

'Trump Can't Ditch MbS Because of Personal Stakes'

WASHINGTON (Press TV) – U.S. President Donald Trump can't let go of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman despite increasing evidence that the prince ordered the murder of a Saudi critic overseas, and that is because the US president has personal stakes in propping up Mohammed, a new report suggests.

An article by The New York Times' White House correspondent on Sunday explained why Trump was sticking with Mohammed even as "evidence piles up pointing to the Saudi crown prince's responsibility in the brutal killing of the dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi."

Khashoggi was assassinated by a hit squad of 15 Saudi Arabian agents — including a frequent companion of Mohammed's and some members of his security detail — inside the Saudi consulate in the Turkish city of Istanbul on October 2.

Turkey "moved heaven and earth" to bring international attention to the killing. As that attention was attracted, Saudi Arabia became incapable of quietly getting away with the assassination.

Riyadh has several times altered its narrative on the killing. Initially, it denied the killing altogether. After 18 days of blatant denial, Riyadh finally acknowledged the killing but said Khashoggi had been killed in a "rogue" operation that had gone haywire. Still later, on Thursday, November 15, the Saudi Public Prosecution offered yet another account, saying the 15 agents had acted on "an order to bring back the victim (Khashoggi) by means of persuasion, and if persuasion fails, to do so by force" but had then went on to kill him on their own.

Citing informed sources, The Washington Post reported on November 16 that the CIA "has concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the assassination."

Trump, who had already refused to directly implicate Mohammed, then defied his own country's intelligence agency by saying that the CIA assessment was "very premature."



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman listens to US President Donald Trump during a meeting in Washington, March 20, 2018.

The New York Times said in its Sunday article that Trump had basically three reasons why he was resisting blaming Mohammed.

It said Saudi Arabia — which is under the de facto rule of Mohammed — is "a linchpin" of the Trump administration's hawkish strategy on

Iran. The Saudi crown prince also has a close relationship with Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who is pursuing what he thinks would be a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians. And lastly, Mohammed has pledged to buy 110 billion dollars' worth of American military equipment.

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strengthen the resolve to resist. "We will certainly survive. We will not only survive — we will thrive. We have tried to minimize the impact on the population but the ordinary people are going to suffer, the economy is going to suffer."

Speaking to the Guardian, Zarif said he was confident the Iranian oil industry would find markets, even though the U.S. measures have pushed down exports sharply. "There are always markets for oil, it depends on the conditions and the price," he said. "I believe Iran will always sell oil."

Zarif also challenged claims by the U.S. secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, that the sanctions had been constructed to exempt humanitarian supplies, such as food and medicine.

"The U.S. has imposed financial sanctions on Iran," he said. "When you want to transfer money, the bank does not ask whether it goes for food or other items — that is why sanctions always hit food and medicine."

"The U.S. is not living up to its promises. We believe all sanctions are unlawful, and against UN security council resolutions, but the U.S. is not even truthful to the commitment they have made."

Zarif said Iran was frustrated by the slow pace of EU moves to help European companies that want to continue trading with Iran.

A clearing house known as a special purpose vehicle, designed to allow European companies that trade with Iran to bypass the sanctions, is due to be set up within the next few months. It has been seen as critical to reassuring Tehran that the EU wishes to reward Iran for signing the 2015 deal on its nuclear program by expanding business with the country.

"What is important is that Europe has made the political commitment but, unfortunately, so far as practicabilities are concerned, it has been very slow," Zarif said. "Hunt gave me commitment that the UK believes in the nuclear deal, but we also need to see some action."

On Yemen, Zarif said his country had been pushing for a ceasefire for years.

"The humanitarian nightmare cannot continue," he said. "All the Yemins are prepared to come to the negotiating table provided the (Saudi-led) coalition enables them to do so."

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The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Sunday that clashes between the majority of the pro-Ankara militants and a group of about 200 fighters in several districts had left 25 dead.

According to the Britain-based group, the 200 militants were accused of "disobeying" Turkish troops and "committing abuses."

Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman described the heavy clashes as "unprecedented since the rebels seized Afrin."

"The clashes provoked terror among civilians," he said, adding that "Turkish tanks are patrolling the streets of the town."

The fighting comes amid a curfew imposed by Turkish forces stationed in Afrin on civilians since Saturday evening, according to the observatory.

The United Nations and human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have documented widespread abuses since the capture of the northern city by the Ankara-backed militants.

Turkey-led forces reportedly went on a rampage in Afrin, pillaging shops and homes after capturing the city.

According to a report by the UN Commission of Inquiry, half of the enclave's 320,000 residents fled and most are unable to return.

Turkey began the so-called Operation Olive Branch against Afrin on January 20 to cleanse the northern Syrian border of U.S.-backed Kurdish militants whom it associates with the homegrown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighting for autonomy on Turkish soil.

The Turkish operation was launched without permission from the Syrian government. It has also pitted Ankara against Washington, which supports the Kurdish militants.

On Saturday, Turkey's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar expressed indignation at photos showing US troops dining with Kurdish militants near the Turkish border in Syria.

The U.S. has been arming and training Kurdish militants under the banner of helping them fight the Daesh terror group, but Syria and several other countries see ulterior motives behind the deployment.

