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Trump rejects calls for US to end arms sales to Saudi monarchy

Amid mounting evidence that the Saudi regime tortured and murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside its consulate in Istanbul on October 2, President Donald Trump summarily rejected calls for the US to cut off its massive arms shipments to Riyadh.

Asked at a press briefing Thursday whether the disappearance and apparent murder of the Saudi journalist would affect US arms sales to the Saudi government, Trump said, “I don’t like the concept of stopping an investment of \$110 billion into the United States. Because you know what they’re going to do? They’re going to take that money and spend it in Russia or China, or someplace else.”

Trump was referring to a \$110 billion US arms deal brokered by his administration with Riyadh last year, even as the Saudi monarchy was stepping up its near-genocidal war against Houthi rebels in Yemen, using US weapons and critical logistical and intelligence assistance provided by Washington.

The Trump administration has deepened the US alliance with Saudi Arabia maintained by successive Republican and Democratic administrations as the centerpiece of an effort to build a common front between the Gulf oil monarchies, Israel and the US to isolate, destabilize and prepare to militarily attack Iran.

Earlier on Thursday, in an interview with “Fox & Friends,” Trump said American investigators were working with Saudi and Turkish officials to determine what occurred with Khashoggi, but he hastened to add that US relations with Riyadh were “excellent.”

On Wednesday, the leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee sent a bipartisan letter to Trump urging him to impose sanctions on the Saudi government, and invoked the 2016 Magnitsky Act, which gives the executive branch 120 days to decide whether to sanction foreign officials deemed to have violated human rights.

The evident murder of the well-connected *Washington Post* contributor and former Saudi regime insider Khashoggi has stirred up simmering tactical differences within the US national security establishment related to Trump's lavish praise for the despotic regime and the US role in the mass killing of civilians and the humanitarian disaster being inflicted on Yemen. At the same time, the establishment media, corporations and politicians in both parties are seeking to distance themselves from the Saudi regime and conceal their longstanding ties to it.

CNN reported Friday that Turkish authorities have audio and visual evidence confirming that Khashoggi was murdered inside the consulate, which he had visited to obtain divorce papers before marrying his Turkish fiancée. A source familiar with the Turkish investigation into Khashoggi's disappearance said the evidence proved there was an assault and a struggle inside. They described the nature of the evidence as "shocking and disgusting."

"You can hear his voice and the voices of men speaking Arabic," a source told the *Washington Post*. "You can hear how he was interrogated, tortured and then murdered."

Also on Friday, Turkey and Saudi Arabia announced that they would conduct a joint investigation. Although Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has strongly suggested that Riyadh was responsible for Khashoggi's death, he has avoided accusing Saudi Arabia publicly.

Previously, it was reported that a commando group of 15 Saudi intelligence officials arrived in Istanbul on the day of Khashoggi's disappearance and left soon after. Among them was an autopsy expert reportedly equipped with a bone saw. According to some reports, Khashoggi's corpse was dismembered before it was removed from the consulate.

Khashoggi's assassination is yet another expression of the complete disregard for international law under conditions of a deepening capitalist crisis. It reflects not only the ruthless character of the Saudi regime, but also of its main backer, US imperialism, which has built up Riyadh as a key regional ally in its drive to secure unchallenged dominance over the Middle East.

Washington has adopted the policy of drone assassinations pioneered by Israel and applied it on an unprecedented scale, killing thousands of civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan,

Libya, Somalia and other countries. It has given its stamp of approval to Israel's shoot-to-kill response to unarmed Palestinians demonstrating on the Gaza-Israel border, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of men, women and children over the past six months.

Successive US governments, led by Democrats and Republicans, have funneled billions of dollars in military supplies and aid to Riyadh, which is one of Washington's main customers for arms exports. Many of these weapons have been used to repress any sign of social opposition within Saudi Arabia to the totalitarian regime and to continue the bloodbath in Yemen.

One of the highest-paid firms representing the Saudi regime in Washington is linked to the Clintons. The Glover Park Group, which receives \$150,000 a month from the royal family, was started by former Clinton administration officials.

In an effort at damage control, sections of the ruling class are now hypocritically seeking to distance themselves from Riyadh and calling for a harder line. Several business figures and media outlets, including the *New York Times*, CNN, *Bloomberg*, and the *Financial Times*, have declared their intention to withdraw from an investment conference due to be held by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman later this month.

The CEOs of JPMorgan Chase and the Blackstone Group, one of the world's largest investment firms, and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin have confirmed their plans to attend the gathering, dubbed "Davos in the Desert."

The principal fear among these circles is that the brazen display of savagery in the Khashoggi case will hamper their efforts to cloak their imperialist goals in the Middle East and elsewhere behind concern for "human rights" and "democracy." They also worry that Khashoggi's assassination and other brutal acts could fuel popular opposition to the House of Saud and its imperialist patrons, both inside Saudi Arabia itself and internationally.

Billions of dollars in investments are at stake. According to the Saudi Arabia General Investment Agency, total American investments in the kingdom amount to some \$55 billion. In 2017 alone, as Prince Mohammed bin Salman began his so-called modernization drive, 16 new US companies entered the Saudi market with projects valued at approximately \$100 million.

While the US is Riyadh's main patron, Washington's ostensible allies in Europe are also deeply implicated in propping up the dictatorship. Britain, France and Germany have all sold billions of dollars worth of weaponry to Saudi Arabia, and these sales have only increased during the three-and-a-half-year war in Yemen.

Having recently mended a diplomatic spat with Riyadh over its campaign against Qatar, the German government has remained relatively muted on the Khashoggi affair, with little more than token statements of concern. In a joint appearance with his Saudi counterpart on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly just a week prior to Khashoggi's disappearance, German Foreign Minister Heiko Mas praised Saudi Arabia as a country that plays "an important role for peace and stability in the region and the world."