

FO 360°

A black and white photograph of a vintage-style microphone. The microphone has a textured, mesh grille. Wisps of white smoke are rising from the top of the microphone, suggesting it is being silenced or that its voice is being suppressed. The microphone is mounted on a stand, and a black trapezoidal shape is superimposed over the lower part of the microphone, containing white text.

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FO 360°



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CONTENTS

About Fair Observer	5
Share Your Perspective	6
Jamal Khashoggi's Murder Damages Press Freedom Atul Singh	7
Is Jamal Khashoggi Really Dead? Rasheed Alameer	8
The Death of One Man Is a Tragedy Virgil Hawkins	10
The US Is in Uncharted Territory with Saudi Arabia Gary Grappo	13
Jamal Khashoggi: The Martyr Who Made Backlash Possible Peter Isackson	15
Why Erdogan Had to Act on Khashoggi Killing Nathaniel Handy	20
Continuing Jamal Khashoggi's Fight for Free Expression in the Arab World Rasheed Alameer	22
Jamal Khashoggi Shines Light on Arts Sector's Problem with Money Vanessa Stevens	24
The Walls Are Closing in on Free Media in the Arab World Bill Law	25
Jamal Khashoggi Continues to Haunt the World's Conscience Gary Grappo	27

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

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Jamal Khashoggi's Murder Damages Press Freedom

Atul Singh

October 2, 2019

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi is a symptom of declining press freedom and rising crimes against journalists.

In late 2018, Fair Observer published many articles on the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. In an editorial decision, we decided to publish a 360° series on the subject one year after his death. We are doing so because freedom of the press matters and his murder raises deeply uncomfortable questions about the nature of the world we live in.

The Story of Jamal Khashoggi

On October 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi stepped into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul never to return. Hatice Cengiz, his Turkish fiancée, kept waiting outside for more than 10 hours to no avail.

Khashoggi was a prominent Saudi journalist. He had covered major stories in the past such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of Osama bin Laden. Khashoggi had been close to the Saudi royal family and had even acted as an adviser to the government.

In 2017, the journalist fell out of favor in Saudi Arabia and went into self-imposed exile in the US. He began writing columns for The Washington Post. His last opinion piece was titled, "What the Arab world needs most is free expression" and argued for "a modern version of the old transnational media so citizens can be informed about global events." In a powerful article, Khashoggi bemoaned the Arab version of Iron Curtain "imposed not by external actors but through domestic forces vying for power."

Khashoggi's criticism of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Arab governments clearly touched a raw nerve. After his disappearance, Saudi Arabia

"consistently denied any knowledge of Khashoggi's fate." In an interview with Bloomberg, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman claimed that his understanding was that Khashoggi left the Saudi consulate "after a few minutes or one hour."

After Turkey presented mounting evidence that could not be ignored, Saudi Arabia changed its tune on October 20, 2018. It said Khashoggi had died in a fight resisting attempts to bring him back to Saudi Arabia. Yet the Saudis kept offering conflicting accounts till November 15 when they finally admitted that the journalist had been murdered in the consulate. The Saudis blamed "rogue individuals" for the murder, made a few arrests and conducted a trial behind closed doors.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that Khashoggi "was killed in cold blood by a death squad" and "that his murder was premeditated." Although Erdoğan exonerated King Salman, he maintained that the order to kill Khashoggi had come from "the highest levels of the Saudi government."

In June 2019, UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard came to a similar conclusion as Erdoğan. For her, Khashoggi's death "constituted an extrajudicial killing for which the state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [was] responsible." Callamard found there was "credible evidence" to warrant an investigation into Prince Mohammed and other high-level Saudi officials. She also argued that the prince should be subject to the targeted sanctions.

Why Does the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi Matter?

The killing of journalists is not new. The Committee to Protect Journalists has estimated that 1,335 journalists were murdered between 1992 and 2018. In 2017, UNESCO published a report on world trends in freedom of expression. It examined press freedom along four key dimensions: "(i) media freedom, (ii) media

pluralism, (iii) media independence and (iv) safety of journalists.”

The report looked at the period between 2012 and 2017. It found that, though the number of sources of information had increased, concentration of ownership of media companies and filtering effects of social media create “bubbles” where people neither access the truth nor other points of view. The report also found that media independence had weakened because of political persecution and economic pressures.

Most importantly, the report found the trends in “the physical, psychological and digital safety of journalists” extremely alarming. It concluded that crimes against journalists were on the rise. Between 2012 and 2016, two journalists died per week. It also found that impunity for such crimes was the norm with justice “in only one in 10 cases.”

The killing of a journalist in a consulate marks a new low. Not even Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin or Mao Zedong had someone killed and dismembered in an embassy or a consulate. This murder marked a complete disregard for international norms, human rights and press freedom. It shows that even living in the capital of the US and writing for The Washington Post was not enough of a safeguard against summary execution for an Arab journalist.

Until Khashoggi’s murder, many leading companies, newspapers and columnists were extolling Saudi Arabia’s modernizing efforts. They conspicuously ignored the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s record in Yemen, its iron fist in its Eastern Province and its treatment of dissidents. When the Saudi elite became “five-star prisoners at the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton” on suspicion of corruption, many analysts argued this was a step forward toward rule of law. It took the murder of a journalist in a consulate to dent that image.

Khashoggi’s murder demonstrates that co-optation and corruption are as big threats to a free press as political persecution and economic pressures. The tragedy reminds us that truth matters, that power corrupts and that press freedom is sacred.

***Atul Singh** is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer.

Is Jamal Khashoggi Really Dead?

Rasheed Alameer

October 10, 2018

Jamal Khashoggi, albeit neither a dissident nor an activist, was a free voice — enough to make him a persona non grata for the Saudi regime.

It is impossible to deny that we — “Saudi” dissidents and activists — were shocked when the news of the disappearance of the prominent journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, who was critical of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s regime, first broke. The shock became stronger when rumors and reports spread about the possibility of Khashoggi having been killed inside Saudi Arabia’s consulate in Istanbul on October 2. We are concerned and worried about his fate and closely follow new revelations about his fate.

We await the results of the investigations currently being conducted by the competent authorities in Turkey. Meanwhile, we can analyze the situation and the circumstances of Khashoggi’s disappearance and try to build a most plausible scenario of what could have possibly happened that day. I will provide my analysis based on the publicly available information and put it in context and in line with the past history of the Saudi government’s practices.

First, I believe the culprit behind Khashoggi’s disappearance is the government of Saudi Arabia; that is what most of the Saudi dissidents and activists believe. Khashoggi, albeit neither a dissident nor an activist, was a free voice — enough to make him a persona non grata for the Saudi regime. This is especially true given Khashoggi’s fame and widespread global audience provided by his Washington Post platform. This is very important because, believe

it or not, the Saudi regime cares deeply about its image and spends a lot of money on public relations campaigns to polish it.

Someone like Khashoggi might tarnish all of this effort in just one column, which he did, repeatedly. Moreover, at some phase in his career, Khashoggi happened to be part of the government and close to both the diplomatic and intelligence apparatuses when he was a media advisor to Prince Turki al-Faisal — who headed the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate between 1977 and 2001 — when al-Faisal was ambassador to the United Kingdom and then the United States. That makes him a moving receptacle of state secrets whom the Saudi regime will by no means tolerate walking about the world freely.

While Khashoggi may not defect and expose the secrets in his possession, they might unintentionally slip through when he speaks or writes, which is a nightmare for the Saudis. All in all, Khashoggi is a wanted unwanted voice for the regime. Riyadh will go to any lengths and measures to stop and incarcerate him, hence our belief that the Saudi government is the culprit in Khashoggi's disappearance.

How Did They Do It?

Now that we have established the culprit, there remains the question of what could have possibly happened. How did they do it? The most plausible scenario, based on the public information available and on the Saudi regime's modus operandi, is that Khashoggi has been abducted and forcibly moved to Saudi Arabia. It is possible that on his first visit to the consulate, he was made to feel safe so that he would come back thinking he would leave without any harm. They were prepared and expecting him on his second visit.

When he first went to the consulate on September 28, they possibly delayed his papers and then asked him to come back at a later date. Most likely the consul informed the Saudi intelligence that Khashoggi was at the consulate — if the Saudi intelligence was not tracking him

already. Since no one was expecting him on the first visit, it did not give them enough time to prepare the kidnapping, so the consul was instructed to make him come back, buying the perpetrators time to prepare.

