

Canada upholds \$15 billion Saudi arms deal after Khashoggi murder

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In the nearly four weeks since the Saudi regime had journalist Jamal Khashoggi murdered, Canada's Liberal government has gone out of its way to avoid criticizing Riyadh, while insisting Canada must fulfill a \$15 billion arms deal with the kingdom—a linchpin of US imperialism's domination of the oil-rich Middle East.

A Saudi citizen, Khashoggi disappeared after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul October 2 to obtain divorce papers needed to marry his Turkish fiancé. In the three weeks since his disappearance became internationally known, the Saudi regime has desperately attempted to deny responsibility. Initially it claimed that Khashoggi left the embassy, then that he had died during a “fist fight.” More recently, it has said he was the victim of a premeditated murder carried out by “rogue” elements in the Saudi security forces.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has avoided publicly accusing Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, the kingdom's effective ruler, of ordering Khashoggi's murder. But Turkish authorities have systematically leaked information contradicting Riyadh's claims, including video of the arrival in Turkey of a 15-man Saudi assassination squad. Everything points to the Saudi journalist having been tortured and beheaded inside the consulate, then his dismembered body being smuggled out of the premises.

With public outrage over Khashoggi's gruesome murder mounting, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government have spent the past two weeks twisting and turning in the face of mounting criticism from sections of the media and opposition over its insistence that Canada must fulfill its \$15 billion contract to supply Riyadh with 740 LAVs (Light Armored Vehicles), manufactured at a General Dynamics plant in London, Ontario.

For the first week, Trudeau and Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland claimed, as they have in the past, that

Canada's international reputation would be damaged if it failed to “honour” the contract, while emphasizing that it was the Harper Conservative government that entered into the deal—Canada's largest ever arms contract—with Riyadh in 2014.

However, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has now come forward with a second argument. Cancelling the contract, he insists, would result in massive financial penalties. Initially, Trudeau spoke of a billion dollars, but by Thursday he was claiming Canadian taxpayers would be on the hook for “billions of dollars.” According to Trudeau, the deal is subject to stringent confidentiality clauses such that the government cannot make the financial penalties section, or any other part of it, public. In other words, the government must be taken at its word.

Trudeau's claims to be in a legal bind are a callous and hypocritical subterfuge.

The reality is he and his government have issued no more than pro forma statements of concern about Khashoggi's horrific fate. The strongest language Ottawa has been willing to employ is to describe the obvious stream of lies coming from Riyadh as “not credible.”

Bourgeois commentators have noted a contrast between Ottawa's tepid response to Khashoggi's death, and Freeland's tweets of last August denouncing Riyadh's jailing of human rights activists. The latter triggered a bitter diplomatic spat, with the Crown Prince demanding an apology and Riyadh recalling its ambassador to Canada and announcing a series of economic reprisals.

In reality, in both cases the Liberals have been pursuing the same reactionary aims.

In August, the Liberal government was not seeking a confrontation with Riyadh. It saw the tweets as a way of providing it political cover at home for the controversial Saudi arms deal, and calculated the criticism would be interpreted by the Saudis as nothing more than the usual human rights rhetoric Western governments use to

camouflage their imperialist intrigue and aggression.

After all, Trudeau and his government had never voiced a word of criticism of the brutal war the Saudis have been waging in Yemen since 2015, and which has produced the world's greatest humanitarian crisis. When evidence emerged of Canadian-built LAVs being used in the Yemen war and to suppress Shia protesters in eastern Saudi Arabia, the Liberal government willfully ignored it. Nor did Trudeau or Freeland ever make any issue of the Saudi absolutist regime's beheading of over 150 people in 2017, or its executing 48 prisoners in the first four months of this year.

That Ottawa is eager to maintain the \$15 billion arms deal with Riyadh is incontrovertible. But the Trudeau government's muted response to Khashoggi's murder is about more than just the Canada-Saudi relationship.

For the Liberal government and for the Canadian bourgeoisie as a whole an even more fundamental consideration is sustaining and strengthening the Canada-US military-strategic alliance, which is the cornerstone of Canadian imperialism's global strategy.

Ottawa was rattled when the Trump administration, which has stepped up its strategic partnership with Riyadh as part of its plans for war with Iran, refused to come to Canada's support in last August's spat. In what was seen as a slap in the face in Canadian ruling circles, Trump administration officials repeatedly urged Ottawa and Riyadh to settle the dispute among themselves.

In the intervening period, Canada has reached an agreement with Washington on a "modernized" North American Free Trade Agreement, but to do so it had to make significant concessions. These include changes aimed at making NAFTA a more effective instrument for waging trade war, such as a clause that for all intents and purposes prevents Ottawa and Mexico City from concluding free trade agreements with China without first receiving Washington's approval.

The Trudeau government has got the message. If Canadian imperialism is going to rely on the might of Washington's military and geostrategic influence to pursue its predatory interests around the world, it needs to bend more to Washington, at least on issues that it does not view as core interests.

The Trump administration has all but publicly announced that it is looking for the quickest and most effective way to sweep the Khashoggi affair under the proverbial carpet, so it can resume open and active collaboration with Saudi Arabia in bullying and threatening Iran.

Consequently, the Trudeau government is raising only the most muted criticisms of the Saudi murder of Khashoggi, who was a regime insider until a recent falling out with the Crown Prince.

The Khashoggi affair has not only highlighted the Trudeau government's imperialist foreign policy. It has also provided yet another demonstration of the hypocrisy of the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

Under pressure from the leadership of Unifor, the country's largest industrial union, the NDP dropped criticism of the Saudi arms deal like a lead balloon during the 2015 election, and until recently has said little to nothing about it. But now, hoping to bolster their pathetic poll numbers, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh and his fellow social democrats are urging the Trudeau government to abandon the Saudi arms deal.

The New Democrats are feigning outrage that Canada is associated with a regime that is a gross violator of human rights and promoting as an alternate market for General Dynamics' SAVs Canada's NATO allies—that is the states that comprise the world's foremost inter-imperialist military alliance, which is currently involved in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeking to strategically encircle and threaten Russia.

NATO is led by none other than Washington, the country that not only has back-stopped the Saudi regime for decades, but which over the past quarter century has led a series of illegal wars that have destroyed entire societies from Afghanistan to Libya, and which with Canada's support is today pursuing military-strategic offensives against nuclear-armed Russia and China. Other NATO states include Britain, Washington's chief ally in the Iraq war; France, which, again with Canada's support, is waging its own neo-colonial war in north Africa; Germany, which is today frantically rearming; and a coterie of other lesser imperialist powers.

Such is the NDP's defence of human rights and opposition to imperialist militarism.



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