

One Year after Khashoggi's Brutal Murder: Business as Usual?

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*Heinous. Savage. Ghastly. It's hard to find the words to describe the act of luring journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** into a Saudi consulate in Istanbul, suffocating him, chopping him up and dissolving his bones. Yet a year later, governments and businesspeople around the world are eager to forgive and forget—or already have.*

So far, not a single Saudi official has been found guilty or punished for this crime. The Saudi government has put [11 officials on trial](#) but these trials, which began in January and drag on behind closed doors, are a mockery of justice. The government is prosecuting lower-level officials but not the top guns who are truly responsible. The defendants have not been named but it is known that [Saud al-Qahtani](#), a former top aide to **Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman** (MbS) and the alleged mastermind of the murder, is not a defendant and the government refuses to say where he is.

And what about the crown prince himself? In a [September 29 PBS interview](#), MbS accepted responsibility for the killing because it happened “under his watch” — but he denied having prior knowledge. The CIA, however, [concluded](#) in November that the prince, who maintains tight control in the kingdom, likely ordered the killing. A [report](#) by United Nations Special Rapporteur **Agnes Callamard** said there was “credible evidence” linking him to the murder and cover up of what she said was undoubtedly a “state killing.” Still, the trials continue even though they do nothing to indict the person who gave the orders.

When Khashoggi was murdered, the outrage had a major effect on US congressional support for the Saudis, manifested by growing opposition to the US support for the catastrophic Saudi war in Yemen. Several key Republicans turned against MbS, not in response to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen but in response to the public outcry against Khashoggi's horrific murder. A broad-based coalition of peace, human rights and humanitarian groups was able to convince a majority in both the House and the Senate to [cut off support](#) for the Saudi war in Yemen, a necessary step to hold MbS accountable for his complete disregard for human life. Even some of the most hawkish Republicans stepped up in response. **Lindsey Graham**, for example, called MbS a “[wrecking ball](#)” and voted to end support for the war, [explaining in a statement](#),

“I changed my mind because I'm pissed. The way the administration had handled [Khashoggi's murder] is just not acceptable.”

The bills were [vetoed](#) by President Trump but Congress is still trying to force the President's hand by [including an amendment](#) in the must-pass military funding bill (NDAA).

On the heels of Khashoggi's death, businesses, embarrassed by their Saudi connections, started pulling out of deals. [Dozens of companies and notables](#), from the New York Times to Uber CEO to the head of the World Bank, decided to skip the major annual Saudi Future Investment Initiative, also known as Davos in the Desert. Talent agent Endeavor [returned a \\$400 million investment](#) from Saudi Arabia. [Several think tanks](#), including the Brookings Institution and the Middle East Institute, announced that they would no longer accept Saudi funding. In the past year, five PR firms—Glover Park Group, BGR Group, Harbour Group, CGCN Group and Gibson, Dunn & Crutche—have [severed ties](#) with the kingdom. At the behest of groups including the [Human Rights Foundation](#), singer Nicki Minaj canceled her performance in Saudi Arabia, citing concerns about the treatment of women, the LGBTQ community and freedom of expression. [Freedom Forward](#) was [successful](#) in getting the New York Public Library to cancel its “Youth Forum” with MbS's charity, the Misk Foundation.

Still, the Saudis have been investing huge sums of money in companies and notables to “rebrand” the Kingdom, prompting [CODEPINK to launch a full-blown Boycott Saudi campaign](#) in January. The campaign includes urging entertainers not to perform, asking Vice Media to stop producing promotional/propaganda videos for the Saudis, encouraging Lush Cosmetics to close their Saudi stores, and pushing the G20 nations to reconsider their decision to hold their 2020 meeting in Saudi Arabia. The campaign's long list of targets shows just how much money Saudi invests in whitewashing its crimes and how overreaching its influence is.

While human rights groups work to hold the private sector accountable, the biggest obstacle to holding Saudi accountable is the Trump administration continued support. Trump has focused on Saudi Arabia's key role as a purchaser of US weapons and an ally against Iran. In the wake of the September 14 attacks on the kingdom's oil infrastructure, Trump announced the [deployment](#) of 200 troops and Patriot missiles to Saudi Arabia to bolster its defences against Iran. It is also Trump who vetoed legislation to end military assistance for the Saudi war on Yemen on three different occasions and went so far as to declare a state of emergency to sell \$8 [billion](#) in weapons to the Saudis while bypassing Congressional disapproval.

Trump has not only stood by MbS but pushed for his rehabilitation on the world stage. With the “Davos in the Desert” [Future Investment Initiative](#) taking place against this year, on October 29-31, Jared Kushner is expected to lead a robust US delegation. Big banks and investment firms, including Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, CitiGroup, [are once again lining up](#) to attend. It seems the money to be made in the anticipated initial public offering of the world's wealthiest company, the Saudi oil company Aramco—valued at between \$1.5 trillion and \$2 trillion—is just too enticing.

Khashoggi himself was critical of the international community's unwillingness to take substantive steps to hold the Saudi regime accountable. In a column about the need for freedom of speech in the Arab world, he [remarked](#) that the repression by Arab governments “no longer carry the consequence of a backlash from the international community. Instead, these actions may trigger condemnation quickly followed by silence.” The sad irony is that in response to his own murder, governments and private interests are proving his point.

One year later, their silence has allowed MbS to tighten his grip on power and increase repression against political rivals and women activists. It has given the green light for governments around the world to sell weapons to the Saudis to destroy Yemen. It allows businesses to rake in billions in petrodollar investments and foreign entertainers to provide a veneer of normalcy and modernity to the kingdom. Far from being held accountable for

Khashoggi's murder, MbS is thriving—thanks to his rehabilitation by an international community that cares more about money than it does human rights.

In times like this, it's difficult not to ask oneself: Who is more evil—the maniacal Saudi crown prince responsible for Khashoggi's murder and the murder of tens of thousands of Yemenis, or the mendacious world leaders and businesspeople who continue to embrace what should be a pariah state?

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