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'Deafening silence': White House's response to Khashoggi disappearance

MBS has been at the helm of a kingdom-wide crackdown on opposition since ascending to crown prince. But has Trump emboldened him?



The US presidency has yet to comment on the disappearance of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi (AFP)

[MEE staff \(/users/mee-staff\)](#)

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Social media users have criticised the "deafening silence" from the US administration following the alleged death of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who disappeared on Tuesday after entering Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul.

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An unnamed Turkish official told the Reuters news agency over the weekend that Turkish police believed Khashoggi had been killed and his body then removed from the building.

“ Jamal Khashoggi: A different sort of Saudi

David Hearst

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"The initial assessment of the Turkish police is that Mr Khashoggi has been killed at the consulate of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul. We believe that the murder was premeditated and the body was subsequently moved out of the consulate," said the official.

No evidence has yet been provided by officials.

As a Turkish forensic team prepares (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-has-concrete-information-saudi-journalists-fate-says-erdogan-adviser-131833323>) to enter the consulate, where authorities suspect that Khashoggi was killed, social media users have been highlighting the seriousness of Khashoggi's disappearance - and the failure of the White House to respond.

Deafening silence from White House over Saudi assassination of Jamal Khashoggi. Could it be Trump-MBS bromance is strained by this bit of mischief on part of young crown prince? Nah...nothing could break the chemistry these two have. Except maybe cancelling that \$100B arms deal!

— Tikun Olam (@richards1052) October 8, 2018 (https://twitter.com/richards1052/status/1049181269504868352?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

In May last year, US President Donald Trump signed the largest arms deal with the Gulf kingdom in history.

The deal - worth \$109.7bn - caused uproar, with Amnesty International accusing Trump of “emboldening” (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/05/saudi-arabia-trump-visit-risks-giving-green-light-to-violations-of-human-rights/>) further violations of human rights in the region.

Social media users seemed to agree that Trump's embrace of the Saudi government has empowered the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).

The White House empowered Saudi crown prince MBS as he confronted Qatar, as he kidnapped Lebanon's prime minister, as he starved Yemenis, as he crushed dissent. Will it continue to sell him weapons if it's confirmed that he murdered a brave journalist, Jamal Khashoggi?

— Nicholas Kristof (@NickKristof) October 7, 2018 (https://twitter.com/NickKristof/status/1049059274746421248?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

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Khashoggi is a Washington Post columnist and outspoken critic of Saudi government policies. He had been a prominent and well-respected journalist for decades and worked as a foreign correspondent for Saudi newspapers across the region.

Idk maybe because Trump promotes the press as the 'enemy of the people' or the fact that Khashoggi got banned in Saudi for criticizing Trump. Maybe because Kushner handed sensitive info to MBS leaving him compromised or maybe it's just plain old money that will buy inaction

— Olga Lautman (@olgaNYC1211) October 7, 2018 (https://twitter.com/olgaNYC1211/status/1048777061505163264?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Khashoggi also previously served as the media advisor to Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal during his tenure as ambassador in London and Washington.

He had been based in Washington DC since he fled Saudi Arabia in 2017 over fears of the new government's crackdown on critical voices and was unsparing on the issue that caused his final rift with Riyadh.

He also pointedly criticised President Trump's relationship with Riyadh.

"From time to time, Trump tweets that he is protecting us and that we must pay for such protection to continue. He protects us from what? Or he is protecting who? I believe that the greatest threat facing the Gulf countries and their oil is a president such as Trump who sees nothing in us apart from the oil wells," Khashoggi wrote.

The blood of the world's murdered journalists like Jamal Khashoggi and countless Russians is splattered on Donald Trump, who lavishes praise on their killers like MBS and Putin while calling a free press "the enemies of the people," egging them on pic.twitter.com/jgg1JzDOkc (<https://t.co/jgg1JzDOkc>)

— Will Bunch Sign Up For My Newsletter (@Will_Bunch) October 7, 2018 (https://twitter.com/Will_Bunch/status/1048891254740856833?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"I have left my home, my family and my job, and I am raising my voice," Khashoggi wrote (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/10/06/read-jamal-khashoggis-columns-for-the-washington-post/?utm_term=.050f7bd4ef78) in September 2017.

"To do otherwise would betray those who languish in prison. I can speak when so many cannot."

Yasin Aktay, a former MP for Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the man Khashoggi told his fiancée to call if he did not emerge from the consulate, voiced concerns over the Saudi national's whereabouts.

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Missing Saudi journalist: Turkish forensics team poised to probe Khashoggi 'murder'

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"His friends had warned him

[Khashoggi], 'Do not go there, it is not safe,' but he said they [the Saudis] could not do anything in Turkey," said Aktay.

Turkish authorities believe that a group of 15 Saudi nationals may have been involved in Khashoggi's disappearance.

Police said about 15 Saudis, including officials, came to Istanbul on two private flights on Tuesday and were at the consulate at the same time as the journalist. They left again the same day, according to MEE's sources.

Another police source told MEE on Saturday: "The consulate is surrounded by cameras, no evidence of Khashoggi leaving was recorded on them."

Trump allies speak out

In the face of continued silence from the White House, US Republican Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted on Monday that it was "imperative" to find out what happened to Khashoggi.

"Honest answers must be forthcoming for the sake of the Saudi-US relationship," he wrote.

Graham also said that if allegations of Saudi wrongdoing prove true, "it would be devastating to the US-Saudi relationship and there will be a heavy price to be paid — economically and otherwise".

We agree if there was any truth to the allegations of wrongdoing by the Saudi government it would be devastating to the US-Saudi relationship and there will be a heavy price to be paid — economically and otherwise.

— Lindsey Graham (@LindseyGrahamSC) October 8, 2018

(https://twitter.com/LindseyGrahamSC/status/1049311825580445697?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

In a talk with the National Press Club in Washington, House Majority Leader Paul Ryan said news of Khashoggi's disappearance is "very disturbing and unnerving".

"We just need to get clear facts from both governments. As an elected leader, we stand with the media in solidarity to make sure that this does not go unnoticed," he said.

Bob Corker, the Republican senator who chairs the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, said he personally raised the issue of Khashoggi's disappearance with the Saudi ambassador.

"And while we await more information, know we will respond accordingly to any state that targets journalists abroad," Corker tweeted (<https://twitter.com/SenBobCorker/status/1049356286847016966>) on Monday afternoon.

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On Sunday, another Republican senator, Marco Rubio, also tweeted that he was "deeply disturbed" by the news of Khashoggi's disappearance and called for action from the US:

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I pray Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is alive. But if this deeply disturbing news report is confirmed, the United States & the civilized world must respond strongly, and I will review all options in Senate.

<https://t.co/LzrKiRveRp> (<https://t.co/LzrKiRveRp>)

— Senator Rubio Press (@SenRubioPress) October 7, 2018

(https://twitter.com/SenRubioPress/status/1048960686565601280?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

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