



[The Declaration that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Official Standing Should Provide Immunity from Khashoggi Killing Lawsuits Draws Criticism from Human Rights Activists](#)

The Biden administration recently declared that Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the crown prince of Saudi Arabia – who was also named prime minister back in late September – should be immune from lawsuits connected to the heinous 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. While the Biden administration states that the high office held by MBS dictates this, critics have argued that he only accepted the official title of prime minister in order to claim immunity from the pending Khashoggi killing lawsuit. The lawsuit, filed by Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz, makes many charges including wrongful death. Some have also pointed out the notable shift in tone from the Biden campaign trail where he actively and forcefully denounced the crown prince for his role in the brutal slaying, while the White House has tried to maintain that this declaration is merely a legal matter and that the president's feelings about MBS have not changed. Regardless, Biden has elicited criticism for a visit that he made to Saudi Arabia back in July, where he even exchanged a very public fist-bump with the crown prince.

According to the Biden administration's defense of the declaration, the crown prince's official standing should warrant that he be given immunity regarding the lawsuits. In its letter, the State Department had tried to quell anticipated backlash from rights activists over the declaration by saying that "In making this immunity determination, the Department of State takes no view on the merits of the present suit and reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of the heinous murder of Jamal Khashoggi."

The decision to grant the crown prince immunity has outraged activist groups who have been trying for years to see that he faces some type of consequence for the murder of Khashoggi. Democracy for the Arab World Now said in a statement that "The Biden administration's decision was an unnecessary, elective action that will serve only to undermine the most important action for accountability for Khashoggi's heinous murder." Amnesty International has documented at least 47 cases of people in Saudi Arabia being sentenced to prison terms of up to 30 years for merely peacefully exercising their universal basic human rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The prominent rights group responded to the MBS immunity declaration by stating that those behind it "should hang their head in shame...and that this is nothing more than a sickening and total betrayal." Additionally, they expressed that the decision sends a deplorable message that those in power are free to operate above the law with total impunity.

Jamal Khashoggi was a prominent and well-respected Saudi journalist, who for years was close to the Saudi royal family and even served as an advisor. When he fell out of favor, he went into a self-imposed exile and moved to the United States, where he wrote columns criticizing the Saudi government's policies. He visited the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to obtain documents and was murdered. The U.S. intelligence community concluded that the Saudi Crown Prince approved the killing of Khashoggi. The report detailed how a group of Saudi operatives arrived in Istanbul back in 2018 to commit the heinous killing, noting that MBS viewed Khashoggi as a threat to Saudi authorities and thus wanted him silenced in any way possible. Recently, it became apparent that the Saudi government was worried enough about the pending lawsuit against MBS when he was named prime minister – a title usually held by the king – just two months ago in September. Impartial observers have outlined how the move was clearly aimed at strengthening his case for sovereign immunity, and predicted that it may in fact end up doing so.