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The Regional Implications of the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi

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The killing of the renowned Saudi Arabian media personality Jamal Khashoggi, in the Saudi Arabian consulate building in Istanbul, has sparked mounting political reactions in the world, as the brutal crime is a breach of diplomatic norms and the principles of international relations. The reactions of the murder appear inseparable from the consequences of the Saudi Arabian foreign policy in Yemen, as well as the criticisms of the human rights violations. Due to the above, Saudi Arabia will face a number of political implications on a domestic, regional and international levels. The implications will overshadow Riyadh's alliances and its ability to implement its own foreign policy agenda in the wake of the reactions.

It is highly believed that the Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy is based on the international arena's reactions, as the state seems to lack clear strategies of foreign policy. This can be reflected in the three current challenges faced by the Kingdom that will be examined in this brief. First, the difficulties of pushing the reform vision of the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has become almost impossible to preach to the community while he is linked to the massacres in Yemen as well as to the series of arrests taking place in Saudi Arabia. Second, any attempt of Saudi Arabia to expand in its foreign policy will be faced with backlash and major challenges. Finally, it is difficult for the international community as a whole to differentiate between the crimes that took place in Turkey, with the decision maker in Saudi Arabia, regardless of all the public statements made in the Kingdom by several Saudi officials in defense of Mohammed Bin Salman. In addition, the absence of a clear political agenda leads to many crucial case studies, such as the Khashoggi's crime, to die out without the regime dealing with the consequences of political implications of them.

To understand the principles of the Saudi Arabian foreign policy, it is worth mentioning that what gives the regime its legitimacy is its Islamic identity. It strictly promotes itself as the guardian of the Islamic state, the official representative of Islam in the world, therefore, getting itself legitimacy domestically and internationally. In addition, Saudi Arabia takes power in its relationship with the United States of America and its recently growing relationship with Israel. Since the appointment of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz al-Hakam and the appointment of his son Mohammed bin Salman as crown prince, the US-Saudi relations have become more solid under the administration of the president Donald Trump. This relationship is based on the exchange of economic and political security that Trump claims is the core of his relationship with the GCC, and that countries of the Gulf cannot afford losing.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's policy over the past couple of years has focused on the survival of its identity. It is the one of the only major countries in the region, which has managed to survive where others have failed to do so, such as the Egyptian state and the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq. The Al Saud family who

established Saudi Arabia is still in power as a result of many factors, one of which is its gained legitimacy from the ruling presidencies of the USA over the years. In addition to that, Saudi Arabia has had a role in many regional disputes such as the elimination of the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and currently its military role in Yemen. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has had a massive role in the support and return of the military rule of AbdalFattah al-Sisi, who is a vital Saudi ally. Saudi Arabia uses their religious identity, political relationship with the USA/Israel, and its role in regional disputes in the Middle East as tools of political survival.

The Saudi Arabian political regime faced a shift in its internal and foreign policies with the arrival of Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. The kingdom had faced a lot of international criticism over the war of Yemen that has been ongoing for the past 3 years and a half. Saudi Arabia has been accused of killing many innocent people and demolishing entire regions in Yemen. This was one of the main aspects that has drawn attention to Saudi Arabia in the media. However, since Mohammed bin Salman took power, the media attention shifted from Yemen to his actions, whether it was arresting a number of princes, clerics, intellectuals and businessmen and locking them up at the Ritz Carlton, or allowing the women to drive, or the killing of Khashoggi has all brought further negative light on Saudi Arabia.

When looking at the Saudi Arabian foreign policy through the lenses of the new realism theory, Saudi Arabia appears to constantly pursue short-term policies and strategies. For example, Saudi Arabia allied itself with the Muslim Brotherhood Islamists during the war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, then allied itself with the United States of America against the Islamists, and supported the coup against the previous Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi who led the Muslim Brotherhood. When the Arab Spring took place, which was a phenomenon that was supposed to pave the way for justice and freedom for the Arab peoples, Saudi Arabia handpicked which countries to support, and which to go against, according to its specific agenda. Many claim that the reason Saudi Arabia chose to do that is because the kingdom does not want for any government in the Arab region to be a successful model of a diplomatic Arab state in order for its role, as one of the major countries in the region, not to be reduced. In addition, Saudi Arabia is perceived to always have a negative role in the weakening of neighboring regional countries such as Iraq and Lebanon. This is true for countries that Saudi wanted to have control over, instead of allowing Iran, one of Saudi's main enemies in region, to have a presence in Arab countries and in the Middle East as a whole. This comes against the beliefs that Saudi Arabia works against Iran because of its application of Shiite Islam. On the contrary, the region has witnessed Saudi supporting political figures such as Moqtada al-Sadr in Iraq, although he is a representative of the Shiite political party. It is believed in attempts to support the American mission in the region, that Saudi Arabia

played a role in marginalizing Sunni Muslims and allowing for the term 'Terrorism' to be linked to this faction of Islam. This did not only justify Americas "War against Terrorism" but it allowed countries such as Israel to justify their need and presence in the region.