How would they kidnap him? In 2004, the Saudi authorities kidnapped a dissident from the royal family in Switzerland. Prince Sultan bin Turki — nephew of King Fahad — was invited him for a tea with Abdulaziz bin Fahad, who was then secretary general of the royal court and the king's son. In that meeting, they had a discussion and asked him to return with them. When Turki refused, they injected him in the neck with some sort of an anesthetic — done by a doctor, most likely — and transported him from Geneva to Saudi Arabia.

I think this scenario is what most likely happened to Khashoggi. He could have either been injected with an anesthetic right away, when he was not paying attention, or someone could have slipped him a sedative in a drink and then introduced the long-term anesthetic into his body. Most likely all of this was done under the supervision of a doctor, because they don't want to harm or kill Khashoggi. And this is important. Here is how the Saudi regime thinks: They don't consider kidnapping a dissident being wrong — they see it is as a righteous act. And when they anesthetize him, they genuinely try not to kill him in the process. When you are going into surgery, you are doing it because it is good for the patient, and the anesthesia is part of it, so it is absolutely fine to do it, according to their moral code.

For the Saudi regime it is absolutely acceptable to kidnap Khashoggi, because they have done it on “their soil” (the consulate), because for them he is a criminal (any free outspoken Saudi is a criminal for the regime) and a wanted man, so they had the right to kidnap him. So between them, the Saudi authorities don't feel guilty because what they are doing is right and acceptable. Yes, it is not legal and contravenes international norms and law, but who cares as long as they manage to hide the truth forever.

Don't Let Us Perish

I highly doubt the reports that Khashoggi has been murdered. It is possible that he died during the anesthesia, and that is the only way that he could have died inside the consulate. If the Saudis wanted to assassinate him, why do it in the consulate? Plus, the Saudi regime is mostly known for abductions and not assassinations.

Why were there rumors that Khashoggi was murdered inside the consulate based on leaks from the Turkish authorities? Maybe because there is no evidence of him exiting the building and as such it would be a fair assumption to think he was murdered. The Turkish authorities might also have more information that they have not released yet and have based those assumptions on.

So, after the anesthesia, they must have put him in a diplomatic package and put him inside a car belonging to the consulate that was reportedly seen leaving the premises. In that car, there must have been a medical team to monitor his condition, and the package must have been open during the transit to the plane. A diplomatic package is inviolable as per the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations and cannot be inspected. This package could have been transported out of the country on a private plane. A team of 15 Saudis that arrived in Turkey that day and went to the consulate came on private jets. So, they could have taken Khashoggi back with them.

Once on the plane, the package would have been opened, and the medical team would have continued to take care of the prisoner. They could have either woken him up on the plane or kept him anesthetized until they landed in Saudi Arabia. Both are plausible scenarios. Once on Saudi soil, they could detain him. The black op is complete.

Now that the accusations have been elevated from kidnapping and abduction to assassination and murder, that does not give the Saudis room to admit that they have him. In other words, the Saudi regime will never reveal the whereabouts

and the fate of Khashoggi until he dies in its custody.

I don't believe that Khashoggi is literally dead. He is dead in another, and worse, sense. He is now a man without freedom or a voice to be heard. He is now in custody in Saudi Arabia and possibly subjected to torture. I am afraid he will remain a prisoner for the rest of his life, because the Saudi regime cannot afford to reveal the truth about the kidnapping.

All of this shows the extent to which the Saudi authorities are willing to go in order to silence any free mind and every free voice. This is alarming, and if the international community does not take measures to pressure Riyadh to reveal Khashoggi's whereabouts and fate, we will be heading down a dangerous path where the regime will feel empowered to do it again to any of the dissidents and activists abroad. There are not many of us, and we ask the world to not let our species perish.

***Rasheed Alameer** is a political dissident and activist from Saudi Arabia.

The Death of One Man Is a Tragedy

Virgil Hawkins

October 16, 2018

The sudden selective indignation regarding the actions of the Saudi regime raises concerns about how the news media handles atrocities across the world.

The disappearance of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul has sparked a media frenzy in much of the world. The New York Times has published vast amounts of coverage examining in detail a host of angles, from the incident itself to the political and corporate fallout in the US and abroad, and even

an opinion piece written by Khashoggi's fiancée, Hatice Cengiz.

In total, the newspaper has devoted some 50,000 words (and counting) to the story in the two weeks since it broke. This is roughly equivalent to the quantity of coverage in the same newspaper for the previous four months of Saudi-related issues combined — and those four months were hardly uneventful. During that period, the Saudi regime launched a major offensive on the strategic port of Hodeidah in Yemen; bombed a civilian bus, killing 40 children and 11 adults; lifted a ban on driving for women; dramatically broke off relations with Canada over a tweet; put on hold the initial public offering for its massive oil company, Aramco; and called for the death penalty for a female activist, among other things. So what is it about the disappearance and possible murder of Jamal Khashoggi that has made it so particularly newsworthy?

Mixed Messages

The US media's recent coverage of Saudi Arabia has been a combination of (apparently largely unfounded) optimism regarding political and social reform, cold strategic analysis of how the country fits in the region and its relationship with the US, and a rather matter-of-fact description of human rights abuses and potential war crimes.

A massive lobbying and public relations campaign by the regime has certainly helped promote a perception in the news that Saudi Arabia is liberalizing, and that the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, frequently referred to as MBS, is a reformer who deserves admiration. Coverage of the Saudi charm offensive seems to have been relatively positive, while to some it appears “fawning.” A 2017 opinion piece by Thomas Friedman in *The New York Times* announcing the arrival of a Saudi Arab Spring is a case in point. This was by no means the first time that the paper has suggested that change was coming to the kingdom.

This is not to say that the media has failed to report Saudi atrocities and human rights abuses. It is no secret, for example, that Saudi Arabia has

led a devastating air and ground offensive in large swathes of Yemen, along with an even more devastating land, air and sea blockade that has contributed to huge numbers of deaths, a record one million cholera infections and has left three-quarters of the entire population in dire need of humanitarian aid, much of which cannot be delivered.

While all parties in the conflict share responsibility for the suffering, a UN report strongly suggests that war crimes have been committed and singles out the Saudi and Emirati actions as causing the greatest civilian casualties. Nor is it a secret that Saudi Arabia locks up, and at times publicly beheads, critics of the regime on highly suspect charges — or sometimes no charges at all. These stories have been covered by *The New York Times* and its colleagues, and they can certainly be critical.

But coverage has tended to be rather limited in quantity and often tame in tone when compared to atrocities committed elsewhere, not least in cases in which the perpetrator is a perceived “enemy” of the US government. Since his rise to de-facto power, MBS has careened from one foreign policy blunder to another — from the full-scale military intervention in Yemen to the blockade on Qatar and the apparent kidnapping of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and, finally, to the Khashoggi incident it currently faces. And yet the tendency in the media on the whole has been to gloss over this, which can perhaps best be explained by the narrative around MBS as a young, bold and dynamic reformer, and by the country's status as a key US ally, buyer of weapons and provider of oil.

The Deal-Breaker

In 2017, when the kingdom held its first Future Investment Initiative, nicknamed Davos in the Desert, a *CNN Business* article had nothing but praise for the event and the future of the country. The trend continued as MBS visited the UK and the US accompanied by a supportive media, offering happy photo opportunities with a host of famous billionaires, including Jeff Bezos,

owner of The Washington Post. The constant stream of atrocities in Yemen and horrific repression within Saudi Arabia were no impediment to this support — it was business as usual with the kingdom.

When the second Davos in the Desert event was planned for October 2018, The New York Times had committed itself as a media sponsor, and other media partners included CNN, the Financial Times and Bloomberg; the owner of The Los Angeles Times was scheduled to attend. All that abruptly changed in the wake of the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi. Representatives of all of the aforementioned media corporations, along with a host of other current and potential investment partners, announced that they were no longer willing to take part in the event. CNN Business quoted a researcher at Chatham House calling the incident a deal-breaker for investors. The word applies equally to the news media and its dramatic change of heart in covering Saudi Arabia.

