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Opinion // On Khashoggi, U.S. Journalists Are Falling for Turkey's Conspiracist, State-run Media

In its breathless hunt for grisly, sensational details, the Western media is embracing evidence-free, state-curated 'scoops' from the same Erdogan-obedient sources that spread lies and hate towards Turkey's own journalists and political dissidents

Louis Fishman | [Send me email alerts](#)

24.10.2018 15:53 Updated: 3:54 PM

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Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan waves to members of his ruling AKP party after a speech addressing the Khashoggi murder at the parliament in Ankara, Turkey. Oct. 23, 2018. Credit: AP

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All eyes were on Turkey on Tuesday morning, in anticipation of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's promise to reveal the "naked truth" of the murder of Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. Most suspected that he would present evidence incriminating Mohammed Bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince. One Turkish official stated, in a deliberate curtain-raiser: "Nothing will remain secret."



ANADOLU AGENCY (ENG)
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World media covers #Erdogan's speech on #Khashoggi murder
aane.ws/MZq

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In the end, Erdogan **didn't reveal** anything new, and didn't even cover **vast swathes** of the details being drip-fed to the international media through anonymous Turkish official sources. We will need to wait longer to see if a key element of those stories – that Turkey possesses secret tapes, audio and perhaps even video, of the gruesome murder is confirmed.

Saudi operative dressed as Khashoggi, Turkish source says



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It has been over three weeks since Khashoggi walked into the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul and disappeared into thin air. During the first few days following his entering the embassy, those close to him must have been hoping that his fate might be that of so many dissidents worldwide, who are illegally “rendered” by their governments only to appear at show trials back in their home countries.

However, less than a week after his disappearance, Turkish newspapers ignited a media frenzy with news that a search was being conducted for his body. It seemed Turkish intelligence knew something that we did not: Khashoggi had been ruthlessly killed at the hands of the Crown Prince and the Saudi Government right there in the consulate.

Since then, Khashoggi's murder, for a lack of better words, has taken on a life of its own, transpiring into media sensation.

There is not one place in the world where people are not talking about his death; the U.S. media follows the case like a Netflix television series with all of its gory details, plot tricks and subterfuges: a body cut to pieces with a bone saw smuggled in by a 15-man Saudi hit team, a killing allegedly recorded on the [Apple watch](#) of the victim, ([unlikely](#) on technical grounds), a double who dressed up in the dead man's clothes, who exited the back door of the consulate and was [caught](#) on numerous surveillance cameras throughout the city.



ABC News
@ABC

Asked about Jamal Khashoggi's killing, Pres. Trump says, "They had a very bad original concept, it was carried out poorly, and the cover-up was one of the worst in the history of cover-ups."

abcn.ws/2CZJyM3

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President Trump seemed less impressed by the quality of the dramatic narrative: he **declared** Tuesday **that**: "They had a very bad original concept. It was carried out poorly and the cover-up was one of the worst cover-ups in the history of cover-ups."

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Khashoggi-related stories and tidbits have filled Americans' media feeds non-stop for two full weeks. But despite all the coverage, the media has missed a golden opportunity to draw greater conclusions from the story.



A Turkish journalist joins protests in Istanbul in an April 2016 trial of journalists accused of revealing state secrets. Credit: Emrah Gurel/AP

With so much attention given to the murder of a dissident journalist, one might think that Khashoggi's murder would have sparked a passionate and informed discussion on the extent of state targeted killings and other human rights violations journalists face every day.

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Instead, the international press has played up endless unconfirmed reports by the Turkish government - regularly leaked by government officials via its obedient press - and replays these second-hand scoops rather than leading their own investigative journalism.

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The latest was the claim that Khashoggi's body had been found in a

freshly dug grave in the grounds of the Saudi consul general's home, a scoop based on "unclear" and "unconfirmed" sourcing with [no back-up evidence](#) and then [denied](#) by the Istanbul police (as channeled by state-run media).

When Erdogan, who jailed more journalists than anyone in this world, lectures us about a journalist, know that you are in a living hell. #JamalKhashoggi
— Manal al-Sharif (@manal_alsharif) October 23, 2018

Suddenly a country that has the highest number of jailed journalists and has a record of kidnapping its own dissidents from abroad, has become a symbol and source of justice, with eminent papers as the New York Times and CNN quoting conspiracy-ridden government mouthpieces such as Yeni Safak, Sabah, and its English version, Daily Sabah.

And if this was not enough, - with no remaining free press in Turkey – those sources can't even pretend to offer counter narratives, just the one sole voice of Erdogan's government.

By doing this, the international media provided a stage and unwarranted legitimacy to Turkish media outlets that frequently spread lies and hate towards Turkey's own journalists and political dissidents.



Bloomberg Opinion
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Information, mixed bewilderingly with misinformation, has emerged, drip by lurid drip, since Khashoggi disappeared in the Saudi consulate three weeks ago. It has to stop
bloom.bg/2CYugHB
5:51 AM - Oct 22, 2018

Turkey's Leaks Are Undermining the Khashoggi Investigation
Only Erdogan can stop the confusing drip of information and misinformation. Here's why he should.
bloomberg.com

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Analysts have correctly stated that Turkey is using the incident as a way to delve a [major blow](#) to their Sunni rivals, [Saudi Arabia](#), and, certainly, one cannot blame Erdogan and his circles for doing their utmost to control the information and for using the leaks [to their own benefit](#).

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However, all the leaked stories in the world can't hide the fact that it can't have been by chance that the Saudis chose Istanbul as the scene for Khashoggi's grisly murder. The Saudis must have (correctly) estimated the Turkish security apparatus was not good enough to stop them. Or even (wrongly assessed) that the crime of targeting a regime critic wouldn't raise too much of an outcry among Turkish authorities.

For now, we are all caught up in stories of bone saws and blood, and have forgotten that the greater loser in this case, after Khashoggi himself, is journalism and its search for the truth.

Ironically, and painfully, it seems that it is journalists who have buried that truth in the grave dug for Khashoggi by the Saudis - undermining their jobs as journalists in a breathless hunt for more grisly, sensational details spoon fed by unnamed sources in hock to the Turkish government.

Just as the West has already exhausted its interest in attacks on free expression in Turkey (among other places in the world), the more "conventional" stories of journalists jailed, disappeared and killed will continue to be treated as mundane - and unremarked.



A woman holds a placard at a demonstration for journalists detained in Turkey during the visit of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to Berlin, Germany. September 28, 2018. Credit: \ CHRISTIAN MANG/ REUTERS

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By not placing the Khashoggi murder in the context of an attack on journalists in general and highlighting Turkey's repressive media climate in particular, it seems a safe prediction that we will have more Khashoggis whose fates won't be tracked so closely because their far quieter deaths will be filed under "old news."

Louis Fishman is an assistant professor at Brooklyn College who has lived in Turkey and writes about Turkish and Israeli-Palestinian affairs. Twitter: @Istanbultelaviv



Louis Fishman