

# US Slap on the Wrist Response to Khashoggi's Murder

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Global Research, October 25, 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

*There's virtually no doubt that Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) ordered Jamal Khashoggi's brutal abduction and murder.*

No lower level regime officials would dare order elimination of a prominent figure within or outside kingdom borders without his authorization – how all despotic states operate.

Trump, Pompeo and Bolton failed to blame king Salman or MBS for the incident. The secretary of state and Treasury secretary Mnuchin schmoozed with them in Riyadh, clearly showing US/Saudi relations remain solid. Khashoggi's murder did nothing to alter the longstanding alliance.

On Tuesday, Trump stopped short of blaming MBS for the incident, saying

“(w)hoever thought of (killing Khashoggi), I think is in big trouble.”

“Somebody really messed up. And they had the worst coverup ever...There should have never been an execution or a cover-up because it should have never happened. It was a total fiasco.”

Interviewed by the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, Trump said he won't suspend or end lucrative US contracts with the kingdom in response to the incident, mainly arms sales.

He's convinced King Salman didn't know about the killing in advance. Asked about likely MBS responsibility for what happened, for the first time he suggested it's possible saying:

“Well, the prince is running things over there more so at this stage. He's running things and so if anybody were going to be, it would be him.”

He spoke to MBS by phone, saying:

“My first question to him was, ‘Did you know anything about it in terms of the initial planning?’”

MBS replied no.

“I said, ‘Where did it start?’ And he said it started at lower levels.”

Asked if he believed the crown prince's denial, DLT said

"I want to believe them. I really want to believe them."

At the same time, his accusing Riyadh of a "coverup" flies in the face of its public remarks since Khashoggi's October 2 disappearance, showing everything its officials said were bald-faced lies, including comments by its foreign minister days earlier.

State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said 21 Saudis will have their US visas revoked. Pompeo said targeted individuals include "those in the intelligence services, the royal court, the foreign ministry, and other Saudi ministries," naming no names, adding:

"These penalties will not be the last word on this matter from the United States. We will continue to explore additional measures to hold those responsible accountable" – short of holding MBS responsible for Khashoggi's murder.

Separately in addressing Turkey's parliament on Tuesday, President Erdogan sounded like Trump, saying

"Saudi authorities have taken an important step confirming the killing, and now we ask Saudi authorities to work hard to reveal the names of those involved, from the bottom to the top" in what he called premeditated "savage murder."

Erdogan wants to avoid a rupture in relations with Riyadh and the West. He allowed revelations about Khashoggi's abduction and murder to drip out.

He's likely seeking economic and financial concessions from MBS in return for not telling all he knows, what's most damning, including likely intercepted phone calls and other audio evidence showing his direct involvement in what happened.

His Tuesday remarks were less than fully candid, failing to deliver the "naked truth" as promised, only information about Khashoggi's elimination already known – earlier reported by Western, Turkish and other media.

The world community and human rights groups slammed one fabricated Saudi explanation about what happened after another – from for two weeks claiming he left the consulate unharmed, to a fist fight/brawl in the consulate resulting in his death, to his "strangulation" in the facility, to kingdom foreign minister al-Jubeir calling the killing a "grave mistake," claiming no MBS involvement in the incident, adding:

"He was killed in the consulate. We don't know in terms of details how. We don't know where the body is. We are determined to uncover every stone."

"We are determined to punish those who are responsible for this murder. We are not an authoritarian government. We are a monarchy." Khashoggi's murder was an "aberration."

Al-Jubeir was the first high-level Saudi official to comment publicly on the incident, shielding

MBS from responsibly.

There was nothing aberrant about a ruthless regime's action, ruling with an iron fist, notorious for public whippings and beheadings, imprisoning kingdom critics, and countless other horrendous human rights abuses throughout its existence.

Western and most other countries turned a blind eye to them until now over one incident, largely silent about others, including Riyadh's alliance with Washington's imperial wars and support for regional terrorist groups.

Ahead of Erdogan's Tuesday address, Mike Pence and CIA director Gina Haspel went to Turkey on the pretext of aiding the investigation into Khashoggi's murder.

Their real purpose for coming was likely to convince Erdogan not to reveal all he knows, mostly about virtually certain MBS direct involvement in what happened.

Reportedly audio evidence showed Khashoggi was murdered in about seven minutes shortly after arriving in the Saudi consulate, his body dismembered inside the facility, according to an unnamed Turkish source, adding:

His body was dragged from the consul general's office onto a table in his adjacent study. Consulate personnel uninvolved in the killing heard his screams. The consul was ordered out of the room where Khashoggi was killed and dismembered.

US sanctions, if imposed on Saudi officials, will likely exclude king Salman, MBS, and other key kingdom figures.

Trump regime hardliners want nothing interfering in longstanding US/Saudi dirty business as usual.

Khashoggi's murder changes nothing in the bilateral relationship – nor with the West and most other countries, including Russia and China.

Representatives from both countries are attending Riyadh's ongoing Davos in the desert investment conference.

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