So why the change? Joseph Stalin allegedly once remarked that the death of one man is a tragedy, but the death of millions is a statistic. Millions of suffering, yet faceless Yemeni civilians are indeed all too often reduced to a statistic. On the other hand, Jamal Khashoggi was not just any ordinary individual. Since fleeing Saudi Arabia, he became a columnist with The Washington Post, was frequently interviewed by US and other media outlets, and was close to people in power both in the media and political circles. Surely, it hit close to home for the American media.

A Sudden Bout of Selective Indignation?

The shock and sensationalistic news value of what appears to be a gruesome murder mystery certainly has also played a role in the heavy coverage. Is Jamal Khashoggi alive or dead? Was he killed and then dismembered in the consulate? Where is his body? Then there is the cloak-and-dagger mystery of the so-called hit squad that flew in from Riyadh, the (unlikely) possibility that the murder was secretly recorded by the

victim via his Apple Watch, or that the consulate was bugged by Turkish spies.

The Turkish authorities' piecemeal leaking of information also kept interest high, including allegations that the Saudi team was carrying a bone saw, that there was torture and that there are recordings. The fact that so many unknowns remain after two weeks also serves to inflate the coverage. When US-made Saudi bombs were dropped on a bus killing 40 children, however, there was no mystery about it. The facts of the matter were quickly established, so there was little interest in pursuing the matter further.

The deliberate and brazen nature of the act (if proven true) also helps account for the indignation and resulting coverage. Bombings of hundreds of civilians can be explained away as a targeting accident of war, and even mass famine affecting millions of people can be portrayed as an unfortunate consequence of conflict and weather, for which blame can be spread around. A human rights activist beheaded in a public square can be labeled a terrorist or a drug dealer, if any explanation is required.

But the murder of a journalist, who was a known public figure in the US, at a consulate in a foreign country without taking the trouble to invent charges or hold a trial, is not something that can be simply explained away. Friedman, in response to the incident, writes that if the murder were indeed true, it “would be an unfathomable violation of norms of human decency, worse not in numbers but in principle than even the Yemen war.” This incredible feat of moral gymnastics tells us so much about the lens through which atrocities can be viewed by media agenda-setters.

Finally, media access has also meant that reporters can be on the ground and gather information. Journalists are rarely able to enter Saudi Arabia or Yemen, and although grainy images of public beheadings do emerge from time to time, they are usually lacking in terms of context, and follow-ups are rarely possible. In the case of Jamal Khashoggi's disappearance, journalists have been able to set up cameras in front of the Saudi consulate in Istanbul — at

times broadcasting live — and have been given access to a range of video clips associated with the incident, including footage of Khashoggi and his fiancée at the consulate, and the movements of the alleged hit squad.

Whatever the reasons, the sudden rise of selective indignation regarding the actions of the Saudi regime raises some serious concerns about how the news media handles atrocities throughout the world. The media's response to the Khashoggi incident, both in terms of the quantity and content of coverage and its participation in events in Saudi Arabia, is clearly not of a straw that broke the camel's back nature, but marks an abrupt turnaround. It should be examined and questioned.

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The US Is in Uncharted Territory with Saudi Arabia

Gary Grappo

October 18, 2018

The US must lead with a principled position following Jamal Khashoggi's assassination, but this will require a type of diplomacy not yet seen in the current administration.

Information about the shocking and brazen torture and execution of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi spills out now with stomach-churning regularity. All indications point to Saudi Arabia's top leadership's culpability. Unable to justify or explain the inconceivably barbaric and contemptible act, the Riyadh regime responded first with denial and then shifted to a new storyline to dodge what increasingly appears to be direct responsibility for this heinous criminality.

There are several aspects of the grisly crime that bear significantly on the character of the current Saudi regime, its future and the US-Saudi relationship. The first is that for Saudi Arabia, its relationship with the US is its oldest and most important.

There is no overstating its prominence in Saudi foreign, economic and security affairs. Since the founder of the modern Saudi state, King Abdul Aziz al-Saud, or Ibn Saud, first met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard the USS Quincy on the Great Bitter Lake outside the Suez Canal in the waning days of World War II, the US has been the one and only nation to which Saudi kings have turned for security, counsel and support. While also of vital strategic importance to the US, for the kingdom it is its foreign policy touchstone and security blanket.

A Series of Irrational Acts

Second, this incident must be viewed in light of other actions and behavior of the Saudi leadership since King Salman ascended to the throne in January 2015, and especially since his son, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), was promoted to crown prince in June 2017. There is the bloody civil war in Yemen, which, after more than three years, shows little prospect of ending despite billions expended by the Saudi government. The Saudi armed forces have been accused of repeated human rights violations in the war. There is also the inexplicable blockade of Qatar and consequential weakening of what had been the Middle East's most effective regional alliance, the Gulf Cooperation Council.

In November 2017, the Saudis forcibly detained the prime minister of Lebanon, Saad Harari, and forced him to issue a public resignation from Riyadh while on an official visit. In the same month, Saudi security authorities, acting on orders from MBS, detained nearly 200 Saudi business executives, including royal family members and senior officials, on charges of corruption. Many observers believe that the charges were trumped up to justify a purge of those suspected of harboring opposing

views. There have been multiple arrests of dissidents and critical bloggers inside the kingdom, too.

Then, last June, the Saudi leadership clashed with the government of Canada over its remarks critical of the kingdom's human rights record, including arrests of human rights advocates. Riyadh expelled the Canadian ambassador, withdrew Saudi students studying in Canada and severely curtailed its economic relations with Ottawa. And while Saudi Arabia's angst over bordering Iran is understandable, the Saudi leadership has remained adamantly opposed to any dialog with the Islamic Republic, ratcheting up regional tensions to a feverish pitch.

All of these seemed questionable and suspect at the time. But today they are clear indicators of a leadership with questionable judgement. It appears to be thrashing to protect itself from enemies — real and imagined — and to sanitize the public space of all criticism. Given such an approach, the only thing shocking about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi is its brazen, careless manner and calculated brutality.

Many questions surface in considering such an act. Has too much power been concentrated in the hands of one man? Has it led to effective disinhibition, in which the normal constraints of human beings — as well as leaders — are repressed, and all actions become justified just because the one in power can do them?

Questionable Judgment

Third, having by all accounts indeed committed this crime and now faced with calls from around the world for accountability and full transparency, the Saudi leadership faces one of its most existential crises in recent history. How does it respond in order to satisfy these demands, mollify critics and yet preserve the status quo in Saudi Arabia?

The Saudi leadership has always been purposely opaque — not unusual for a family that runs a country of the size, wealth and influence of the kingdom. It has generally done a creditable

job of avoiding crises, often relying on American advice and support.

Moreover, Saudi kings have relied on the counsel of the family's top princes, both those in government as well as out, in order to keep its foreign and domestic policies on a largely steady course. But with MBS being catapulted over family members to the kingdom's number two position and de facto decision maker, it isn't clear whether family members are even consulted today, and whether the crown prince enjoys their support the way his predecessors have.

Last year's round up, detention and purge of perceived MBS opponents no doubt did little to endear him. So, it may be fair to surmise that even if they are proffering advice, unless it accords with the crown prince's own instincts, it's likely disregarded.

Meanwhile, the US has stepped down from its historic role as counselor. Today, the Trump administration, represented before the Saudis by the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner, may be enabling Mohammed bin Salman. That would appear to be the case in Yemen, the blockade of Qatar and other matters. Reasons for that are myriad.

However, the administration wants to maintain Saudi support for its Iran policy — not a heavy lift for the Iran-phobic Saudi leadership — and is probably looking for ways to distinguish its overall Middle East policies from those of Donald Trump's predecessors. That suggests disengagement and turning the keys over to, in this case, the Saudis. It may be, therefore, that MBS felt he had a green light to continue his approach of eliminating opponents, like the influential and eloquent Jamal Khashoggi.

So, the leadership — the king and the crown prince — themselves at the center of attention now, must grapple with the decision of what to do to silence worldwide condemnation. How can this leadership genuinely hold accountable those responsible for Khashoggi's assassination but still maintain credibility and confidence outside and inside the kingdom?

