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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: A pariah you say?

The Takeaway:

- This week, the Biden administration hosted a high-level meeting with one of the Saudi Prince's directly implicated in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This comes mere weeks after it was revealed that Khashoggi's killers were trained in the United States.
- Arms sales, security trainings, backing the war in Yemen, and now this — despite his campaign rhetoric, President Biden is proving to be yet another upholder of the broken status quo of the toxic U.S.-Saudi alliance.
- It's time to change the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies once and for all. It's time for a foreign policy that puts human rights, accountability, and justice *first*.

Biden's Saudi Arabia Policy? More of the Same.

Top Biden administration officials quietly [hosted](#) Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's brother, Prince Khalid bin Salman, in Washington, DC this week. **That's the same Prince Khalid who [told](#) journalist Jamal Khashoggi it would be safe to go to the consulate in Istanbul where he was then brutally murdered and dismembered.** Now, as firm supporters of diplomacy, we're not saying it's inherently wrong to meet with a foreign leader who has committed abuses. But these meetings with a high-level government official implicated in the MURDER of an internationally-renowned journalist, IN the United States WITH cabinet secretaries and the president's national security advisor, is just one more piece of evidence in a larger trend that is becoming increasingly undeniable: *despite his promises of change, President Biden is doubling down on the age-old toxic U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia.*

The Toxic Relationship

For decades, the United States' allyship with Saudi Arabia has been one of its most unwavering — and most deeply harmful. In service of this unholy alliance, the United States has: [fueled](#) one of the single most catastrophic wars in generations, in Yemen; sold hundreds of billions of dollars in weapons that have repeatedly been used to [massacre](#) civilians and have regularly [fallen](#) into the hands of violent non-state actors; maintained a [disastrous](#), antagonistic approach to Saudi Arabia's primary rival, Iran; and repeatedly and continuously overlooked the Saudi government's [repressive](#), anti-democratic nature and [systematic](#) human rights [abuses](#) against its own population, as well as its role in backing anti-democratic forces throughout the region.

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Khashoggi's Killers

On top of that all, on October 2, 2018, the Saudi government assassinated one of its most prominent critics, *Washington Post* columnist and U.S. permanent resident, Jamal Khashoggi. After years of intentional famine and massacres of civilians in Yemen or the brutal, ongoing internal crackdowns that has led to the arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders and activists, the death of one individual may seem an unlikely catalyst. But the depravity of the assassination, the Saudi government's attempted cover up, and the fact that the U.S. intelligence community confirmed that the killing was personally approved by the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) seemed to finally be enough to wake many in Washington up to the true, horrific costs of a close relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Donald Trump, however, saw too much to lose, both financially and politically, to allow his favorite benefactors to become a pariah. Naturally, Team Trump played coy to the Saudi government's role in the murder and directed the U.S. government to [look the other way](#). In response, bipartisan majorities in Congress passed an unprecedented War Powers Resolution demanding an end to U.S. military support for the war in Yemen and resolutions condemning the Crown Prince and his government. In addition to the Biden administration's release of the intelligence report confirming MbS' role, more details in the U.S. government's role in the murder continue to come to light. Just last month, it was confirmed that the very people who personally killed Jamal Khashoggi had [received](#) military training in the United States authorized by the U.S. Department of State. It is likely the same training program that a member of the Saudi military participated in before attempting a mass shooting at a military base in Florida in 2019.

In short, the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia is the paradigmatic case of a broken U.S. foreign policy: one that's based on maintaining "allies" at all costs, with no consideration for the impacts on human rights, everyday people, or even broader U.S. foreign policy.

The Stranglehold

So why does the U.S.-Saudi alliance hold such a stranglehold over U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East? First, the oil: it's no secret that U.S. dependence on fossil fuels was the original [motivating factor](#) behind its corrupt bargain of oil for security with the Al-Saud family — and continues to be a key reason for the close relationship with one of the largest oil producers in the world today. Second, the hegemonic foothold: the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia allows the United States to hold a [foothold](#) in the Middle East, both physically, in the form of U.S. military bases and forces kept in the country, and in broader terms of power and influence. And finally, the \$\$\$: whether through the direct influence of the [well-resourced](#) Saudi and Gulf government [lobbies](#) in DC, or simply through the broader power of being a mega-rich oil autocracy with seemingly limitless capacity for corporate investment, the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia is all about the Benjamins. Or, to paraphrase the Wu-Tang Clan: 🎵

