

Angered by Saudi Plan to Purchase Russian S-400, Trump Admin Exploiting Khashoggi Disappearance to Force Saudis to “Buy American”

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The response of the Trump administration and many U.S. politicians to Khashoggi's disappearance is largely being guided by the military-industrial complex — in this case Lockheed Martin — but masquerading as a response motivated by “human rights.”

The disappearance and alleged murder of Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi continues to strain relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. On Saturday, President Donald Trump warned the Saudis of “[severe punishment](#)” if the Saudi government was found to have been responsible for the journalist’s alleged murder.

The Saudi government has vocally denied any involvement even though Khashoggi disappeared within the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul and responded to Trump’s threats by vowing an [even “stronger” response](#) if the Gulf monarchy is ultimately targeted by the United States. The exchange of threats caused Saudi [stocks to sustain their biggest one-day loss](#) since 2016 when trading opened and has brought the upcoming three-day Future Investment Initiative (FII) in Saudi Arabia much [unwanted negative publicity](#).

However, there is considerable evidence pointing to the fact that the U.S.’ response to the Khashoggi affair is likely to be determined, not by any Saudi government responsibility for Khashoggi’s fate, but instead whether or not the Saudis choose to follow through with their promise to purchase the \$15 billion U.S.-made THAAD missile system or it cheaper, Russia-made equivalent, the S-400. According to reports, the Saudis failed to meet the deadline for their planned THAAD purchase and had hinted in late September that they were planning to buy the S-400 from Russia instead.

While the U.S.’ response to the alleged murder of the Saudi journalist is being cast as a U.S. government effort to defend press freedom and finally hold the Saudi government to account for its long litany of human-rights abuses, there is every indication that the U.S. is not in fact seeking to punish the Saudis for their alleged role in Khashoggi’s apparent murder but instead to punish them for [renegeing on this \\$15 billion deal](#) to U.S. weapons giant Lockheed Martin, which manufactures the THAAD system.

Khashoggi’s disappearance merely provided a convenient pretext for the U.S. to pressure the Saudis over abandoning the weapons deal by allowing the U.S. to frame its retaliation as a “human rights” issue. As a result, it seems likely that, if the Saudis move forward with the latter, the U.S. and the Trump administration the Saudi government guilty of involvement in Khashoggi’s disappearance while, if they move forward with the former, the media frenzy

and controversy surrounding the Saudi national will likely fizzle out and, with it, Trump's threats of "severe punishment."

Ultimately, the response of the U.S. political class to the Khashoggi affair is just the latest example of a U.S. government policy being motivated by the military-industrial complex but masquerading as a policy motivated by concern for "human rights."

Why the sudden concern over the Saudi government's atrocious human rights record?

As the Khashoggi saga has drawn on since the Saudi journalist disappeared earlier this month, some observers have noted that the corporate media and the U.S. government's sudden preoccupation with Saudi Arabia's human-rights record, particularly in regards to journalists. Indeed, just last Wednesday, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [announced that](#) 15 Saudi journalists and bloggers had been arrested over the past year and noted that "in most cases, their arrests have never been officially confirmed and no official has ever said where they are being held or what they are charged with."

In addition, Saudi Arabia has helped kill tens of thousands of Yemeni civilians in the war it is leading against that country, with most of those civilian casualties resulting from the Saudi-led coalition's bombing campaign that routinely targets civilians. The Saudi-led coalition's blockade of food and medicine into Yemen has also brought the country to the brink of famine, with nearly [18 million](#) now at risk of starving to death — including over 5 million children, while thousands more are dying from [preventable diseases](#) in the country.

While murdering a journalist by "hit squad" in a diplomatic compound on foreign soil — as is alleged to have Khashoggi's fate — would certainly set a dangerous precedent, Saudi Arabia leading the genocide against the Yemeni people is arguably a much worse precedent. However, little concern over the Saudis' role in this atrocity in Yemen has been raised by those pushing for action to be taken against Saudi Arabia over Khashoggi's "inhumane" fate. So, why the sudden concern?

Go ask the families of the kids killed by US bombs in Yemen about our "moral standing" <https://t.co/wEPMXKEFpl>

— ((YousefMunayyer)) (@YousefMunayyer) [October 13, 2018](#)

The world is shocked about the reports of [#JamalKhashoggi](#)'s death while Saudi Arabia is responsible for the deaths of 100s of 1000s Yemenis, but it takes the death of 1 journalist to get world's attention? [#Yemen](#). <pic.twitter.com/cpGL1QiHSY>

— Ahmad Algohbary (@AhmadAlgohbary) [October 13, 2018](#)

Despite it being a well-known fact that the Saudi government routinely imprisons journalists and activists and is leading a genocidal war against its southern neighbor, the Trump administration has now adopted a harsh tone towards the Saudis, with concerns over Khashoggi's disappearance serving as the "official" excuse.

