

The Saudis and the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi (Part Two)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The killing of Jamal Khashoggi reminds us that the Saudi rulers, and the Crown Prince, are well-versed in the use of violence. They are determined to keep themselves in power, and to keep the colossal wealth to which they help themselves. The 15,000 Saudi royals are collectively worth \$1.7 trillion; they are not about to let go of any of it. Jamal Khashoggi, though not a royal, began life as well-connected as any commoner in Saudi Arabia could be. His grandfather was the personal physician to King Abdelaziz Al Saud. His uncle was Adnan Khashoggi, who through his connections in the Saudi government made \$4 billion dollars as an arms dealer. His cousin was Dodi Fayed, Princess Diana's last boyfriend, and the son of the billionaire businessman Mohamed Fayed.

Khashoggi has been a leading journalist since the 1970s. He's been the chief editor of Al Madina (one of the oldest papers in the kingdom), worked as a columnist for Al-Arabiya, served as a media advisor to Prince Turki al Faisal when he was the Saudi ambassador to the United States, and has been a frequent guest both on Saudi television and on such international channels as MBC, BBC, Al Jazeera, and Dubai TV. He became the editor-in-chief of Al Watan twice, and on the second occasion, he quickly got into hot water for publishing a column by the poet Ibrahim al-Almaee challenging the basic Salafi premises. This led to Khashoggi's seemingly forced resignation. On May 17, 2010, Al Watan announced that Khashoggi resigned as editor-in-chief "to focus on his personal projects." However, it is thought that he was forced to resign due to official displeasure with articles published in the paper that were

critical of the Kingdom's harsh Islamic rules; the one by al-Almaee was the last straw.

In December 2016, the Independent, citing a report from Middle East Eye, said Khashoggi had been banned by Saudi Arabian authorities from publishing or appearing on television "for criticising US President-elect Donald Trump." That led Khashoggi to move permanently to the United States.

Khashoggi began writing for the Washington Post in September 2017, and still was contributing pieces up to the time of his death. In the Post, he criticized the Saudi-led blockade against Qatar, Saudi Arabia's dispute with Lebanon, Saudi Arabia's diplomatic dispute with Canada, and the Kingdom's crackdown on dissent and the media. But he also supported some of Crown Prince's reforms, such as allowing women to drive. He condemned the arrest of Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, and several other women's rights advocates involved in the women-to-drive movement and the anti male-guardianship campaign. He opposed the Saudi-Israel alliance.

By 2017, Khashoggi, who had two million Twitter followers, was the best known pundit in the Arab world. He has been hailed in the West as a progressive, but that is a case of misunderstanding his aims. Khashoggi believed in spreading Islamic rule, the same goal as that of any Jihadi, but he wanted to achieve that goal through political Islam. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and remained true to it, even praising it in a Washington Post column. Some described him as the de facto leader of the Saudi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Crown Prince, on the other hand, believes that the Muslim Brotherhood is a danger to the Kingdom, that is, to his family's continued rule.

Khashoggi flourished in Washington during the last year. He became a regular guest on the major TV news networks in Britain and the United States, as well as a columnist for the Washington Post. In 2018 Khashoggi established a new political

party, in the West, called Democracy for the Arab World Now, which – had he lived – could have become a major political threat to Crown Prince Mohammed.

During this past year, there have been many Saudi emissaries – “businessmen” – who met with Khashoggi in Washington, to promise him he would be safe if he returned to the Kingdom; the Crown Prince, too, offered to make him an “advisor” if only he would return. He turned them all down, telling a friend that he would have to have been crazy to believe their assurances.

Khashoggi was not a secularist, not a Saudi Ataturk, as some in the West seem to think. He believed in Islam and wanted it to spread, but to do so through “democratic” means – the “political Islam” of, for example, Mohamed Morsi in Egypt or Rachid Ghannouchi in Tunisia. He disliked the Saudi family’s censorship of the media; he believed that criticism might weaken the hold of the Al-Saud, but strengthen the sinews of the state and of the Muslim Brotherhood. He knew how corrupt the Saudi system was, and knew, too, how unforgiving the Crown Prince could be. Yet he still maintained his faith that there were some limits to Saudi ruthlessness, which is why, on October 2, he went to the consulate in Istanbul. We see – as he suddenly saw, just before the murderers started in on him – that he was wrong.

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