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Trump rules out further action against Saudi regime over Khashoggi's murder

President Donald Trump issued a statement yesterday, which declared “America First” considerations ruled out taking any further action against the Saudi Arabian regime over the brutal murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The only US response has been token sanctions imposed last week on 17 Saudi individuals, who the regime itself had implicated in the crime.

Trump made his announcement following the publication of claims on November 16 in the *Washington Post* that the “CIA has concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the assassination.” The crown prince is the heir to the throne and de facto head of the monarchical dictatorship that rules over the oil-rich country.

Khashoggi, who had fallen out with the regime and publicly criticised it, was killed inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey on October 2 by a 15-man hit-team. His body was then dismembered and disposed of in an unknown location.

Trump brushed aside the top-level Saudi involvement in Khashoggi's murder, writing: “[I]t could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event—maybe he did and maybe he didn't!”

His statement crudely spelled out that his only real concern was the “national interest” of American imperialism, which were its economic relations with the Saudi monarchy and Saudi support for US aggression in the Middle East, particularly with Syria and Iran.

The Saudi regime, he declared, “had agreed to spend and invest \$450 billion” in the US, including \$110 billion in purchases of military equipment. If the US cancelled the

contracts, “Russia and China would be the enormous beneficiaries.” Saudi Arabia, he went on, was “a great ally in our very important fight against Iran.” It was also the largest oil producing country after the US and had been “very responsive to my requests to keep oil prices at reasonable levels.”

According to *Washington Post* sources, as well as statements by Turkish agencies, the evidence that Khashoggi’s murder was ordered by the crown prince is overwhelming.

The *Post* reported that US intelligence intercepted a call by the crown prince to the Saudi ambassador to Turkey, Khalid bin Salman, instructing him to give assurances to Khashoggi that he could safely pick up divorce documents from the consulate. He was murdered within “moments” of entering the building. One member of the hit-team then called a top aide of the crown prince to report that the “operation had been completed.”

The version of events that was belatedly given by the Saudi regime—after insisting for over two weeks that Khashoggi has left the consulate unharmed—is that the killing was not planned and was a “terrible mistake.” It resulted from a “fight” in which the journalist died, after which officials sought to “conceal” what happened.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir declared that a Saudi investigation had shown that “the crown prince” had “nothing to do with this issue.” Some 11 people have been arrested in Saudi Arabia and the regime has indicated it will apply the death penalty to some of them.

The Saudi claims were so fantastic that they were almost universally dismissed as an embarrassing tissue of lies within the American establishment. Trump’s endorsement of the transparent attempt to protect the crown prince has therefore provoked a raft of cynical criticism by his opponents in the Democratic Party and his own Republican Party, as well as in numerous media comments.

Despite all its war crimes, factions of the American capitalist class still desperately attempt to conceal the predatory character of its foreign policy with claims to be upholding “democracy,” the “rule of law” or “human rights.” They expected that the Trump administration would subject the Saudi regime to some further cosmetic wrist-slapping—without, of course, threatening US relations with the country.

A comment by CNN White House reporter Stephen Collinson summed up the concern over Trump’s “America First” statement. He complained that Trump’s statement amounted to “effectively repudiating the concept of American Exceptionalism, the idea that the US is embarked on a unique, moral mission exemplified by support for freedom, democracy and universal values.”

Collinson felt compelled to admit that “Washington’s actions, in the Vietnam War for instance or in the war on terror, have been seen by outsiders as falling well short of the lofty principles it has preached to others.” American relations with the brutal Saudi regime, he also confessed, “have often fallen on the hypocritical side of this line.”

But Trump, he bewailed, “is getting rid of any pretense.” His statement on Saudi Arabia “represented the latest show of force from a President who is showing signs of breaking free from any remaining restraints, and is increasingly confident in a course that has sown historic disruption.”

In the *New York Times*, Thomas Friedman, who was one of the chief propagandists for the illegal invasion of Iraq and has justified numerous other war crimes as “humanitarian” operations, sanctimoniously condemned Trump’s exoneration of the Saudi murder of Khashoggi. He asserted that he should have at least demanded some quid pro quo from the crown prince, such as the release of women imprisoned for driving and a ceasefire in the brutal Saudi air war against Yemen, which has killed tens of thousands and put millions at risk of starvation.

Friedman complained: “[W]hat is the intangible damage to our moral standing all over the world from such a grotesque blood-for-money transaction?”

The reality is that Trump, who is the personification of the parasitism and criminality of the American ruling class, could not care less what the world’s population think about the policies of his administration. To protect the interests of a billionaire corporate oligarchy, it has escalated the decades-long drive by US imperialism to prevent any power or group of powers challenging American global dominance.

Under Trump, the US has effectively declared economic war on the world and is openly threatening military conflict with Russia and China if they do not submit to American dictates. In the Middle East, it has mapped out a strategy of destroying the regional influence exerted by Iran—an agenda that is assisted by the closest possible relations with both Israel and the Saudi dictatorship, regardless of what crimes they commit.

The tattered and discredited “democratic” mask of American imperialism has well and truly been tossed into the gutter. That is the only real concern in the US ruling circles over Trump’s statement.