Indeed, Trump [told CBS' 60 Minutes](#) during an interview broadcast on Sunday that

“there’s something really terrible and disgusting about that if that were the case [that Saudi Arabia had been involved in Khashoggi’s murder], so we’re going to have to see. We’re going to get to the bottom of it and there will be severe punishment.”

“There will be severe punishment.” – President Trump on what will happen if Saudi Arabia is found to be behind the disappearance of missing journalist Jamal Khashoggi pic.twitter.com/aE4581jHqY

— 60 Minutes (@60Minutes) [October 14, 2018](#)

Other powerful figures in the U.S. political establishment have called for dramatic action to be taken against the Saudi government, particularly the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). For instance, John Brennan, former CIA Director under Obama and current cable news pundit, lobbied in [a recent Washington Post op-ed](#) to dethrone MBS for his alleged role in Khashoggi’s fate.

Brennan also notably called upon the U.S. to impose “immediate sanctions on all Saudis involved; a freeze on U.S. military sales to Saudi Arabia; suspension of all routine intelligence cooperation with Saudi security services; and a U.S.-sponsored U.N. Security Council resolution condemning the murder.”

Another prominent figure in Washington pushing for action to be taken against the Saudis over Khashoggi’s disappearance is Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC). Graham [recently stated](#) that there would be “hell to pay” if the Saudi government was found to be responsible for Khashoggi’s disappearance and alleged murder. Notably, the [top contributor](#) to Graham’s 2020 re-election campaign is U.S. weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

Given that human-rights concerns among the U.S. power establishment have only emerged after the disappearance of this one journalist and such concerns regarding the Saudis other grave human-rights abuses continue to go unvoiced by these same individuals, something else is likely driving Washington’s sudden concern over alleged Saudi state-sanctioned murder.

So what has protected the Saudi government from U.S. retribution over its repeated human-rights abuses in the past? Though Saudi Arabia’s vast oil wealth is an obvious answer, [a recently leaked State Department memo](#) revealed that U.S. weapon sales to the Gulf Kingdom were the main and only factor in the Trump administration’s continued support for the Saudi-led coalition’s disastrous war in Yemen. Those lucrative weapon sales, according to the memo, led Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to “[rubber stamp](#)” the Saudi-led coalition’s bombing campaign in Yemen despite the fact that the coalition has continued to bomb civilian buses, homes and infrastructure in recent months.

If the Saudis were to back away from a major, lucrative deal with U.S. weapon manufacturers, such an act would likely result in retribution from Washington, given that weapons sales to the Gulf Kingdom are currently the driving factor behind Washington’s “concern” with the Saudi government’s poor human-rights record.

This is exactly what happened and it took place just two days before Khashoggi disappeared inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

The Saudis back out of a US deal and eye the rival's wares

Last year, President Trump visited Saudi Arabia and praised its crown prince for finalizing a massive weapons deal with the United States at a value of over \$110 billion. However, it emerged [soon after](#) that this “deal” was not contract-based but instead involved many “letters of interest or intent.” Over a year later, the *Washington Post* [recently noted](#) that many of the planned weapons deals have yet to be finalized.

One of those agreements was the planned \$15 billion purchase of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD), which is manufactured by U.S. weapons giant Lockheed Martin. The deadline for the Saudis to finalize that deal [passed on September 30](#), just two days before Khashoggi's disappearance on October 2. However, a Saudi official [told the Post](#) that the Saudi government is still “highly interested” in the deal but “like any military purchase, there are negotiations happening which we hope will conclude in the quickest means possible.”

Yet, not only has Saudi Arabia apparently backed out of the \$15 billion deal to buy Lockheed's THAAD, it is also actively considering buying the Russian-made S-400 missile defense system instead and [has also refused](#) U.S. government requests to disavow its interest in the Russian-made system.

Indeed, on September 21, Saudi ambassador to Russia Raid bin Khalid Krimli [stated](#):

Our cooperation with Russia continues and grows. And during King Salman's historic visit [to Russia] we have signed 14 agreements that began to be implemented. There were four agreements in the military field; three of them began to be implemented. As for the fourth ... there is discussion of the technical issues. Because the system itself is modern and complex.”

The fourth deal to which he alludes appears to be the S-400. The Saudi ambassador also stated the he hoped “nobody will impose any sanctions on us” for making the purchases with Russia — further suggesting that the system he was discussing was the S-400, given that the U.S. sanctioned China for purchasing the system soon before the Saudi ambassador's comments.