U.S.... (Continued From Page 2)

by the rules. In January, however, a senior Iranian naval officer said Iran's warplanes warned off two "coalition vessels" during a military drill in waters off the country's southeast.

In his Monday remarks, Admiral Khanzadi also referred to Iran's self-sufficiency in manufacturing the military equipment it needs, and said, Iran's "Fateh" submarine will surprise the enemies.

"Therefore, they'd better never think of any aggression."

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The Houthis, he said, should be ready "to freeze and stop all military operations on all fronts" to achieve "a just and honorable peace".

Griffiths told the UN Security Council on Friday that Yemen's warring parties had given "firm assurances" that they are committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the three-and-a-half-year conflict.

Houthi missiles have landed near the Saudi capital Riyadh and key facilities belonging to oil giant Aramco.

The fighters have also carried out attacks on major international airports in the UAE, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Berlin Imposes Entry Ban, Arms Freeze Over Khashoggi Killing



The file photo shows members of the Sri Lankan web journalist association holding placards with the image of Jamal Khashoggi during a demonstration outside the Saudi embassy in Colombo on October 25, 2018.

BERLIN (Dispatches) – Germany banned Saudi citizens suspected of involvement in the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi from much of Europe on Monday and moved to halt all arms sales to the kingdom in a firming of its stance towards Riyadh.

The entry bans, targeting 18

Saudis suspected of playing a role in the killing of Khashoggi in Riyadh's Istanbul consulate, bind all members of the European Union's passport-free Schengen zone, suggesting that Germany is willing to use its influence as the EU's largest country to push for a tougher line.

"We have coordinated closely with our French and British friends and decided, as Germany, to put an entry ban beside their names in the Schengen system database," Foreign Ministry spokesman Christopher Burger told a regular news conference.

Germany has already imposed a ban on selling weapons to Riyadh until the circumstances of Khashoggi's killing are fully cleared up.

The United States also imposed economic sanctions on 17 Saudi nationals last week, including suspected members of the alleged hit squad and senior advisers to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — who is alleged to have been involved in the killing of the 59-year-old critic.

U.S. media reported on Saturday that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) believed with "high confidence" that the Saudi crown prince directly ordered the killing.

Saudi Arabia is facing global criticism over Khashoggi's kill-

ing inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

Khashoggi, a prominent commentator on Saudi affairs who wrote for the Washington Post's Global Opinions section, had lived in self-imposed exile in the US since September 2017, when he left Saudi Arabia over fears of the Riyadh regime's crackdown on critical voices.

The 59-year-old was seeking to secure documentation for his forthcoming marriage when he entered the Saudi consulate, but never came out despite Riyadh's initial claim that he exited the mission less than an hour after completing his paperwork.

The Saudi kingdom, after denying the murder for several days, finally admitted that Khashoggi had been killed in the consulate during an interrogation by rogue operatives that had gone wrong after diplomatic pressure grew tremendously on Riyadh to give an account on the mysterious fate of its national.

Four Palestinians Injured by Zionist Shelling in West Bank

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – Four Palestinians were injured by the Zionist regime's army's shelling in the West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said on Monday in a statement, obtained by Sputnik.

"Four young Palestinian men were injured by bullets from the Israeli forces at the entrance to the Deir Abu Mash'al settlement [northwest of the city of Ramallah]," the statement said.

One of the injured is in serious condition, according to the ministry. On October 26, a Palestinian man was killed in clashes with Zionist troops in the village of al-Mazra'a al-Qibliya.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society reported at the time that nine people had been shot with live bullets, and two had been badly injured. On December 21 last year, the United Nations General Assembly

overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution that calls on the U.S. to withdraw its controversial policy shift.

Despite the vote, the U.S. went ahead with the embassy transfer on May 14, triggering demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

The regime's crackdown in Gaza left over 60 protesters dead in the impoverished coastal enclave on that day alone.

Angered by Trump's move, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas boycotted his administration, saying Washington is no longer qualified to serve as the sole mediator in the decades-long conflict with the regime.

Persian Gulf Cooperation Council States to Meet in Riyadh

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – All members of the Cooperation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC), including Qatar, will attend the upcoming summit in Riyadh in December, local media reported, citing Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khalid al-Jarallah.

The deputy foreign minister also expressed hope that the upcoming meeting will help to ease tensions on the peninsula as Kuwait has long been trying to mediate the crisis, according to the Al-Khaleej media outlet. Last year, a two-day (P)GCC summit end-

ed within hours of its start in Kuwait without any progress being made on the Qatar diplomatic row. Leaders of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) refused to visit the summit because of their tense relations with Qatar. Instead, the states were represented at the level of foreign or deputy prime ministers.

Qatar has been under a diplomatic and economic blockade since last June, when the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain cut off diplomatic rela-

tions and communication with Doha, accusing it of supporting terrorism and interfering in their internal affairs. Qatar has refuted the allegations.

Kuwait's deputy foreign minister, Khalid al-Jarallah, expressed optimism that this year's summit will see a high level of representation from all member states.

"This summit is a glimpse of hope to revive the efforts of containing the long-standing (Persian) Gulf dispute", al-Jarallah said.