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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TOPLINE TAKEAWAY

- *It's time for the United States to stop enabling Saudi human rights violations.*

THE TRAGEDY OF JAMAL KHASHOGGI

Last week, Jamal Khashoggi [entered](#) the Saudi consulate to pick up a document for his upcoming marriage. The Saudi citizen and U.S. resident was a respected Washington Post contributor and a moderate critic of the Saudi government who lived in self-exile in Virginia. He was preparing to [launch](#) a pro-democracy advocacy group calling for fair elections in the Arab world. According to his fiancée, who stood outside waiting for him, he never exited the consulate.

This week, gruesome reports from Turkish authorities [allege](#) Khashoggi was murdered within the consulate, his body dismembered, and his remains disposed of. According to Turkish officials, the order came from the highest levels of the Saudi royal court. Meanwhile, U.S. intelligence intercepts also reportedly back up these allegations.

It can't be overstated: This is not normal. If the reports are true, Khashoggi's murder is a dramatic escalation, even by Saudi Arabia's traditionally repressive standards. To murder a U.S. resident in a consulate within a NATO member country is a remarkable violation of international law. Yet, Saudi's de-facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, commonly referred to as MbS, somehow felt empowered to give the order.

In a [speech](#) on Tuesday, Senator Bernie Sanders suggested a reason. He described a rising authoritarian axis, one empowered by oligarchs and inspired by one another's tactics. It's no surprise then that, if confirmed, MbS's order reads like a page ripped out of Putin's playbook, in gruesome fashion. Sanders rightly identified MbS's "new" Saudi Arabia as a member of this authoritarian axis and highlighted, [in particular](#), **Donald Trump's role in emboldening the regime's atrocities.**

THE COSTS OF EMPOWERING SAUDI'S NEWEST AUTHORITARIAN

The Trump administration openly [embraced](#) MbS, even before MbS upended the Saudi line of succession to become Crown Prince in an apparent [palace coup](#). And in the midst of growing

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repression in the Kingdom, MbS and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, have been remarkably close, texting each other frequently and discussing policy late into the night. Kushner even reportedly [gave](#) MbS a list of disloyal Saudis, who were later imprisoned at the [Ritz Carlton shakedown](#) in Riyadh. Trump's first foreign visit as president was to Saudi Arabia, where the U.S. and Saudi [signed](#) a reported \$110 billion-plus arms deal (which [experts note](#) was not all as tremendous as Trump claimed) – arms used to perpetuate Saudi Arabia's catastrophic war against the Houthis in Yemen.

Here are a few of the costs of Trump and Kushner's cozy relationship with MbS:

- Turning a blind eye to the [jailing](#) and execution of women's rights activists, religious leaders, and political dissidents.
- [Failing](#) to come to the defense of one of our closest allies, Canada, when they dared to [speak out](#) against MbS's jailing of female activists.
- Supporting and perpetuating the [slaughter](#) in Yemen, all in the name of arms sales to the Gulf.

And the Trump Administration's unconditional support of MbS may have even cost Khashoggi his life. [According](#) to a U.S. official, U.S. intelligence has intercepts of a Saudi plan to lure Khashoggi to the Kingdom to detain him, raising vital concerns about whether the administration fulfilled its obligation to warn Khashoggi of the impending threat to his safety.

In spite of all this, when asked whether confirmation of Saudi's hand in Khashoggi's disappearance would trigger a halt in weapons sales to Saudi, Trump [responded](#), "What does that do for us? I would not be in favor of stopping a country from spending \$110 billion -- which is an all-time record -- and letting Russia have that money and [letting China have that money.](#)"

Besides exposing blatant moral bankruptcy, Trump's statement just proves how deeply the Trump Administration has invested in Saudi's young authoritarian leader and how any human rights violation, however gross, can be washed away for the right price. The Trump administration supported MbS's unprecedented ascension, sustained his catastrophic war in Yemen, and looks ready to continue to sell MbS arms while knowing he allegedly ordered the assassination of a U.S. resident. In this transactional and unchecked embrace of MbS, the Trump administration has pinned U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf to a mercurial man in his thirties, who rose to power not through merit or seniority, but by purging those who stood in his way.