Saudi Arabia is a central and powerful State given its wealth and population. It is the only State that has a regional weight after the dissolution of Syria and Iraq. In addition, Saudi Arabia is a strong ally of the United States with which they share the same regional interests. Saudi Arabia is also important to the United States as it is contributing to the development and stability of the U.S economy and market.

Regionally, Saudi Arabia has always relied on the United States to intervene and solve the issues of the Arab world, and has always created problems to allow American intervention in the region to maintain the U.S protection system. The two countries are working to protect each other's interests. The recent sanctions on Iran have great economic, political and security benefits for Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi will not have a great impact on Saudi-American relations nor will Turkish-US relations have any impact on it.

To answer the question of whether the murder of Jamal Khashoggi would change the Saudi political system, one has to know that the Saudi regime is not very different from the surrounding regimes in the region that limit power to only one person or a few. Therefore, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi will have no direct repercussions on the kingdom or on Saudi foreign policy. Saudi Arabia succeeded in weakening and eliminating all those who stand in the face of the Saudi regime inside and outside the Kingdom. Indeed, no one seems to be able to challenge the authoritarianism of Mohammed bin Salman and the US-Israeli-Saudi alliance, which is still coherent. Perhaps the only factor that could affect Saudi Arabia in this issue is the public opinion and the media. The international community as a whole knows who gave the order to murder Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Turkey. Saudi Arabia is still required by public opinion to explain the matter. At the same time, the image of Mohammed bin Salman has been shattered more, and Khashoggi' s case will continue to haunt him as the 9/11 event is still haunting Saudi Arabia until now.

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi has borne all this media momentum only because of the apprehension of Mohammed bin Salman's arbitrary policies and many accumulations such as the kidnapping of the Prime Minister of Lebanon and forcing him to resign, and the fact that Mohammed bin Salman governs the whole kingdom and undermines the role of others even from within the ruling family. In this context, a question comes to the mind on the options available to Riyadh's allies. Will Mohammed Bin Salman be

replaced by another Crown Prince who is a more serious ally to Washington? To answer this question, there are 3 main scenarios:

First: there might be consensus on the replacement of Mohammad Bin Salman. The regime of Mohammed Bin Salman has fallen morally and politically, because of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and has undoubtedly become a burden on the United States that would want to replace him. Despite this, however, this possibility remains somewhat weak as the replacement of the crown prince should come from within, not from outside, by virtue of the Saudi tradition of allegiance “Bay’aa”. Additionally, there is no historical imperative nor precedent to support this option. Bashar Al-Assad is still in power despite the human massacre in Syria. In addition, no one within the ruling family would want to compete with Muhammad bin Salman given his power and authority, not to mention that no one could fulfill the vision of King Salman; Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz is not committed, Prince Mohammed bin Naif is trapped, although he proved to be competent, while Prince Khalid bin Salman is not fit for the position because he has no clear vision. He could rather be a foreign minister.

Second: there might be consensus on keeping Mohammed bin Salman on condition to have a group of politicians and advisors to run the Kingdom with him. Washington, hence, would train the Crown Prince to soften his abusive policies, which is a more likely possibility. In the case of Jamal Khashoggi’ s murder, Al-Asiri is expected to be used as a scapegoat, but Saud Al-Qahtani will not be sacrificed.

Third, none of the above will happen. Washington would regard the case of Jamal Khashoggi’ s murder as a regular incident that will be forgotten over time, while Saudi foreign policy will somewhat shrink.

Turkey's role in managing Khashoggi’ s murder and its consequences is striking. Turkey does not seem eager to gain an absolute victory over Saudi Arabia; rather seems eager to win points even with the CIA report that reveals that the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is the one who gave the order to kill Khashoggi, which was known to Turkey since the early days of the case.