Interestingly, soon after the Saudis' failure to stick to the planned deal with Lockheed, Trump began to publicly criticize the Saudis for “not paying” their fair share. Speaking at a campaign rally in Mississippi on October 3 – one day after Khashoggi's disappearance in Istanbul and three days after Saudi Arabia “missed” the Lockheed Martin deadline, [Trump stated](#):

“I love the king [of Saudi Arabia], King Salman, but I said: ‘King, we're protecting you. You might not be there for two weeks without us. You have to pay for your military, you have to pay.’”

More recently, this past Saturday, [Trump told reporters](#) that he did not want to risk the bottom line of the U.S.' top weapons manufacturers in determining the Saudis' “punishment:”

I tell you what I don't want to do. **Boeing, Lockheed, Raytheon, all these**

companies. I don't want to hurt jobs. I don't want to lose an order like that [emphasis added]. And you know there are other ways of punishing, to use a word that's a pretty harsh word, but it's true."

However, if the Saudis do follow through with the purchase of the S-400, Lockheed Martin will lose \$15 billion as a result. It will also endanger some of other potential contracts contained within the \$110 billion weapons contract that Trump has often publicly promoted. With Trump not wanting to "lose an order like that," some analysts like Scott Creighton of the *Nomadic Everyman* blog [have asserted](#) that the Khashoggi scandal is being used as a "shakedown" aimed at pressuring the Saudis into "[buying American](#)" and to force them to disavow a future purchase of the Russian-made S-400.

Would the U.S. use such tactics against a close ally like the Saudis over their potential purchase of the Russian-made S-400? It would certainly fit with the U.S.' recent efforts [to threaten countries around the world](#) with sanctions for purchasing that very missile defense system. For instance, in June, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell [threatened Turkey](#) with sanctions if Turkey purchased the S-400. Those threats were followed by the September decision made by the Trump administration to sanction China [for its purchase](#) of the S-400 system.

Notably, it was right after China was sanctioned for purchasing the S-400 that the Saudi ambassador to Russia [told Russian media](#) that "I hope nobody will impose any sanctions on us" for purchasing the S-400.

However, U.S. sanctions against the Saudis may now be in the works after all, with Khashoggi's disappearance as the pretext. Indeed, as previously mentioned, former CIA director John Brennan, among other powerful figures in Washington, is calling for sanctions against the Saudi government and Trump himself stated on Saturday that "severe punishment" could soon be in the Saudis' future.

Yet another piece of this puzzle that cannot be ignored is the fact that Khashoggi himself has ties to the CIA, as well as to Lockheed Martin through his uncle Adnan Khashoggi, one of Saudi Arabia's most powerful weapons dealers.

Khashoggi's deep connections to CIA, Saudi Intelligence suggest his "disappearance" may be something more

Following his disappearance, Khashoggi [has been praised by](#) establishment and non-establishment figures alike, from Jake Tapper to Chris Hedges, for being a "dissident" and a "courageous journalist." However, prior to his scandalous disappearance and alleged murder, Khashoggi did not receive such accolades and was a very controversial figure.

As Federico Pieraccini [recently wrote](#) at *Strategic Culture*:

[Khashoggi is a] representative of the shadowy world of collaboration that sometimes exists between journalism and the intelligence agencies, in this case involving the intelligence agencies of Saudi Arabia and the United States. It has been virtually confirmed by official circles within the Al Saud family that Khashoggi was an agent in the employ of Riyadh and the CIA during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan."

Indeed, Khashoggi doubled as a journalist and an asset for the Saudi and U.S. intelligence services and was also [an early recruit](#) of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was also [the protégé](#) of Turki Faisal Al-Saud, the head of Saudi intelligence for 24 years, who also served as the Saudi ambassador to Washington and to the United Kingdom. Khashoggi was “media advisor” to Faisal Al-Saud during his two ambassadorships. Notably, Khashoggi became a regime “critic” only after internal power struggles broke out between former Saudi King Abdullah and Turki Faisal al-Saud.

Supporters of King Abdullah accused Khashoggi at the time of having recruited and paid several journalists on behalf of the CIA while he was editor of the leading English-language magazine in Saudi Arabia, *Arab News*, a post he held from 1999 to 2003.

More recently, Khashoggi strongly supported the Muslim Brotherhood during the “Arab Spring” and backed the Barack Obama/Hillary Clinton regime-change efforts that spread throughout the Middle East, including the regime-change effort targeting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

However, under King Salman, the Muslim Brotherhood’s presence in Saudi Arabia came under threat and was suppressed. This led Khashoggi to leave and [seek refuge](#) in Turkey.

