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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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03.08.2022

Macron greets killer Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Paris

On July 28, French President Emmanuel Macron greeted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Paris with full state honors. Macron's greeting of the man universally acknowledged to have ordered the grisly 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi underscores the fraud of French imperialism's democratic pretensions—in particular, its claims to be helping US-NATO defend democracy against Russia amid the war in Ukraine.



French President Emmanuel Macron, left, welcomes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for a dinner at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Thursday July 28, 2022. (AP Photo/Lewis Joly)

Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist who worked for the *Washington Post*, was tortured, murdered and dismembered on October 2, 2018 in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. He was seeking official documents in order to marry Turkish author Hatice Cengiz. His body parts were removed by a team of Saudi intelligence agents linked to bin Salman.

Saudi Arabia has recognized what is universally known: that bin Salman had Khashoggi butchered in cold blood. Saudi officials told Turkish investigators that a fight broke out, leading “to his death and to their attempt to conceal what happened.”

Nonetheless, Macron greeted bin Salman at the Elysée presidential palace and gave him a long handshake in front of the television cameras. Macron’s decision to meet bin Salman amounts to an official endorsement by the French head of state of crown prince’s public use of murder as a tool of domestic political repression. It confirms the criminalization of the capitalist regime in France and internationally.

Last week, Cengiz denounced Macron’s decision to greet bin Salman as a criminal gesture bound up with attempts to attain cheaper oil from Saudi Arabia. She said, “I am scandalized and outraged that Emmanuel Macron is receiving with all the honors the executioner of my fiancé, Jamal Khashoggi. The surge in energy prices because of the war in Ukraine cannot justify that—in the name of alleged realpolitik—we absolve the person responsible for Saudi policy towards political opponents.”

Treating bin Salman’s brazen murder of Khashoggi as completely unremarkable, the French press laid out a series of pragmatic geopolitical arguments in favor of greeting bin Salman in Paris.

The US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine means that Europe needs Middle East oil and gas to replace Russian energy exports, declared Camille Lons, a researcher at London’s International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank. “The war in Ukraine has put the energy-producing countries back in the spotlight, and they are taking advantage of it,” she said.

Others reported that Macron hopes to invite bin Salman to a summit in Baghdad, if US-Iran talks on a nuclear treaty break down.

It was perhaps CAPmena consulting firm executive François Touazi, who most crassly laid out for *Le Monde* the motives leading Macron and major French corporations to line up behind Saudi Arabia's killer prince. He said, "Bin Salman's big projects, the Neom [an eco-futurist mega-city] and beach resorts on the Red Sea are now getting going. With the rising price of oil, the kingdom's treasury is full. Our corporations cannot miss the boat."

Whatever the precise calculations, an undeniable stench of murder and hypocrisy hangs over the talks between Paris and Riyadh.

Bin Salman arrived in France at the newly-built Chateau Louis XIV in Louveciennes outside Paris near King Louis XIV's actual royal palace, now a national museum, at Versailles. Bin Salman allegedly owns the massive facility, having acquired it through a series of shell companies for €275 million, leading *Fortune* magazine to dub it "the world's most expensive home." In a ghoulish twist, it was built by Jamal Khashoggi's cousin, Emad, who runs a French property development business.

While he went into Paris for talks with Macron at the Elysée, bin Salman stayed at the garish Chateau Louis XVI throughout. He has, according to the *Times of India*, installed there "a gold-leafed fountain, a cinema, as well as an underwater glass chamber in the moat that resembles a giant aquarium with white leather sofas." A large detachment of French riot police, as well as private security guards ringed the Chateau Louis XIV during bin Salman's stay.

This grotesque display must be taken as a warning to workers in France and internationally. A president and a media establishment that can greet and celebrate a murderer like bin Salman are capable of any crime.

Indeed, the brazenness of the crown prince's visit is matched only by the hypocrisy of the French parliamentary opposition parties posturing as humanitarian critics of bin Salman.

Green party legislator Sandrine Rousseau said: "It shows we are ready to compromise on our values for oil. Saudi Arabia is a country that punishes homosexuality with the death penalty and shamelessly kills Yemen's civilian population."

Despite this the Greens have not called a single significant protest while Macron threatened to prosecute journalists who revealed that France was arming the Saudi monarchy for war in Yemen.

Danièle Obono, a member of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France party, said: "Putin attacks Ukraine: boycott! Bin Salman, accused of murdering journalist J. Khashoggi and of ordering attacks in Yemen in a war that has claimed over 300,000 lives: welcome. Hypocrites!"

In reality, the greatest political criminals are the imperialist powers and the petty-bourgeois parties who provide political cover for their wars. As bloody as bin Salman's record is, it pales in comparison to the 30 years of NATO wars that followed the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. NATO countries bombed, invaded or provoked civil wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Mali and beyond. These wars cost millions of lives, turned tens of millions into refugees and left entire societies shattered.

In this, Mélenchon himself played a significant role. He worked to call off protests against the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq as part of France's Socialist Party (PS) government at the time and was a PS minister when France invaded Afghanistan in 2001. He has endorsed the war in Mali and joined the French media chorus condemning Russia after the 2014 NATO-backed coup in Kiev led to the outbreak of civil war in Ukraine.

Trying to hide some of the stench of Macron's policy in an editorial titled "Mohammed bin Salman: an embarrassing visit," *Le Monde* complained: "Russian propaganda did not fail to exploit this episode to question Western intentions on Ukraine."

It continued: "Denunciations by a growing number of countries of the hypocrisy of Western positions based on different levels of indignation, according to whether it is targeting our geopolitical friends or enemies, are nothing new. The resentment has long been building up. The lies that justified the invasions of Iraq and then Libya have helped discredit the claims of Western democracies. There is a striking contrast between the international emotion and mobilization over the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the deafening silence since 2015 on the Saudi war in Yemen."

The reason for the “deafening silence” is that newspapers like *Le Monde* and its political allies every day denounce Russia while covering for Saudi Arabia. They do not object to the lies that they retail to the public in the pursuit of their imperialist geostrategic interests. Rather, they are angry that these lies are challenged and provoke opposition and disgust among masses of workers.

As Europe teeters on the verge of all-out world war between US-NATO and Russia, it is a warning of the utter rottenness of the ruling class. Paris is not only giving bin Salman carte blanche for his next crime, but signaling its willingness to perpetrate its own crimes on an even greater scale.

World Socialist 02.08.2022