declaring that the murder of Khashoggi “has evinced a recklessness that is deeply at odds with US interests.”

It is clear that factions within the US intelligence apparatus have grown increasingly concerned over the rule of the current crown prince and were promoting Khashoggi as part of a push to rein him in or possibly replace him. None of the US critics of the crown prince remotely suggest that the crimes of the regime call for a campaign of regime-change, as with Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi and Assad. But they fear a change at the top may be required to avert a collapse of the regime itself.

In suddenly discovering the war in Yemen and the crimes of the Saudi regime, the pro-imperialist, pro-Democratic Party organizations of the privileged middle class such as the ISO and the DSA are snapping into line behind those factions within the ruling class and the state with which they are allied.



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