US Senator Lindsey Graham described the crown prince as “unhinged” and a “rogue killer” and said he “must go.” The senator may be right in his view of meting out a suitable sentence for the unspeakable crime. But no sitting king — or crown prince acting in his stead — has been forced to abdicate since King Saud bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud in 1964.

The Upper Hand

Last and perhaps most important in this affair is what the US will do. The president has been loath to condemn or even criticize the Saudis, despite the mounting evidence. He prudently dispatched Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Riyadh, who elicited a commitment of transparency and accountability from the king and the crown prince. But this has never been a regime known for its transparency. Moreover, given that at least one of them has been implicated, how transparent can we expect the Saudi investigation to be?

For an administration that has gone out of its way to de-emphasize human rights in its foreign policy, this is an especially difficult issue. On the one hand, the Saudi-ordered, mafia-style “hit” on Khashoggi contravenes the very core of America’s values and crosses every line of acceptable human behavior. It demands a strong response. On the other, though, the Saudi relationship is a critical one for the US, and a diminished Saudi leadership or weaker government isn’t good for either country. It’s the textbook interests-versus-values tug of war in American foreign policy, only accentuated now because this administration pays little attention to American values.

One fact is clear: The US cannot be seen as complicit in or collaborating with a whitewash. Meeting with the Saudis as Pompeo did earlier this week was a sensible first step. Difficult issues are best addressed with Saudi Arabia in the privacy of a high-level diplomatic exchange. Addressing too much in the public eye will force the Saudis to withdraw, further depriving themselves of desperately needed perspective and

balance in this crisis. That is patently not in anyone’s interest.

If the US accepts anything less than full Saudi cooperation and accountability, it truly will be seen as abandoning the field to autocrats like Russia’s Vladimir Putin, North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, the Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte, Egypt’s Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro and the rest of the world’s thugs-in-waiting.

For all these reasons then, the Khashoggi affair may be as great a challenge for the US as it is for Saudi Arabia. However, America, as the indispensable ally of the kingdom, holds the upper hand. It can get what it wants. It must lead with a principled position reflecting American core values and then follow with actions necessary to ensure maintenance of the vital partnership. It is possible. But it will require a type of diplomacy not yet seen in this administration.

***Gary Grappo** is a former US ambassador and chairman of the Board of Directors at Fair Observer.

Jamal Khashoggi: The Martyr Who Made Backlash Possible

Peter Isackson

October 19, 2018

In his last ever article, Jamal Khashoggi lamented the lack of an “independent international forum” and “transnational media” in the Arab world.

In his final, posthumous column published by The Washington Post, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi complained about the public’s general acceptance of attacks by governments in the Arab world on freedom of the press. They are so frequent and widespread that the public has become inured and indifferent. “These actions no

longer carry the consequence of a backlash from the international community,” he wrote. “Instead, these actions may trigger condemnation quickly followed by silence.”

When the press first began to speak of Khashoggi’s failure to appear after a visit to the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, many in the media expressed their alarm and ran stories about it for two or three days and then began to go quiet when, following Saudi denials of any knowledge of Khashoggi’s fate, no further news was forthcoming. The pattern seemed confirmed. The world would move on to other dramas.

But the mystery deepened with the continued insistence of the Saudis that they knew nothing and had nothing to report, including the basic facts about how and when he left the consulate, as they claimed. Then, probably to the Saudis’ own surprise, the Turkish authorities revealed that they had evidence not only that the journalist had never left the consulate, but that he was most likely murdered inside the consulate.

Now the media had something to work with. Embarrassed by the revelation, the Saudis had a brief opportunity for damage control by admitting partial responsibility (i.e., the “botched interrogation” suggested some days later). All they needed to do would be to place the blame on a designated subordinate — the standard procedure of “plausible deniability. But by then they may have realized that the degree of toxicity of the event was such that the only viable strategy would be to continue stonewalling, hoping that Khashoggi’s own insight was correct, that his murder would simply “trigger condemnation quickly followed by silence.”

The Unraveling of Donald Trump’s Middle East Gambit?

This is where US President Donald Trump may have been unwittingly responsible for the definitive undermining of the reputation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), on whom Trump, or rather Jared Kushner, has based his grand vision of a new Middle East led by

Israel and Saudi Arabia, with Iran neutralized after regime change or simply reduced to rubble.

By failing to join one of his most vocal supporters, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, in expressing his moral indignation and forcing the Saudis to admit some level of accountability — if only to stabilize the increasingly embarrassing situation caused by their blanket denial — Trump has revealed to the world how focused his own values are on money and power to the exclusion of justice and human rights. He has run the risk of potentially splitting the fragile unity he had created in the Republican Party around his bombastic personal power.

As we wait to see the chain reaction of future events once the already evident facts are brought out into the open, observers will focus on how three threads of the story will play out: the damage inside Saudi Arabia to Mohammed bin Salman’s hold on power (after all he is “only” the crown prince); the damage done to Trump within in his party and to his party during the midterm elections in November; and the fate of the notorious peace plan for Palestine and Israel, engineered by Kushner which, according to reports, included a major role for Saudi Arabia.

After first speculating that there may have been “rogue killers,” which most observers believed was an allusion to the “botched interrogation” thesis, Trump has finally admitted that he “believes Jamal Khashoggi is dead.” He also tellingly revealed his disappointment that the story has remained in the public spotlight longer than he and MBS hoped or expected: “This one has caught the imagination of the world, unfortunately.” In an act of uncharacteristic patience, Trump now insists on waiting for the outcome of three investigations before making a “strong statement,” possibly in the hope that in the meantime Kanye West and Kim Kardashian will have drawn “the imagination of the world” to a more exciting subject.

Trump’s willingness to passively support as long as possible the Saudis’ stonewalling illustrates Khashoggi’s concern that the international community was no longer capable

of providing the “backlash” he felt was necessary to drive a wedge in Saudi Arabia’s despotic control of the press. As more and more economic partners, international firms and European ministers turn away from their commitment to the glitzy Future Investment Initiative in Saudi Arabia, something resembling a backlash finally seems to be taking place.

If the backlash continues to capture not just the imagination but also the moral indignation of the world, Khashoggi’s martyrdom may turn out to be a blow for freedom, opening a slight but possibly growing breach in the authoritarian control of the media that MBS has exercised. Could the journalist’s murder be for Saudi Arabia what the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi was for Tunisia’s Arab Spring in 2010? That seems unlikely, given the nature and the sheer wealth of the interests in place, but symbols and acts of martyrdom have been known to change the course of history, particularly in the Middle East.

How Free Is Any Press?

Describing how the media is manipulated in the Arab world, Jamal Khashoggi tells us: “[T]hese governments, whose very existence relies on the control of information, have aggressively blocked the Internet. They have also arrested local reporters and pressured advertisers to harm the revenue of specific publications.”

In the West it’s different, but only by a degree. As this author recently pointed out, quoting Jacob Rees-Mogg, a member of the British Conservative Party: “Governments want to control information. To do this they have elaborate systems for promoting themselves.” These include putting the media in a dependent and eventually compliant position.

The Washington Post is a prime example of this. The newspaper is known both for its heroic challenges to government (Watergate) and its compliant bending to the wishes of partisan insiders and even to Saudi Arabian interests. This soft or indirect control of information takes different forms, one of which Khashoggi mentions in his posthumous article: through the

pressure of advertisers, who combine with governments to present and enforce an official account of certain events and, more commonly, a normalized version of social values.

As the wealthiest man on earth, Amazon’s Jeff Bezos could pay to have Khashoggi write for The Washington Post, just as he pays for a number of establishment writers who promote establishment values, while excluding a wide range of celebrated thinkers and writers known for critiquing those values. US commercial news media is locked into a binary logic that pits Democrats against Republicans, liberals against conservatives and occasionally subdivides the drama into opposing clans within each of the parties.

Consequently, they confine all discussion of politics, society and economics within the purview of two traditional partisan establishment points of view, creating and often fomenting false drama that excludes any point of view, however seriously reasoned, that fails to fall within the categories of debate defined by the bi-partisan establishment. The news as a source of public debate is organized in the manner of a sporting event, designed to foment fandom for one team or the other, confining the public’s attention to recognized, official positions on the issues that those two teams consider important and focusing the public’s interest on the question of who will win and who will lose.

