



## **Don't believe Donald Trump; we'll be just fine without Saudi Arabia: Today's talker**

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We may be better off without Saudi Arabia

With the presumed killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, opinion in Washington appears to be turning decisively against longtime ally Saudi Arabia. Think tanks are returning Saudi money, lobbying firms are rejecting Saudi business, and Congress is actively considering sanctions on Saudi leaders.

The only holdout is President Donald Trump himself, who accepted King Salman's denials, dispatched Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Riyadh, and parroted back the idea that Khashoggi could have been murdered by rogue killers. That "rogue killers" are rarely found hanging out in official consulates appears not to have crossed the president's mind.

Trump's defense of Saudi Arabia focused on arms sales and U.S. jobs. But his administration has been strongly supportive of Saudi Arabia in general, arguing that it is vital to U.S. energy security and regional interests.

Four decades ago, oil and security were indeed good reasons to maintain a strong partnership with Saudi Arabia. That is no longer the case.

Our view: Can Donald Trump handle the truth about Jamal Khashoggi?

Other views: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rejects any attempts to undermine it

For starters, U.S. and Saudi interests in the Middle East are diverging. Saudi Arabia wants to roll back Iran and undermine democratic gains in nearby states. The Saudi-led war in Yemen has created a humanitarian crisis and produced the worst famine in years.

Whether it is arming rebels in Syria, initiating a blockade of Qatar or kidnapping the prime minister of Lebanon, Saudi foreign policy is increasingly a destabilizing force in the region. Minimizing our ties to Saudi Arabia certainly won't worsen our regional interests. It could even improve things.

Global oil markets, meanwhile, have changed a lot since President Jimmy Carter argued in 1980 that the United States needed to defend the Middle East to protect the flow of oil. It's true that Saudi Arabia remains a major global oil producer, but changes in the world market mean that America today is far less reliant on Middle Eastern energy.

To keep the oil flowing, Saudi Arabia needs to be stable. It does not need to be a U.S. ally.

Even Trump's new justification - that Saudi arms sales are vital to the U.S. economy - is wrong. Arms sales figures are often inflated and are rarely as lucrative as they sound. In fact, experts believe that the purported \$110 billion of Saudi Arms sales are in reality worth only about \$28 billion. More important, they are responsible for only a small proportion of the overall U.S. defense industry.

Even as the Saudi government seeks to portray an image of reform, it has become increasingly repressive. Dissidents have been kidnapped abroad and returned to Riyadh. Human rights activists have been jailed.

Unlike past decades, however, U.S. leaders today don't have to tolerate this behavior. A less friendly relationship with Saudi Arabia won't harm U.S. interests in the Middle East. It's time to stop turning a blind eye to the worst excesses of the Saudi leadership.

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