

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Khashoggi's Killers, Made in the USA

The Takeaway:

- New evidence released this week confirms that four Saudi operatives who murdered Jamal Khashoggi had received state-sanctioned paramilitary training in the United States only the year before.
- The news is shocking. But it would be a mistake to see it as an aberration. From the School of Americas during the Cold War, to “security” trainings in Colombia, Egypt, Israel, and beyond, the United States has exported violence to repressive state forces around the world for many decades.
- This should be a wake-up call. No amount of “trainings” for human rights abusers and repressive state forces will build real security. For that, we need a new approach.

Made in the USA: How U.S. “Security” Trainings Export Violence

Content Warning: Descriptions of Violence

On October 2, 2018, journalist and prominent Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi walked into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to pick up documents to certify his marriage. He never walked out. Evidence would later reveal that Khashoggi was lured to the consulate under false pretenses, ambushed, murdered, and dismembered in a horrific political assassination in all likelihood [approved](#) by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman himself. But it gets worse.

Khashoggi's Killers

This week, it was [revealed](#) that the very Saudi operatives who committed the murder had received paramilitary training in the United States under a contract approved by the State Department. You read that right: not only does the United States provide Saudi Arabia with the weapons it uses to [massacre](#) civilians in Yemen, not only does it regularly [cover](#) for Saudi human rights abuses, not only does it shape its foreign policy in part to Saudi Arabia's demands — it literally trained the murderers of one of Saudi Arabia's leading dissidents. While the contract was first approved by the State Department years prior, in 2014, the trainings themselves took place only a year before the murder, as the operatives were in the midst of a crackdown on dissent. To top it all off, the head of the company that conducted the training was later nominated to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense under Trump.

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“Security” Training

While this is a particularly enraging example, the tragic truth is that it’s not all that unusual. Every year, the United States assists or trains an estimated [200,000](#) foreign soldiers, police, and other personnel through what one investigation [called](#) a vast, shadowy “constellation of global training exercises, operations, facilities, and schools.” While some of these trainings are likely for legitimate ends, far too many are instead in service of U.S. economic and military domination. They are conducted largely in secret, with little to no oversight, and with few if any measures in place to ensure that they do not empower present or future human rights abusers.

Insecurity Training

The results of this program are unsurprising. Major recipients of these trainings, and so-called “security assistance” more generally, include state forces in Colombia, where police have recently and repeatedly [massacred](#) those protesting their government’s neoliberal austerity policies; Egypt, under the [authoritarian](#) al-Sisi government; the Philippines, where security forces are widely known to conduct widespread extrajudicial [killings](#); Israel, where U.S. police and the IDF [exchange](#) tactics for enforcing apartheid and racial injustice; and, of course, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies. On top of all that, such training and assistance is actually [negatively](#) correlated with future cooperative behavior, and countries receiving U.S. foreign military training programs are [twice](#) as likely to experience a military coup d’état in the future. In short, the United States is exporting violence and insecurity.

A Long Tradition

While the exact nature of these trainings have changed over time, the United States has been teaching repression in some form for decades. After World War II, the United States [sought to cement](#) its global dominance and quell any resistance to capitalist hegemony — and security trainings quickly became a key tool in its arsenal. First under the auspices of the CIA, and then the Office of Public Safety (OPS), the United States [sent teams](#) to train, strengthen, and “professionalize” local police forces across the Global South with the goal of suppressing Left-wing resistance in postcolonial states. While OPS was formally dissolved in the 1970s, its tactics lived on elsewhere, including under the FBI, DEA, and DoD. Perhaps most infamously, the DoD-led [School of the Americas](#) (SOA) trained politicians, military leaders, and police officers from across Latin America in a variety of areas including intelligence and counterintelligence, “riot control,” guerilla warfare, and even torture. SOA’s [esteemed alumni](#) now includes [dictators](#), [coup-leaders](#), [torturers](#), [massacrers](#), and [war criminals](#). Though the school has since been renamed, and its worst excesses somewhat curtailed, the impacts live on today — not only in its surviving victims, but in the form of so-called “security trainings” today.

A New Approach

In many ways, the U.S. training of foreign security forces is emblematic of the entire unjust, violent, and ultimately counterproductive militarist approach to security. But while more and

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more policymakers are finally beginning to recognize the failures of certain parts of that approach — like the endless U.S. occupation of foreign countries — too few are willing to confront the militarist mindset at its roots. That Khashoggi's murderers were trained in the United States should be a wake-up call. It's time to finally recognize that the United States' alliance with the repressive Saudi autocracy leaves blood on our hands; that training human rights abusers won't build security, here or abroad; that the only path to security, whether for people in the United States, Saudi Arabia, or beyond, is [a new approach](#) to U.S. foreign policy — one rooted in peace, not war.

BURIED LEDES

71 years. **As of today, it has been 71 years since the start of the war on the Korean peninsula**, and still, the dangerous armed standoff remains. Sanctions, brinkmanship, and aggression have failed. It's time for a [peace-first approach](#).

Conservative hardliner Ebrahim Raisi [has won](#) Iran's presidential election. Surprise surprise: unilaterally tearing apart a breakthrough diplomatic agreement and then imposing suffocating sanctions doesn't exactly help reformists make their case.

In what has now become an annual tradition, **the UN [voted](#) this week on whether or not to condemn the deadly U.S. blockade of Cuba.** For: 184 countries. Against: 2 — the United States and Israel...

...that's just about all the evidence you need that **the Biden administration's [claimed commitment](#) to the "rules-based" international order is really "rules for thee, not for me."**

This week, **the World Bank released its new 5-year Climate Change Action Plan...** a bold title for a plan that [wouldn't even end](#) the World Bank's own financing of fossil fuels.

The city of Oakland has passed an ordinance to increase oversight of the use of military weapons and equipment by police. It's a positive step, but let's be clear: a little more oversight doesn't fix a broken system.

President Biden's announcement of support for a waiver on vaccine intellectual property rules was a major victory. **This week, we joined 130+ organizations [calling on](#) him to see it through.** To end global vaccine apartheid, the waiver must be clear, comprehensive, and timely.

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164 countries have committed to ending the use of anti-personnel landmines, which maim and kill indiscriminately, long after wars are over. The United States is not one of them. **This week, 21 senators, led by Senator Leahy, sent a letter to Biden calling to change that.**

And finally... "[dispensing freedom.](#)"