The website Media Bias/Fact Check offers this description of The Washington Post: “They often publish factual information that utilizes loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes) to favor liberal causes.” Of Fox News, it reports: “They may utilize strong loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes), publish misleading reports and omit reporting of information that may damage conservative causes. Some sources in this category may be untrustworthy.”

No writing is entirely trustworthy. All writing reflects someone’s point of view and loaded

words can be found in every discourse. But the damage of media bias comes more from the deliberate narrowing of perspective. It achieves a deeper effect through the consistent framing of issues in a way that invites the “loaded words” its public expects to hear, which provokes an emotional response.

Propaganda to Respectable Fake News

Jamal Khashoggi left this world dreaming of “an independent international forum, isolated from the influence of nationalist governments spreading hate through propaganda.” It is a dream that people in the West should share and extend. Alas, it remains a dream because reality has not been kind to the idea of independence. Recent history makes it clear that despite the variety of platforms in the so-called “free world” (free of what?), true independence is rare. When it does exist, it tends to be aggressively marginalized by its more successful opposite — commercial journalism — which we would be wise to get in the habit of calling our “dependent media.”

A single sentence in a recent article by Rick Newman of Yahoo Finance concerning the Khashoggi affair helps to clarify what we mean by Western media’s dependence on established interests, both government and private. Attempting to explain “why Trump is going soft on Saudi Arabia” (the title of the article), Newman writes: “The Khashoggi mess, however, could disrupt Trump’s Iran strategy just as he’s about to tighten the screws on the hard-line Islamic nation.”

In a context where the subject is both Saudi and Iran, an objective observer might legitimately pause and wonder which “hard-line Islamic nation” he is referring to: Iran or Saudi Arabia? Obviously it’s Iran. Why should that be? Because everyone knows and accepts that Iran is the enemy of the US and Saudi Arabia is its ally. The public is taught to think in binary categories, where only opposites exist (as in a sporting contest).

But if you ask any thinking person which of the two nations cited they would describe as the

most hardline or the most “Islamic,” after a bit of thought and research, the more obvious answer would be that it’s Saudi Arabia. Not only do women have fewer rights than in Shia Iran, but Wahhabi Saudi Arabia has for decades exported violent Islamic extremism and terrorism on an unparalleled scale, spawning both al-Qaeda and, to a degree, the Islamic State. As military historian Major Danny Sjursen complains, the extremists who killed soldiers under his command in Afghanistan were “too often armed and funded by the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” Is that how we choose our allies?

Separating Allies and Enemies

Westerners have been conditioned to think within the constraints of a culture and political ideology created and promoted by governments working — closely, intimately and, more often than not, outside of public view — with financial and industrial interests. As a group, they are more concerned about opportunities for business and power relationships than human rights or even the lives of their own soldiers. The technique for conditioning the public is, as mentioned above, fairly simple. Binary reasoning permits the presentation of any problem as a choice either between good and evil (by excluding all nuance) or between the lesser of two evils. This helps us divide the world into two camps: allies and enemies.

How do the public and the nation as a whole make that choice? That’s easy: “it’s the economy, stupid.” Do we really prefer Sunni Islam to Shia Islam? Few in the West have even a vague idea of the difference between those two versions of Islam and even fewer care. Do we compare their records on human rights or despotic rule? No, all we need to know is that the nation we end up calling the enemy can truthfully be accused of practices that can be labeled despotic. The fact that the ally may be equally as despotic, or even more so, has no importance because we presume that their leaders trust and honor us, meaning that they will not direct their despotic tendencies to curtail our own sacred freedom. After all, anyone

who does business with us must trust and honor us. What more do we need to know?

From the very time of its creation in 1932, Saudi Arabia accepted its role as a cog in the wheel of the complex arrangements established between powerful financial, political and industrial interests defined in the West. Iran, on the other hand, dared to revolt twice against the Western system. First when Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh attempted to nationalize Iran's oil industry. The democratically elected leader was quickly overthrown in 1953 through the collaborative work of American and British intelligence agencies. What was Mosaddegh's real crime? A wish for economic independence, which he felt Iran could achieve by nationalizing the oil industry. The US and Britain made what they called the "progressive" move of replacing a democratically elected leader by a monarch, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, a former playboy who easily slipped into the role of Western puppet and local tyrant.

The Making of an Enemy

When Imam Ruhollah Khomeini led the revolt that forced the shah into exile in 1979, the new Islamic regime had finally found a way to gain the independence that had been denied by the West in 1953, but this time with a vengeance and a deep resentment that required the combined force of religious conviction with the political sense of national identity to achieve its goal. This constituted a perfect recipe for a rigid, inflexible, theocratic, culturally authoritarian form of government, in contrast to the secularism of Mosaddegh. In some sense, Khomeini's Iran duplicated the template of Saudi Arabia, with similarly massive oil reserves but without a royal family.

The democratic West reacted with its usual shock and incomprehension at seeing another group of people refuse the benefits of economic cooperation with the powers that, in the name of democracy and free markets, rule the world and control its resources. This confirmed in many people's minds the perverse but facile

Islamophobic belief that Muslim populations prefer theocracy to democracy, even though it was the US and the UK who had put a halt to the growth of secular democracy in Iran — the same two nations that since the creation of the Saudi nation never ceased to endorse, or at least benignly tolerate, its despotic theocracy.

We must therefore ask ourselves: How does the establishment, including the media, maintain the public's perception of Saudi Arabia as a trusted ally and Iran as an existentially defined enemy?

As everyone knows, Iran was designated as a core member of George W. Bush's "axis of evil." It was also the country John McCain wanted to bomb without asking questions and the nation John Bolton is now promising to give "hell to pay." Donald Trump had no trouble canceling Barack Obama's Iran deal, not because there was an objective reason to do so, but because he knew that the majority of Americans believed Iran is, by definition, "the enemy."

Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are theocracies, but Iran has a democratically elected government, whereas Saudi is the world's last significant absolute monarchy. It doesn't matter how hardline, how Islamic (or Islamist), how brutal, cruel, unjust and committed to violence one or the other may be. Saudi Arabia wears our uniform. It's on our team. Iran isn't. In the words of English poet John Keats, "that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know." And for decades the public has asked no questions, not even after 9/11 when it became clear that both Osama bin Laden and 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens.

Realizing Jamal Khashoggi's Dream

In his final article, Jamal Khashoggi lamented the lack of an "independent international forum" and "transnational media" in the Arab world. There is a great diversity of media platforms in the West, but most of them — and those that are the most watched and read — are neither independent nor truly international. Publishing and broadcasting the news that aligns with corporate interests and

is careful not to disturb the ideological taste of its public is only a tiny step closer to independence than many government-funded and run media outlets.

That explains why celebrity news, entertainment and sports play such a prominent role in such media. They fill the time that might be more responsibly dedicated to raising issues of serious concern, issues that would invite people to think and eventually act democratically, but which might also risk disturbing the population's comfort level with an economy and political system managed, unbeknownst to them, by the corporate interests that program the news.

There are some exceptions. The BBC and Al Jazeera have established reputations for a high but far from perfect level of independence. Al Jazeera projects a more international vision of the world than BBC, which is still encumbered culturally by Britain's colonial heritage and its fundamentally English-speaking view of the world. Khashoggi mentions with approval the fact that "Qatar's government continues to support international news coverage." Had the article been published before his death, it would have been a sufficient pretext for the Saudis to assassinate him, since MBS made the decision in 2017 to brand Qatar — Riyadh's traditional Gulf partner and ally — a dangerous enemy, which he threatened to destroy and annex.

There are a number of online channels that have achieved independence but rarely correspond to Khashoggi's wish for "an independent international forum." This media organization, Fair Observer, actually does fall into that category. By refusing institutional sponsorship and advertising, and steering clear of any ideological orientation, Fair Observer deserves to be cited as an example of true independence. It gives voice to the widest variety of serious and frequently conflicting points of view, always in the interest of creating perspective, the very thing most commercial media outlets endeavor to suppress.

As an independent publication, Fair Observer refuses to put itself in a position in which it

would be beholden either to governments or private corporate interests. Alas, those two bastions of power remain the primary sources of the news people consume. As we have seen, governments and corporate interests understand that they wield the power not just to present the news stories that comfort the status quo but, more importantly, the power to shape public discourse and guide people's "thinking," even on questions as basic as: who is our ally and who is our enemy?

