

Jamal Khashoggi Died for Nothing

Let the cover-up begin

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The angst over the Jamal Khashoggi murder in the Saudi Arabian Consulate General building in Istanbul is already somewhat fading as the media has moved on in search of fresh meat, recently focusing on the series of attempted mail bombings, and currently on the mass shooting in Pittsburgh. But the affaire Khashoggi is still important as it potentially brings with it possible political realignments in the Middle East as well as in Europe as countries feel emboldened to redefine their relationship with Saudi Arabia.

The Turks know exactly what occurred in the Consulate General building and are now putting the squeeze on the Saudis, requiring them to fess up and no doubt demanding compensation. Some sources in Turkey believe that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will actually demand recreation of the Caliphate, which the Kemal Ataturk led Turkish Republic's government abolished in 1924. That would diminish Saudi Arabia's ability to regard itself as the pre-eminent Islamic state due to its guardianship over the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. It would be a major realignment of the Islamic *umma* and would be akin to a restoration of some semblance of Ottoman supremacy over the region.

To be sure, the brutally effective Turkish intelligence service, known by its acronym MIT, is very active when it comes to monitoring the activities of both friendly and unfriendly foreign embassies and their employees throughout Turkey. It uses electronic surveillance and, if the foreign mission has local Turks as employees, many of those individuals will be agents reporting to MIT. As a result, it should be presumed that MIT had the Consulate General building covered with both cameras and microphones, possibly inside the building as well as outside, meaning that the audio of the actual killing that has been reported in the media is no doubt authentic and might even be supplemented with video.

One [recent report](#), on BBC, indicates that CIA Director Gina Haspel has traveled to Turkey and has been allowed to hear the recordings of Khashoggi being tortured and killed. It's a good thing the Trump White House sent Haspel as she would know exactly what that sort of thing sounds like based on her own personal experience in Thailand. She will presumably be able to explain the operation of a bone saw to the president.

So the Saudis seem to be in a hopeless situation, but they have several cards to play. They have many lobbyists of their own in Washington that have bought their way into think tanks and onto editorial pages. They are also in bed with Israel in opposition to Iran, which means that the Israel Lobby and its many friends in the U.S. Congress will complain about killing Khashoggi but ultimately will not do anything about it. The White House will also discourage America's close allies from adopting measures that would do serious damage to the Saudis. In regional terms, Saudi Arabia is also key to Trump's anticipated Middle East peace plan. If

it pulls out from the expected financial guarantees aspect, the plan will fall apart, so Washington will be pressing hard on Ankara in particular to not overdo its bid for compensation.

All of which leads to some consideration of the hypocrisy of the outrage over Khashoggi. Saudi Arabia murdered a citizen in a diplomatic facility located in Turkey, apparently because they believed that individual to be a dissident who was a threat to national security. They then seriously botched the cover-up. In spite of all that, it would seem that the issue involves only two parties directly, the Saudis and the Turks, though there have been calls from a number of countries to punish the Saudis for what was clearly a particularly gruesome murder carried out in contravention of all existing rules for behavior of diplomatic missions in foreign countries.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular missions grants to Diplomats a certain level of immunity in foreign posts, but that does not include murder. In consular posts, like Istanbul, consular immunity only extends to officials who are actually performing consular duties when an alleged infraction occurs. I know from personal experience how subjective that process can be as I was arrested by Turkish police when I was the U.S. Consulate duty officer in Istanbul while looking for a missing American who turned out to be a drug dealer. The Turks weren't sure what to do with me as I was Consular so I spent 24 hours playing cards with the prison governor before I was released.

The hypocrisy comes in when the U.S. Congress and media become enraged and demand that there be "consequences," in part because Khashoggi was a U.S. legal resident and therefore under law a "U.S. person." Saudi Arabia is, to be sure, a country that most would consider to be an undesirable destination if one is seeking to eat, drink and be merry. Or just about anything else having to do with personal liberty. An absolute dictatorship run by one family, it has long both relied on and been the exporter of the most backward looking and unpleasant form of Islam, *Wahabbism*. But for the fact that the Saudis are the world's leading exporter of oil, and, for Muslims, guardian of the religion's holy sites, the country would long ago have been regarded as a pariah.

But that said, Congress and the White House might well consider how the rest of the world views the United States when it comes to killing indiscriminately without fear of consequences. President Barack Obama, who has practically been beatified by the U.S. mainstream media, was the first American head of state to openly target and kill American citizens overseas. He and his intelligence advisor John Brennan would sit down for a Tuesday morning meeting to revise the list of Americans living outside the U.S. who could be assassinated. To cite only one example, the executions of Yemeni dissident Anwar al-Awlaki and his son were carried out by drone after being ordered from the White House without any due process apart from claimed presidential authority. Obama and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also attacked Libya, a nation with which America was not at war, destroyed its government, and reduced the country to its current state of anarchy. When its former ruler Moammar Gaddafi was captured and killed by having a bayonet inserted up his anus, Hillary giggled and said

"We came, we saw, he died."

The United States is also supporting the ongoing war in Syria and also enables the Saudis to

continue their brutal attacks on Yemen, which have produced cholera, starvation and the deaths of an estimated 60,000 Yemenis plus millions more threatened by disease and the deliberate cutting off of food supplies. And the White House looks the other way as its other best friend in the Middle East, Israel, shoots thousands of unarmed Palestinian demonstrators. Overall one might argue that if there is a smell in the room it is coming from Washington and one death in Istanbul, no matter how heinous, pales in comparison to what the U.S. itself, Israel and Saudi Arabia have been doing without any pushback whatsoever.

And then there is the small matter of actual American interests. If Washington persists in going after the Saudis, which it will not do, it will presumably jeopardize future weapons sales worth tens of billions of dollars. The Saudis also support the system of petrodollars, which basically requires nearly all international purchases of petroleum to be paid in dollars. Petrodollars in turn enable the United States to print money for which there is no backing knowing that there will always be international demand for dollars to buy oil. The Saudis, who also use their own petrodollars to buy U.S. treasury bonds, could pull the plug on that arrangement. Those are actual American interests. If one pulls them all together it means that the United States will be looking for an outcome to Khashoggi's slaying that will not do too much damage to Saudi Arabia.

So, what do I think will happen as a result of the Khashoggi killing? Nothing that means anything. There are too many bilateral interests that bind the Saudis to Europe and America's movers and shakers. Too much money is on the table. In two more weeks mentioning the name Khashoggi in Washington's political circles will produce a tepid response and a shake of the head. "Khashoggi who?" one might ask.

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