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“cash rules everything around me, including U.S. foreign policymaking.” 🎵

Empty Promises

Given all this, it should perhaps be of little surprise that promises to break with tradition and hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its abuses have proven easier to make than to keep. On the campaign trail, President Biden [claimed](#) that he saw “no redeeming value” in the current Saudi government, and would make MbS “a pariah” for his role Khashoggi’s murder. And to his credit, Biden did take several actions: he ended offensive military assistance for the Saudi/Emirati military intervention in Yemen and initially [paused](#) arms sales to the country pending review soon after taking the presidency. He also released a report finding MbS [personally approved](#) the Khashoggi assassination.

But these initial wins haven’t meant real accountability or lasting change. Ultimately, Biden has [resumed](#) the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia (except for one type of munition dropped from a certain type of aircraft 😊), and has, all these months later, failed to clarify how “offensive” is being defined, leaving the door open to many forms of continued [support](#) for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. He’s also failed to institute any real reforms that could change the course of, or center human rights in, the relationship. Even the so-called “Khashoggi ban” — that was supposed to ban visas for any Saudi national implicated in Jamal’s murder — has clearly not worked, with Biden’s top advisors holding meetings with the man who lured Khashoggi to his death. In short: [“how it started... how it’s going.”](#)

Breaking the Grip

It’s time to break the stranglehold that the Saudi-U.S. alliance has over U.S. foreign policy. We cannot wait idly by while another administration — one that should know better — subordinates progressive values to naked power and wealth. That means finally ending the unconditional and unaccountable flow of weapons to Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners. It means halting U.S. support for the war in Yemen *in full*. It means calling on Saudi Arabia to end its deadly blockade of Yemen. It means withdrawing troops, taking lobbyist money out of politics, ending U.S. reliance on fossil fuels, holding human rights abusers accountable, *and, yes, avoiding friendly visits with known murderers*. Above all, it means building a new foreign policy that puts peace, justice, and human rights first.

BURIED LEDES

Two decades of U.S. war and occupation did not bring peace to Afghanistan. **As the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan continues, we make unequivocally [clear](#): it was, and is, the right decision.**

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The Cold War approach to China is blocking global climate action. It fuels racism, militarism, & jingoism, while doing nothing for the human rights and wellbeing of people in the U.S. or China. **We join 45+ orgs calling for cooperation, [not Cold War](#), to confront the climate crisis.**

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated this week. While Western governments rightfully condemn the murder and call for peace, let's use this moment to remember how centring of Western slavery, colonialism, coups, and interventionism [brought us here](#).

This week, President Biden [extended and redesignated](#) Temporary Protected Status for Yemenis in the United States. It's hardly full justice for a people whose country we continue to destroy, but it's a welcome and necessary step to help reunite families and offer protections to those our government has caused untold harm.

"The European Union, Led by Germany's Chancellor Merkel, [Chokes Off](#) Progress on Intellectual Property Waiver at the WTO, Blocking Vaccine Access in Sub-Saharan African and Across Global South While Delta Variant Rages." I think that title says it all.

The Biden administration's rhetorical emphasis on addressing the "root causes" of migration is the right one. But if that's going to be any more than a retelling of the status quo, it must include a **rethinking of the unjust system of trade and investment that [fuels](#) displacement**

... oh, and a total disavowal of the [long history](#) of U.S. and foreign interventionism that has **fomented instability and forced countless from their homes.**

How do you think the United States should use its money? Healthcare for all? Green jobs? How about, **[igniting](#) a global nuclear arms race with the potential to kill us all?**

"It's [perfectly possible](#) to **oppose U.S. empire without engaging in denialism, praising colonialism, and debasing the dignity of victims and survivors.**"

South Sudan was founded with U.S. backing as "a fledgling democracy modeled on Washington's America." Instead, **it has [fallen](#) into elite corruption and squandered its wealth on a vast security apparatus....** Okay, so it was modeled on the U.S. after all?

And finally, **the Olympics may not have started, but we already know [the greatest athlete](#) of all time.**