Would Jamal Khashoggi have submitted articles to Fair Observer? Nothing would have stopped him, although without Jeff Bezos' cash to keep the pot boiling, in contrast to The Washington Post, he couldn't have made a living doing so. Are there other voices inside or outside Saudi Arabia that can deliver the kind of independent and knowledgeable insight Khashoggi offered us? Perhaps few with the deep insider knowledge that Khashoggi had, but there are many valid perspectives that we need, more than ever, to learn about. Fair Observer welcomes them. And because it is a truly "international forum," it welcomes them from everywhere in the world.

***Peter Isackson** is the chief strategy officer at Fair Observer.

Why Erdogan Had to Act on Khashoggi Killing

Nathaniel Handy
October 24, 2018

The Khashoggi affair played right into Turkey's hands in the wider struggle for control of the Middle East.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey is once again back, center stage. The question this time is what he is doing there. The murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi has all the hallmarks

of the dark side of the modern security state. But the affair was largely a story about Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, its eternal ally and superpower benefactor, the United States.

The mix was that the whole affair played out on Turkish soil (if we exclude the soil beneath the Saudi Consulate). Until October 23, Erdogan remained tight-lipped. This is not surprising. Political elites are usually cautious when such intelligence and security activities spill into the public domain.

But this was an earthquake everyone knew was coming. You could hear the clock ticking. Why? Because — drip, drip drip — the leaks kept coming. Daily, the pro-government Turkish press was teasing out a story that the Saudis were clearly desperate to brush under the carpet. It was plain that more was going on here than met the eye.

There was speculation that such leaks were a warning from President Erdogan to the Saudi regime that Turkey could blow the story, but could also refrain with the right incentives. If so, were the incentives not forthcoming? Or was the plan all along to bleed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's regime dry?

Do Nothing and Be Damned

Let's look at this from the Turkish government's perspective. It mostly likely bugged the Saudi consulate. It had ample CCTV footage. It knew what had occurred, who had been involved and how. It could have said nothing, just like the Saudis. Just like what usually happens in such cases — especially in the open-ended case of a journalist who went missing.

But then, how likely was this story to stay hidden? Khashoggi didn't go missing in Saudi Arabia or even in some non-descript hotel or apartment. He went missing — as his Turkish fiancée made clear — inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. Given such circumstances, Ankara may well have calculated two things: Either the story would surface, or even if it didn't, it would look so dirty as to leave a bad stain on anyone

vaguely connected with it — including the Turkish authorities.

It's reasonable to question at this point why the Saudis even executed such a brazen and thinly disguised plot. Fifteen intelligence and security men flown in overnight — several with close ties to the crown prince — and whisked away again just after Khashoggi's disappearance. It's like they were asking to be held to ransom by Turkey. Was this an inept operation or simply the action of a regime that didn't expect to be closely scrutinized?

Whatever it was, for the Turkish government, the calculation seems to have been clear. This was an opportunity to be on the right side of the story. Not even President Erdogan's enemies could outmaneuver him here. To the charge of playing politics with a journalist's murder, the answer is simple: What would you have me do — conceal a crime when we have the evidence? To do so would simply put the Turkish president on par with the despots of the Middle East, and he knows it.

This was — at last — an opportunity not to be missed. Events have not been kind to Erdogan of late, but here was a gift. This is a situation in which the Turkish president perhaps feels vindicated after all the moral outrage that has been thrown at him from outside powers. It is a situation that plays out in two spheres: the Middle Eastern and Muslim world on one side, and the Western world on the other. In both, it plays well for Turkey.

Since the days of Turkey's soft power outreach in the Middle East, prior to the Arab uprisings of 2010-11, the Turkish government has vied with Saudi Arabia for the mantle of leader of the Sunni world, if not the wider Muslim world. Such rivalry appeared to have been somewhat eclipsed by the Syrian Civil War, which turned Saudi Arabia and Turkey into potential allies against the Iranian backing of Shia regimes in Syria and Iraq.

But look more closely and this was never the case. Erdogan, with his close affinity to the Muslim Brotherhood, was never in the Saudi

camp. The apparent triumph of political Islam during the early days of the Arab uprisings was a triumph for Turkey and Iran, not for Saudi Arabia. It was the Saudis who gave the nod to the 2013 coup d'état in Egypt, removing the Muslim Brotherhood from power after then-Prime Minister Erdogan's high-profile visit and endorsement of the Brotherhood.

For all the ambiguities of the Turkish-Iranian relationship, the Saudi-led assault on Iranian interests, the blockade of Qatar in 2017, and the drive toward an American-Israeli-Saudi understanding over Palestine and the future Middle East order is an attack on political Islam and a threat to Turkey. In all these Saudi actions, Ankara has been a robust critic and supporter of the opposing side. President Erdogan has also been a steadfast champion of the Palestinian cause, in particular that of the beleaguered Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

A Boost to Turkey's Moral Standing

Given the erratic nature of the Saudi regime under Mohammed bin Salman's guidance and its apparent willingness to raise stakes and tensions across the region, it seems somewhat surprising that they were not expecting some mudslinging. Yet in the grand scheme of things, that may not have seemed so bad. After all, the Khashoggi affair appears to have had negligible impact of the popularity of the crown prince at home. In fact, his agenda of social liberties for the middle classes is having the converse effect. It is dampening dissent.

What's more, in the regional power struggle that has been laid bare by the Arab uprisings, power matters more than popularity to the Saudi regime. Saudi Arabia is an autocratic monarchy. The Saudis are also the key US ally, and that is their ace. Erdogan is a political figure of a very different type. He is a populist, elected to his office. He is instinctively against the US system of autocratic alliances in the Middle East, and he knows he has popular support in that.

The Khashoggi affair will not bring the Saudis to heel. That's because, as Ankara well knows, its

Western backers and arms suppliers will very soon find ways to circumnavigate the awkward moral questions surrounding the murder, as they have so many other moral questions in relation to Saudi Arabia. That is not what motivates President Erdogan. What motivates him is the opportunity to lead in the region, to take the moral high ground that lies so vacant, and in doing so to expose the Saudis and their Western backers to the popular verdict.

***Nathaniel Handy** is a writer and academic with over 10 years of experience in international print and broadcast media.

Continuing Jamal Khashoggi's Fight for Free Expression in the Arab World

Rasheed Alameer

October 26, 2018

When most of the citizens are misinformed and controlled through the government narrative, it is easy for the dictator to control, and keep controlling, the population.

I was amongst those who were in denial about the possible murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul earlier this month. It was not because I think the Saudi regime is not capable of murder, but because it would be a bad decision to invite a critic into the country's diplomatic mission in order to murder him. Also, if I am being honest, I did not want to believe it.

Nevertheless, our worst fears have been confirmed, and we have to accept what happened. On October 17, The Washington Post published Khashoggi's last column which it had received from his translator a few days after his disappearance. In what were to be his last words, Jamal, as if prescient that this could be his final

public statement, was reflecting on the dire state of freedom of expression in the Arab world and its impact on our lives. The fight for freedom, including freedom of expression, is one of the common causes we, Saudi dissidents and critics, stand united in.

Picking up from where Jamal Khashoggi left off, the Arab world needs to be informed. In other words, all we need is freedom of expression, for it is the way of disseminating and sharing of knowledge and information. In his touching last words, Khashoggi emphasized the need to provide a platform for Arab voices to be heard. It is absolutely true that at the core of the problems that we face in the Arab world is the fact that citizens are uninformed, or misinformed. Take, for example, the misinformation campaign that surrounded the Qatar crisis. This is relevant on so many levels and explains most of the development issues we have, and why we are still either developing or undeveloped nations.

Across the Arab world, people are being suffocated, and we have had enough of our regimes' oppression. We are devoid of the right to freely express and share our opinions, let alone the right to participate in governing our own affairs. When the Arab Spring broke in 2010-11, we were full of hope that a wave of change was finally coming our way. But as the world witnessed, this wave was either kept at bay (Egypt, Yemen), or put down with brutal crackdowns (Syria, Bahrain). Tunisia was the only success story. The Arab Spring and the revolutions it produced are one way in which change could happen within the political systems across the Middle East. The other way is a slow, guided and deliberate transformation.