THE SAUDI LOBBY

But it's not just Donald Trump and Jared Kushner enabling Saudi misconduct. For years, the Saudi government has pumped millions into the coffers of Washington, DC [think tanks](#) and

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lobbying firms in an effort to not only [boost its image](#) in the eyes of the American public, but also to prevent American analysts, lawmakers, and U.S. government officials from openly criticizing the Kingdom.

Top Saudi officials also cultivate warm relationships with major U.S. corporations and elite American journalists, who often times [willfully toe the Saudi line](#). That process was [on full display](#) when MbS toured the U.S. earlier this year.

The Center for International Policy's Ben Freeman [recently previewed](#) an explosive soon-to-be-released report demonstrating how big Saudi money influences Congress.

In one example, Freeman found that an individual from a Washington lobbying firm that had received half a million dollars from the Saudi government spoke with the legislative director of Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) on May 16, 2017 to lobby against a resolution that would have cut off military aid to Saudi Arabia. That same lobbyist then made a \$2,000 contribution to the senator's political action committee that very day.

JUSTICE FOR JAMAL

Thankfully, it doesn't appear that MbS and the Saudi Lobby will be able to sweep Khashoggi's enforced disappearance under the rug anytime soon. Instead, his alleged murder has caused global outrage and served as a rallying cry to re-examine the blank check that Trump has granted MbS's regime.

After reviewing Turkish intelligence, a bipartisan group of Senators led by Corker, Menendez, Graham, Leahy, and 18 others [initiated a review](#) under the Global Magnitsky Act in a letter to President Trump. This request triggers a review of whether Saudi Arabia committed gross violations of human rights in connection to Khashoggi's disappearance to determine targeted sanctions on members of the Saudi government involved, which could include MbS.

And the repercussions keep coming: Former Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz [suspended](#) his role advising the development of a Saudi mega city under MbS's 2030 vision. A Washington lobbying firm [announced](#) it would no longer do business with Saudi Arabia.

The [New York Times](#), the [Economist](#), CNN, Financial Times, CNBC, Bloomberg News, and Fox Business News have also [pulled their sponsorship](#) of an upcoming investment conference, Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative, hosted by MbS. There are public calls for other sponsors to follow suit.

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You can join those voices by [signing our petition](#), calling on media companies to end their sponsorship and participation in the conference, to stand up for freedom of speech and press freedom in Saudi Arabia, to call on the Saudi monarchy to reveal Khashoggi's fate, and to take a stand against the Saudi government's brutal bombardment of thousands of civilians in Yemen.

BURIED LEDES

The dispute over the Iran nuclear deal between the Trump administration and Europe **"is a major driver of European debates about a form of 'strategic autonomy'"** from the U.S. "and represents a [more serious cleavage](#) in the Western alliance than did the invasion of Iraq in 2003."

One Democratic Senator who voted against the Iraq war **says it can happen again**. He's right. [It is happening again](#), this time with Iran.

Nikki Haley [resigned](#) as U.S. ambassador to the UN this week. **Let's not pretend that she was some kind of moderate**.

[Israeli authorities](#) detained an American student for her political beliefs.

[Donald Trump is](#) trying to make it harder to protest him near the White House and on the National Mall.

President Obama's [refusal](#) to hold anyone accountable for the Bush administration torture program is **part of the reason why we now have someone like Brett Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court**.

While the federal government continues to fail to act on climate change, [states are taking matters into their own hands](#). This November, **voters in Washington state will decide whether to impose a price on carbon emissions**.

Amnesty International says that [failure to act](#) on curbing carbon emissions **"risks human rights violation on a massive scale."**

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, who should resign, [was grilled](#) by Democrats on Capitol Hill this week about Trump's policy of detaining children. One senator is [taking action](#) to stop Donald Trump's **"internment camp agenda."**

South Korean President Moon Jae-in continues in his unyielding [push for peace](#), **saying that an official end to the Korean War is only a matter of time**. It's time for Washington to get

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onboard.

And finally, from the “This Would Be Bigger News in Normal Times” file, we learned this week that Senator Ted Cruz’s [national security adviser](#) used to lobby for a man currently on trial in the Hague for crimes against humanity.