

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to request an update on the status of the administration's review and assessment of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. We welcomed your Senate confirmation testimony noting, "We have real concerns about some of the policies that our Saudi partners have pursued and accordingly, the president-elect has said that we will review the entirety of the relationship to make sure that as it stands, it is advancing the interests and is respectful of the values that we bring to that partnership."¹ In light of the most recent developments, we request information about the status of this review and how current U.S. policy on Saudi Arabia is advancing core U.S. interests.

A recalibration of the U.S.-Saudi partnership is long overdue in order to reflect President Biden's important commitment to uphold human rights and democratic values in our foreign policy. Our continued support for the Saudi monarchy, which systematically and ruthlessly represses its own citizens, targets critics all over the world, carries out a brutal war in Yemen, and bolsters authoritarian regimes throughout the Middle East and North Africa, runs counter to U.S. national interests and damages the credibility of the United States to uphold our values.

In February 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report assessing that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey that led to the murder of Virginia resident and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Despite this public report, the crown prince—and Saudi Arabia more generally—have been shielded from accountability for their transnational repression and other human rights violations, inviting further abuses. U.S. policies that ensure accountability for Jamal Khashoggi, as well as for the other Saudis who have been systematically oppressed by the Kingdom, including U.S. citizens trapped in the country, should be the only path forward to ensure a strengthened relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Most recently, reports indicate that the Government of Saudi Arabia has rejected cooperation with the U.S. government following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent oil crisis. Instead of accepting appeals from our government to produce more oil, an initial step that would immediately lower prices for Americans across the country, the Saudi monarchy has elected to engage in talks with Beijing to discuss pricing a portion of its oil sales to China in yuan, a proposal that would weaken the reach of the dollar.² Governments that have formed genuine, ironclad alliances with the United States, forged in shared values of democratic norms and respect for human rights, have answered the call to action in the

¹ Antony Blinken, "Senate Confirmation Hearing," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 19, 2021

² Summer Said and Stephen Kalin, "Saudi Arabia Considers Accepting Yuan Instead of Dollars for Chinese Oil Sales" *Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2022

wake of unprovoked invasion. Unfortunately, our long-standing relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not produced a similar response. Saudi Arabia's inability to stand up for international law exemplifies the short- and long-term risks associated with maintaining uncritical U.S. support for the Saudi regime. This latest transgression only confirms that a serious reassessment of the U.S.-Saudi relationship is immediately necessary to ensure it is advancing U.S. interests.

We ask that ongoing interagency policy reviews consider Saudi Arabia's lack of progress on improving labor rights, including the continued implementation of the *kafala* system, women's and girls' rights, including the continued implementation of the male guardianship legal framework, the continued repression of LGBTQ+ individuals, the application of capital punishment, including the barbaric mass execution of 81 individuals in a single day on March 12, the continued detention of human rights activists such as Waleed Abu al-Khair and Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, the enforcement of travel bans against those who speak out against the government including Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Youssef, Salah al-Haidar and others, as well as the lack of meaningful justice and accountability for those responsible for the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi. We request that such review take into account reports that Saudi nationals are spying inside U.S. companies on behalf of the Kingdom, as well as the delays of humanitarian shipments to Yemen through the port of Hudaydah, abuses of spyware deployed against dissidents and U.S. citizens, Saudi Arabia's ballistic missile partnership with China, the assistance provided to Saudi nationals to evade justice in the United States, and the pursuit of nuclear technology outside of a 123 Agreement.

We look forward to your response on the status of the review of the entirety of the U.S.-Saudi relationship that takes into account such matters. We stand at an inflection point: The United States can continue our status-quo of broad support for an autocratic partner, or we can stand for human rights and rebalance our relationship to reflect our values and interests. How we move forward will send a strong message to democracies, activists fighting for democracy, and human rights defenders and will play an important role in our fight against authoritarianism around the world.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



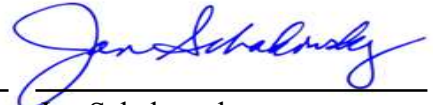
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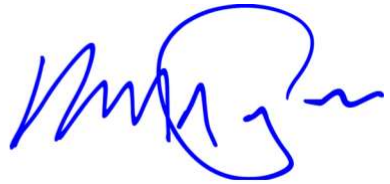
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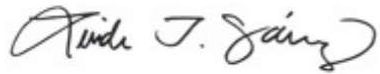
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