For this transformation to happen, an essential element is to have informed participants, for in an ideal world, a true and just democracy that we all dream of is hinged on the inclusion of all citizens in the political process. However, this is not relevant for the current state of politics across the region where, democratically speaking, the standard falls below absolute zero.

What is relevant is the importance of having informed citizens as a precursor to change. When most of the citizens are misinformed and controlled through the government narrative, it is easy for the dictator to control, and keep controlling, the population. For example, just a day after its launch in 2015, the Bahraini authorities have ordered the shutting down of Al Arab TV channel, then under Khashoggi's management. The reason for censorship was an interview with a figure from Bahrain's Shia opposition.

A stark example of this approach is also found in the way the Saudi media has covered the disappearance and presumed murder of Khashoggi before finally admitting he was killed inside the consulate. The whole narrative revolved around a conspiracy theory in which the state of Qatar and Khashoggi's fiancée were to blame. The story went that the journalist had disappeared after he left the consulate and was kidnapped by Qatar in order to initiate a diplomatic rift and a conflict between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. You couldn't see any other version of events in the Saudi media.

Even columnists and writers capitalized on this tragedy — or, more precisely, crime — to defend and praise the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), who is largely believed to have been involved in the murder plot. Because of this, the Saudis did (and do) genuinely believe that MBS is innocent, and that the government is under an unjust attack.

So, if a government manages to misinform its public about what happened to Khashoggi so easily, even though the prevalent counternarrative is much stronger and supported by evidence and logic, imagine how easy it is to misinform the public on other matters.

However, we, the change-makers — dissidents and activists — believe that we can counter this brutal attack on the access to information thanks to the internet, using Twitter and other information-sharing platforms to spread the counternarrative that governments try to block. These are also platforms to freely voice

our opinions and takes on public affairs (for lack of alternative forums like parliament). Outlets like Al Jazeera also fill this gap. The Qatari news network has revolutionized news coverage in the Arab region. It is today the number one source for a holistic coverage of events in the Arab world and beyond and a source of reliable information. As such, it constitutes an existential threat to regimes like that of the House of Saud, and that is why it comes under attack by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Jamal Khashoggi's last words are wisdom. His sound analysis is a reflection of a deep insight into the problem and the solution. We all share his position and we will work to attain our rights starting by freedom of expression.

***Rasheed Alameer** is a political dissident and activist from Saudi Arabia.

Jamal Khashoggi Shines Light on Arts Sector's Problem with Money

Vanessa Stevens

November 7, 2018

With funding cuts that have hit cultural sectors, some museums, galleries and universities are accepting money from politically unsavory donors.

In the wake of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's death, Western governments are re-evaluating their links with Saudi Arabia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has suspended arms sales to the kingdom, while the US is mulling sanctions over what President Donald Trump described as the "worst cover-up in history."

Yet amid all the high-level political maneuvering, the arts sector has found itself, somewhat surprisingly, at the center of the backlash. Museums and galleries in London and New York have come under fire for their decision

to accept Saudi money, the latest example of the murky relationship between money and high culture.

Art has been a centerpiece of Saudi Arabia's attempts to expand its ties with the West under its bombastic young leader Mohammed bin Salman. The crown prince himself launched the Misk Art Institute in 2017, with a pledge to create "Saudi Arabia's leading platform for grassroots cultural production, diplomacy and exchange." Activists described it as little more than "window-dressing," designed to hide the kingdom's unseemly repression behind a veil of high-minded liberalism.

Despite these concerns, the art world embraced the new institute. In 2018, Misk secured Saudi Arabia's first-ever space at the Venice Biennale, one of the world's most influential visual art exhibitions.

Even more remarkably, several of New York's most famous galleries agreed to participate in the Misk-backed Arab Art and Education Initiative (AAEI), which purports "to build greater understanding between the United States and the Arab world." The galleries have scheduled a network of events, the largest of which is the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition, "Syria, Then and Now: Stories from Refugees a Century Apart," which opened earlier this month and is set to run until January. The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Columbia University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art are all hosting their own autumnal events, ranging from explorations of the Arab avant-garde to symposia on Islamic culture.

Now, the New York art world has washed its hands of Riyadh. The Met and Brooklyn museums have both rejected Misk's funding for their Middle East programs, while Columbia has postponed a talk by renowned Saudi artist Ahmed Mater, one of the institute's leading figures, until a time "more conducive to the academic dialogue."

Yet this blackballing only came after a period of very public procrastination. For days, the Met and Brooklyn museums maintained a wait-and-

see approach amid fierce media scrutiny, only severing ties when evidence of foul play became overwhelming and politicians had begun to talk about sanctions.

In London, the Natural History Museum faced similar scrutiny over a reception for the Saudi Embassy on October 11. Writing in *The Guardian*, British columnist Owen Jones called for a protest outside the event, saying the fact that the museum is “hosting an evening of celebration for one of the most extreme regimes on Earth while Yemeni children starve to death is beneath contempt.” Even though Jones’ column helped attract a major demonstration, the Natural History Museum chose to go ahead with the event, describing Saudi Arabia as an “important source of external funding.”

While it’s easy to condemn the Western arts community for its tardiness in condemning Riyadh, its stance simply reflects the fact that, for cultural organizations, principles can be an expensive luxury. Wealthy, powerful and politically unsavory individuals have long used museums, galleries and academic bodies to boost their own image, and the scale of their patronage makes it extremely difficult to cut the cord.

Sackler and South Africa

A case in point is the Sackler scandal, which erupted almost 12 months ago with articles alleging that the billionaire dynasty had fueled the world’s opioid crisis by marketing highly addictive painkillers. Like the Khashoggi affair, the reports sparked outrage in both London and New York, given the Sackler family’s huge investment in the two cities’ cultural communities. One British columnist even described the Sacklers as “world-class drug pushers” and likened them to “cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar.”

Yet, despite the toxic publicity, arts bosses on both sides of the Atlantic have been reluctant to turn their backs on Sackler. Given the family is reported to have invested £80 million in the British arts scene alone, it’s easy to understand why.

A similar dilemma has befallen universities in South Africa and the UK over their ties to imperial magnate Cecil Rhodes, whose tenure as governor of Cape Colony in the late 19th century is seen by critics as a precursor to apartheid. A student-led campaign entitled “Rhodes Must Fall,” which erupted in 2015 over a statue in Cape Town, grew into a wider protest centering on Oxford University, which runs a scholarship program bequeathed by, and named after, Rhodes.

Although many students argued that the program — intended for students born in the former British Empire — should be reassessed or renamed, others suggested it should focus on the cultural impact of Rhodes’ money, and not its dubious origins. Three years on from the initial protests, the program (and the statue of Rhodes at his former Oxford college) remains untouched.

It’s certainly fair to ask why such institutions, which are supposed to promote fair-minded, progressive values, appear so willing to endorse those who reject them. But given the funding cuts that have hit the cultural sectors in both Britain and America, those charged with running today’s museums, galleries and universities may argue they have no other choice but to accept these donors — and stand by them when their money suddenly gets dirty.

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The Walls Are Closing in on Free Media in the Arab World

Bill Law

November 8, 2018

We are at a very low point for journalism in the Gulf and the wider Middle East.

My thoughts are with Hatice Cengiz and Jamal Khashoggi’s family at this very painful time.

The job of journalists is to ask questions, to speak truth to power, to question authority. This has always been a very difficult struggle in the Gulf and wider Middle East, but this is what Jamal Khashoggi was committed to. He believed with great courage and passion that the way to achieve a better place for his country and society was to strive for an independent and free media. He was a pragmatist who understood well the limits of just how far he could push that narrative on, but he never, ever gave up pushing.

He was a brave and dedicated journalist and a warm and funny man.

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi does tremendous damage to the struggle to create a free and independent media in the Gulf and Arab worlds. It has already suffered so many grievous setbacks. To name but one, the Bahraini news site Al Wasat, the only truly independent voice in the Gulf, was shuttered by the authorities in the summer of 2017 with scarcely a murmur here in the West.

