

Chancellor Scholz's Gulf trip exposes German government human rights propaganda

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's trip to the Gulf states last weekend and his handshake with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have exposed once and for all the German government's human rights platitudes as pure imperialist propaganda.

Leading government politicians and the media routinely call Russian President Vladimir Putin a "murderer" and accuse Russia of "genocide" in Ukraine to justify NATO's war against Moscow. If these labels currently apply to states and their political leaders, they certainly apply to the Gulf monarchies.

Prince Salman himself was directly involved in the bestial murder of Saudi journalist and regime opponent Jamal Khashoggi. On October 2, 2018, Khashoggi was lured to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to pick up documents for his upcoming wedding. He never reappeared.

The ordeal the journalist endured before his death can only be imagined. A few days after Khashoggi's disappearance, the Turkish government said it had audio and video recordings proving Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. It said the audio recordings showed Khashoggi being "interrogated, tortured and then killed." The journalist had been "dismembered" alive and the body "then dissolved in acid."

The imperialist powers, whose representatives are now making pilgrimages to Riyadh by the dozen following a brief period in which they kept their distance, are just as aware of the shocking event as they are of the fact that Khashoggi's murderers came from Prince Salman's immediate circle. In February 2021, the US government released a report stating that the crown prince had personally "approved" the murder.

Immediately after the report was published, Omid Nouripour, then foreign policy spokesman and now co-chairman of the Green Party, had demanded, "Germany must make it clear to the House of Saud that no normal relations with it are possible as long as a murderer who has his critics dismembered is crown prince of the country."

Now all that is forgotten. Social Democrat Scholz made it clear on the ground that relations with Saudi Arabia are not only now "normal" for the ruling class, but absolutely essential. "We have long-standing economic and political relations with Saudi Arabia." He said it was "therefore right and important that we continue to talk here and at the other stops on my trip about the development of the region, about the possibilities of economic relations, but also about the political challenges we face."

By "political challenges," Scholz means above all the intensification of NATO's war offensive against Russia. He said he "made it very clear that it is important for us to support Ukraine in defending its own integrity and sovereignty, that we will continue to do so, and that Russia must withdraw its troops." The NATO powers—led by Washington and Berlin—initially provoked Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine. Now they are escalating the war ever further—with the aim of defeating Russia militarily and exploiting the resource-rich country.

Until that happens, the ruling powers are forced to secure new sources of raw materials because of the severed energy ties with Russia. The Gulf states, which have enormous oil and gas reserves, play an important role in the calculations. "There is a great deal of investment to be made here," Scholz explained. "It's also about German companies playing a big role, for example, in the further development of the local economy, the use of oil and gas resources and developments in terms of hydrogen."

The human rights crimes of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies will not be allowed to stand in the way of these plans. When Scholz was asked at a press conference in Jeddah whether he had "addressed the crown prince about his responsibility for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi," he replied with his characteristic cynicism, "We have discussed all issues that revolve around questions of civil and human rights. That's the way it should be. You can assume that nothing has been left undiscussed that needs to be said."

If Scholz had indeed discussed all “issues of civil and human rights,” he certainly would not be back in Berlin yet. The Saudi regime’s human rights crimes alone are so extensive that it would take several days to list them. Every year, there are scores of “Khashoggis” who fall victim to the regime’s terror.

On March 12, 2022, 81 prisoners were executed in a single day. Most of them had done nothing but take to the streets against the ultra-reactionary dictatorship. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, 41 of the victims took part in the mass protests against the Saudi monarchy in 2011/12. Also, the mass execution included seven Yemeni nationals accused of supporting the Houthi rebels in Yemen, whom Saudi Arabia is brutally fighting.

If any conflict currently has a genocidal character, it is the Saudi regime’s actions in Yemen. The exact number of people killed by the systematic bombing and starvation of the impoverished country is unknown, but it numbers in the hundreds of thousands. A report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that as early as November 2021 the death toll stood at 377,000.

UNDP estimates that among the victims are more than 260,000 children under the age of five. They died largely from starvation and disease as a result of the Saudi blockade, which was supported by the US and the United Arab Emirates—which Scholz also honoured with a visit. The report also projects that the death toll will rise to 1.3 million by 2030. At the same time, the number of Yemenis living in extreme poverty is expected to rise to 22 million by 2030.

The German government has an accurate picture of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. The country is “among the countries that carry out the most death sentences worldwide,” according to a November 2020 statement by the Human Rights Committee “on the situation of human rights in Saudi Arabia,” which said the number of people killed has “increased significantly” since 2014. And further:

At least 186 people were executed in 2019. Under current and strictly applied conversion laws, changing faith and so-called apostasy can be punished by death. Children also fall under this legislation. Despite the announcement of reforms, including the abolition of the death penalty for minors at the time of the crime, executions continue to be carried out here. Alleged confessions for crimes not committed are still regularly coerced under torture. Prison conditions in Saudi prisons violate human rights standards.

The report paints a picture of medieval despotism. Human rights and civil liberties activists are being “brutally cracked down on” and the “human right to freedom of religion or belief ... is so severely restricted that it is in fact nonexistent.” Also, “other minority rights” are “massively restricted to nonexistent, including rights of sexual minorities (LGBTI persons).” In particular, “women’s rights” are also “massively suppressed” and activists are “imprisoned, mistreated and tortured because of their commitment to women’s rights.”

In Qatar, where Scholz began his trip and where the next World Cup will be held from November to December, the situation is no better. In the 10 years since the World Cup was awarded to the emirate, 15,000 construction workers have died there building stadiums and venues, according to Amnesty International. Although the 2 million migrant workers from India, Bangladesh and other Central Asian countries are exploited at starvation wages, Scholz claimed in Doha that the “legal situation of guest workers” had “improved.”

Workers and young people must above all understand Scholz’s trip as a warning. The German ruling class will resort to similarly murderous methods to suppress growing opposition to rearmament, social attacks and the policy of allowing the coronavirus to run wild in the pandemic. At the same time, this will not stop them from mouthing mendacious human rights phrases to enforce the return of German militarism to the world stage after its horrific crimes in two world wars.



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