Perhaps most significantly, prior to his disappearance, Khashoggi was “working quietly with intellectuals, reformists and Islamists to launch a group called Democracy for the Arab World Now.” As [Moon of Alabama notes](#), these projects that Khashoggi was involved in prior to his disappearance “reek of preparations for a CIA-controlled color revolution in Saudi Arabia.”

Not only does Khashoggi share ties to the CIA and the Saudi intelligence services (services that [often collaborate](#)), but his family is well-connected to global power structures, including Lockheed Martin.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, Khashoggi’s uncle is none other than Adnan Khashoggi, the notorious Saudi arms dealer who was [an important player](#) in the Iran-contra affair and was once Saudi Arabia’s richest man. Adnan Khashoggi was [deeply connected](#) to Lockheed Martin, as demonstrated by the fact that, between 1970 and 1975, he received \$106 million in commissions from the U.S. weapons giant with his commission rate on Lockheed sales eventually rising to 15 percent. [According to](#) Lockheed’s former Vice President for International Marketing, Max Helzel, Adnan Khashoggi “became for all practical purposes a marketing arm of Lockheed. Adnan would provide not only an entry but strategy, constant advice and analysis.”

Adnan Khashoggi also had [close ties](#) to the Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan White Houses, with the latter likely explaining why he was acquitted for his role in the Iran-contra scandal. Also notable is the fact that Adnan Khashoggi sold his famed yacht to none other than Donald Trump for \$30 million. Trump [later called](#) Adnan Khashoggi “a great broker and a lousy businessman.”

Given Jamal Khashoggi’s past and present connections to the CIA and his family’s connections to Lockheed Martin and powerful players in the U.S. political establishment, the possibility emerges that Khashoggi’s disappearance may have in fact been a set-up in order to place pressure on the Saudi government following its decision to renege on its plan to purchase Lockheed’s THAAD system. This theory is also somewhat supported by the fact

that the U.S. intelligence community [had known in advance](#) of an alleged Saudi plot to capture Khashoggi but ignored its duty ([via ICD 191](#)) to warn Khashoggi of the apparent threat against him. Furthermore, the claims that Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul have — so far — been entirely based on claims from U.S. and Turkish intelligence and no evidence to support the now prevailing narrative of murder has been made public.

If a “set-up” were the case, Khashoggi’s CIA links and his apparent efforts at pushing a CIA-controlled “color revolution” in Saudi Arabia suggest that his disappearance could also have been intended for use as a pretext, not necessarily to punish the Saudis over the S-400, but to remove MBS from his position as crown prince and replace him with former crown prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who was ousted by MBS last year and also [holds close ties](#) to the CIA. Such a possibility cannot be ignored.

However, the Trump administration’s willingness to cooperate with the faux outrage regarding Khashoggi is much more likely to be motivated by the weapons-deal drama given the administration’s [close ties](#) to MBS.

Of course, it is equally likely that this was not a set-up given that MBS is undeniably authoritarian and relentlessly pursues his critics and perhaps thought that his close relationship with Trump would allow him to act with impunity in targeting Khashoggi. However, MBS’ pursuits of his critics in the past were more readily accepted by the West — like the so-called “[corruption crackdown](#)” last December. Either way, the Saudi government’s role in the alleged murder of Khashoggi is being capitalized on by the CIA and other elements of the U.S. political scene and military-industrial complex for its own purposes, as these groups normally turn a blind eye to Saudi government atrocities.

Tracking the political typhoon

Though the U.S. tactic to strong-arm Saudi Arabia seems clear, it is a situation that could dangerously escalate as both MBS and Trump have proven over the course of their short tenure that they are stubborn and unpredictable.

Furthermore, the timing of this situation is also troubling. In early November, the Trump administration’s efforts to punish countries importing Iranian crude oil will take effect and Trump is set to lean heavily on the Saudis to prevent a dramatic oil price increase due to the supply shock the removal of Iranian oil from the market will cause. Notably, the Saudis are [working closely with Russia](#) to keep oil prices from spiking.

Saudi report threatens Trump over [#JamalKhashoggi](#)

1. Install a Russian base
2. Take oil to \$200
3. Kill the petro dollar
4. Stop buying US weapons

US will “stab its own economy to death”<https://t.co/bljlsxNNMo>

— WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [October 14, 2018](#)

Is the U.S. willing to risk the dramatic jump in oil prices, which themselves could have major

domestic economic consequences, in order to keep the Saudis from buying the S-400? It's hard to say but the [coming battle of wills](#) between Trump and MBS could well have truly global consequences.

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