In 2011, Karim Fakhawi, Al Wasat's co-founder, was beaten to death in detention by the police when he went to complain about his house being bulldozed. How quickly Karim's fate was forgotten. In 2017 the UAE sentenced a Jordanian journalist Tayseer Al Najjar to three years in jail and a huge fine for "insulting the symbols of the state." In January of this year, Lebanese journalist Hanin Ghaddar was sentenced in absentia by a military court for insulting the armed forces. How discouraging is that given the relative level of freedom the media enjoys in Lebanon?

Under the guise of security, open criticism and free media are being inexorably crushed. A friend of mine in the region said it is as if the walls are closing in: "We cannot breathe." It has become a grim narrative arc, one that began with modest gains and hope for a freer media environment in the early part of this century but — especially after 2011 and the events of what has been called the Arab Spring — spirals downward to the appalling murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

It is telling that a chief demand of the Saudis and the Emiratis when they launched their land, air and sea blockade of Qatar last June, joined by the Egyptians and the Bahrainis, was the shuttering of Al Jazeera. The news network is not without its faults, but thank goodness that Qatar has withstood the siege — even Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS, has had to acknowledge that — and Al Jazeera remains safe.

Nonetheless, we are at a very low point for journalism in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. In my nearly 20 years of covering the region, I can think of no time when the struggle for free media has been so grievously wounded and so seriously set back.

The killing of Jamal Khashoggi — especially if the man I and many others believe is responsible for his death, MBS, is allowed to get away with it, as I fear now seems the case — will only empower further atrocities and reprisals. The tame media will reflect the views and attitudes of the ruling families. Those journalists who want to ask questions dare not.

And silence will not be an option. Those who stay silent because they cannot stomach parroting lies will be seen as traitors or, as the president of the United States calls honest journalists, "enemies of the people." In Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain the media are the slaves of their masters. It is a new form of Stalinism — Gulf Stalinism — whereby the media become the mouthpiece of the rulers.

For the sake of my murdered colleague, I do not want to end on a note of pessimism, because to do so would be to acknowledge his death was in vain. It was not. What he believed in, what he stood for and wrote about, and what he died for is the way forward. The Gulf and its citizens and those throughout the Middle East will only realize their full potential in a society where a free media flourishes. That is what Jamal passionately believed. And he was right. Jamal is a martyr to that noble cause.

Dictators and their lies do not endure. Speaking truth to power, even with all the terrible

consequences it entails for journalists, ultimately brings their lives crashing down around them.

Thank you, Jamal, for your great and courageous journalism, your dedication, your commitment, your humor and your kindness. Know that you will not be forgotten, and that your death is not in vain. In your name the cause of free media in the Gulf and wider Middle East will carry on. Its victory will be your lasting legacy.

***Bill Law** is a former BBC and Sony award-winning journalist.

Jamal Khashoggi Continues to Haunt the World's Conscience

Gary Grappo

October 2, 2019

One year after his grisly execution by a hit squad, the memory of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and his aspirations for the people of Saudi Arabia haunt the world's collective conscience.

On October 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi expatriate journalist, walked into the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. What then transpired resembled a 1920s American gangland-style killing, complete with the victim's final pleadings, the executioners' harsh words and the chilling sound of a bone saw dismembering the body.

We are fittingly reminded of the events of that horrific day by admirable reporting by the world media but none more so than The Washington Post, for which Khashoggi wrote on a semi-regular basis. On this anniversary, other media have come forward with their own memorials and reporting, including a CBS 60 Minutes interview with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), a two-hour PBS Frontline exposé on the incident and the crown prince's role, and an

especially powerful tribute in Time by Khashoggi's fiancée, Hatice Cengiz.

Repression Persists

Many others around the world are doing the same. When a government sets out to eliminate a journalist for writing critiques of that government, the world media and governments that embrace free speech must speak out. But as despicably brutal as Jamal Khashoggi's murder was, we must not forget that 55 other journalists were killed in 2018 and 16 so far in 2019, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Khashoggi was but a symptom, while the disease of official, ruthless government repression of free speech persists.

Aside from the media's commendable effort to keep the memory of Khashoggi alive, two things are particularly striking after one year. First, the event has become the definitive signpost of Saudi Arabia's undeniable descent into abject authoritarianism. The government and MBS continue to maintain the crown prince's innocence in the murder. The CIA, the UN special rapporteur and the US Senate insist otherwise, arguing that in Saudi Arabia's hyper-hierarchical decision-making structure, the hit could not have occurred without the knowledge of or authorization by Mohammed bin Salman.

The crown prince is the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia. He controls economic and oil policies, all the armed forces, the security and intelligence forces, and has completely marginalized the rest of the Saudi senior princes — all a first in the 87-year-old kingdom's history since its founder, Abdul Aziz al-Saud. The fact that MBS may accept responsibility for the murder obfuscates his continuing refusal to admit he either ordered or was aware of it beforehand. His explanation follows several ludicrously mendacious versions touted by the Saudi government since last year, all disproven by subsequent revelations. Even US President Donald Trump couldn't help describing these

pathetic attempts as “the worst cover-up in the history of cover-ups.”

Meanwhile, a court case against some of the accused reportedly proceeds in secret. The whereabouts of others implicated in the killing, including MBS’ close aide Saud al-Qahtani, remain unknown. If justice is ever done — increasingly unlikely given current circumstances — to any of those involved, the world will probably never know.

Khashoggi’s murder should not distract us from the ongoing persecution and imprisonment of Saudi women, dissidents, bloggers and others who have also bravely spoken out against the crown prince’s newly-established authoritarianism. Khashoggi once wrote: “Saudi Arabia wasn’t always this repressive. Now it’s unbearable.” The sister of an imprisoned Saudi women’s rights advocate underscores Khashoggi’s fear, describing the kingdom today as a “police state.”

During the violent rampage of al-Qaeda in the kingdom between 2003 and 2005, Saudi citizens trusted their security forces to protect them and ferret out the terrorists. The task was far from easy.

At that time, I was serving as deputy ambassador at the US Embassy in the kingdom. In the course of one incident — one of many that had sent residents into abject panic for their lives — when Saudi authorities suspected that terrorists were hiding in a particular neighborhood of Riyadh, I asked a senior official if they had considered a house-to-house search. His response impressed me: “We cannot violate the privacy and dignity of Saudi households without evidence.” In Mohammed bin Salman’s Saudi Arabia, the days of household sanctity or personal dignity are things of the past.

The world should not be confused by MBS’ so-called cultural liberation of the kingdom — the outdoor concerts, newly-opened movie theaters, women driving and lowered religious policing — or ambitious economic plans. They are his version of Rome’s “bread and circuses.” Politics — whether a misbegotten war in Yemen,

roundup and shakedown of influential businessmen and officials in a Riyadh luxury hotel, harmless blogs on social media or genuine freedom for Saudi women — are strictly off-limits. Discussion of such matters is punishable by imprisonment, torture or even death. It’s the Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping models, MBS-style.

American Betrayal

The second factor lingering from Khashoggi’s tragic death is the perhaps equally tragic silence of the country that he hoped Saudi Arabia would one day come to emulate, the United States. Under President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, America is vitiating one of its founding principles: free speech. Trump and Pompeo have gone to great pains to shield MBS from an increasingly vociferous Congress not yet ready to surrender its values. The president ostensibly has done it for billions of dollars in military weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, the modern-day version of 30 pieces of silver.

The Trump administration’s position remains all the more perplexing in light of the findings of the CIA and unanimous consent of the Senate as to the guilt of MBS. It would seem that the president is as impervious to America’s institutions as he is to its values.

Jamal Khashoggi’s death may serve as a signpost too for the US as it confronts the rise of authoritarianism worldwide. Should Moscow, Tehran, Damascus, Beijing, Budapest, Warsaw, Cairo, Manila, Caracas, Managua and Riyadh all take heart now in their new-found friend in the heart of liberty and democracy, the US? If so, then we should expect many more deaths to follow. Which might be just what the authoritarians are wishing for. In the words of the modern era’s authoritarian role model, Joseph Stalin, “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.”

Before one journalist’s brutal death is relegated to a statistic, we should remind ourselves of the ideals he stood for, wrote about and dreamed for his fellow Saudis and for all the

people of the Middle East. Those are the reasons that Mohammed bin Salman wanted his life extinguished. But, of course, ideas cannot be extinguished. As long as Saudi Arabia, the US and other governments turn away from his death, the longer all peoples struggling for genuine freedom shall be haunted by it.

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