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**Blood Diplomacy: Saudi Arabia
between Yemen and Jamal Khashoggi
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The hope of having a positive news headline on the Middle East is often undermined by foreign interventions, lack of harmony and consensus in the region, and a Western media who has established a convenient and comfortable framework to portray the entirety of the Middle East as incompatible with modernity and peace. In some cases, it is rather an irrational set of decisions and miscalculations -driven by some of the leaders' mix of myopia and obstinacy- that result in chaos.

The current ongoing geopolitical row has its epicenter in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and more precisely Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS), who seems to be trapped between the shadow of Khashoggi's murder and the worst man-made humanitarian disaster so far in the new millennium: the war in Yemen. In the latter case, the Prince has pushed for the continuation of military operations against the Houthis by all means, regardless of the collateral damage infringed on the civilian population. In the former case, although no official statement has pointed to his direct involvement, most of the existing information leads to him as the perpetrator.

What is cynical/ironic about the two events is that, while the war on Yemen -that started more than three years ago in March 2015- took the life of more than 15,000 civilians and put the country at the brink of massive starvation, it was the journalist's murder that caught the world's attention to the brutal actions of Saudi Arabia. It is a raw confirmation of Stalin's aphorism:

"The death of one man is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic."

Relying on the international media, political interests have played a key role in purposely maintaining the story of Khashoggi alive by dripping information, announcing new chapters, and creating a suspense similar to that of a Netflix series. Sadly, however, the war in Yemen is either not covered well, or merely illustrated as a marginal catastrophe, normalized and reported occasionally as a side story, almost as a required news segment announcing data and figures.

The first weeks after the assassination, many commentators lamented the paradoxical unbalance of attention due to an overwhelming all-day coverage, but the spotlight on Saudi Arabia was smartly used by those who seek the end of violence and chaos in Yemen to focus the international attention –and potential action- to the MBS-led disastrous war. Khashoggi himself [wrote](#) extensively about the conflict with Yemen. As the war broke out, Khashoggi supported the Saudi actions against the Houthis, yet when the miscalculations of MBS were clear and the situation became a swampy bloody trap, he [called for](#) an end of the intervention.

If Khashoggi's words had not have enough leverage to save Yemen, perhaps his blood does. It is a tangible fact that since his death, [pressure](#) to end the war on the poorest Arab nation has increased in many fronts, from the reduction or ban of arms sales to the Saudi Arabia by Western nations, to a widespread condemnation of MBS in leading media outlets.

The failed evolving narrative of the horrendous murder of Khashoggi, fabricated by Saudi Arabia, is now proven a web of lies. Riyadh's total incapacity of elaborating a credible version of the truth makes its narrative on the war on Yemen much weaker and suspicious; the trustworthiness of the Crown Prince is certainly not in its best moment.

The condemnation of Muhammad Bin Salman has become a costly endeavor to those leaders, analysts and commentators whom were previously praising him as a 'visionary modernizer' and 'reformer' that the Kingdom was long awaiting. Most do not want to embark on a sudden discursive shift that may compromise their own credibility, and have sought a way to temper the way to address the Prince's role in both crises. Ironically, it was precisely the few cosmetic measures framed into the 'modernization' narrative that gave MBS a free hand in Yemen, and most world leaders decided to turn a blind eye on the bloodshed.

It is clear, however, that the link between Yemen and Khashoggi's case is Muhammed Bin Salman, and both situations have weakened Saudi Arabia and damaged its reputation to levels not seen since the aftermath of 9/11 when it was revealed that fifteen of the nineteen terrorists were Saudi citizens. We are witnessing a very particular, rare moment of vulnerability for the Kingdom which allows many abroad to openly criticize its leaders and policies. The question is to what extent this vulnerability and denouncement will evolve into positive political actions? How could this peculiar alignment of factors stop the whimsical bloodshed in Yemen, or end the blockade imposed on Qatar, not to mention the severe repression that many critic voices are suffering from inside the Kingdom

No matter how extensively the [European Union](#), the [British](#) House of Commons, or the [U.S.](#) Congress discuss banning the arms sales to Riyadh, any measures taken will be temporary as none of these countries are prepared to risk the stability of the region or the stable supply of oil from Saudi Arabia.

It is true, as Adam Baron [states](#), that the new front in Yemen's Civil War is Jamal Khashoggi. It is also true that there is a coordinated effort to prevent the war to surface to a level that shows its international dimension. If so, not only [Spain](#), [Germany](#), [Denmark](#) and the [United States](#) would be exposed as the main weaponry suppliers, but the [United Kingdom](#) would also be condemned for its active role in providing technical aid, military personal and strategic coordination to the Saudi-led coalition.

One should not be surprised, however, by the parameters that ultimately govern world politics and international relations. The U.S. has often supported and weaved alliances with dictators and with discredited authoritarian figures, and most European leaders convey discourses on human rights in their public speeches while maintaining substantial business and trade deals regardless of any humanitarian disaster. In any case, the Saudi's 'Game of Thrones' is an internal affair whose dynamics and results ultimately affect those living inside the Kingdom. The concern arises, however, when blood becomes a means of governance and control not only within, but beyond borders.

Any discourse of reform or modernization in the Arab Middle East has been, until now, destined to break into pieces. In recent years, some of the power elites in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, U.A.E, and Bahrain have silenced their critical voices and neutralized the opposition by unconventional means,

from incarceration to exile. In particular, the House of Saud apparently resorts to these methods as its preferred tool of government. As for peace in Yemen, Khashoggi's murder appears to have unintentionally resulted in the restart of the negotiations in Sweden.

Whatever the future arrangements for Yemen are, no peace or stability will emerge any time soon since a multiplicity of local groups and interests are spread all over making any attempt of statehood unlikely in the short run. Reconstruction is a very long process and the recent examples in the Arab world do not lend themselves for hope. Nonetheless, headlines worldwide are paying unprecedented and continuous attention to Riyadh. And, despite the fact that it is unlikely to happen, it is with high hopes that the current situation could lead to a more peaceful Middle East.

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