

Jamal Khashoggi, 2019 WAN-IFRA Golden Pen of Freedom

The job of a journalist is to seek the truth, often putting one's personal safety at risk. In October 2018, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi paid the ultimate price for his truth-seeking – with his life. The former author, columnist and dissident is this year's Golden Pen of Freedom award winner for his perpetual quest to report on events about his homeland, regardless of the consequences.

By Colette Davidson

Since the 1980s, Jamal Khashoggi was a mainstay in the Saudi and Middle East journalism landscape, with an upbringing that allowed him access to the inner circles of the Saudi royal family.

Born in 1958 to a prominent Saudi family, Khashoggi's grandfather was the doctor to King Abdul Aziz, the founder of Saudi Arabia, while his uncle became a billionaire weapons broker for Saudi King Fahd. He was cousin to Dodi Fayed, the romantic partner of Britain's Princess Diana when the pair died in a car accident in Paris in 1997.

But Khashoggi's privileged access to Saudi's ruling elite was coupled with a criticism of that same world, and by the early 2000s, he was becoming known for his disapproval of the Saudi government and Saudi-led actions.

Until then, Khashoggi had held positions at several Saudi publications, including as managing editor and acting editor-in-chief of *Al Madina* from 1991 to 1999. Throughout the 1990s, he was known for his coverage of the Afghan War, where he met former al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Khashoggi went on to take the position of deputy-editor in chief of *Arab News* in 1999 and in 2003 was named editor-in-chief of the *Al-Watan* paper. However, this position only lasted two months before he was dismissed for publishing a column criticizing the kingdom's religious police. The incident was the start of his reputation in the West as a liberal progressive.

He then worked as a media advisor to Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief who served as the Saudi ambassador to the UK and the US. Khashoggi returned as editor of *Al-Watan* in 2007 but his second stint there only lasted three years after he resigned under pressure following the publication of an op-ed criticizing Salafism.

In 2015, Khashoggi was named the head of a new television channel owned by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal and operated out of Bahrain. But within one day, the channel was shut down after it aired an interview with a Bahraini opposition figure.

Khashoggi soon became a frequent contributor to Saudi and international TV channels, such as the *BBC*, *Al Jazeera* and *Dubai TV*. He regularly published opinion columns on *Al Arabiya*.

At the same time, Mohammed bin Salman was rising in the ranks and by the time he became Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Khashoggi had become a prominent critic of the monarch's repressive policies. He advocated for freedom of speech in his country and called for women's rights.

In 2017, Khashoggi went into self-imposed exile in the US, after revealing that he had been “ordered to shut up.” He soon became a regular columnist for *The Washington Post* and in the years that followed and up until his death in October 2018, Khashoggi was a vocal critic of the Saudi government. So much so that the crown prince reportedly told a top aide during a 2017 conversation that he would “use a bullet” on Khashoggi if the journalist didn’t stop his criticism of the Saudi government.

But Khashoggi didn’t stop. He continued his critique, becoming more brazen in his writings about bin Salman, likening him to Russian President Vladimir Putin. In September 2018, he urged the kingdom to address its country’s participation in the Yemen war and said that Saudi Arabia could not “afford to pick fights with Canada” following a spat between the two countries over Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

In his last column for *The Washington Post* – which was published after his death – Khashoggi extended his criticisms further, writing that “Arab governments have been given free rein to continue silencing the media at an increasing rate.”

On 2 October 2018, Khashoggi entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to get documents related to his upcoming marriage to his Turkish fiancée Hatice Cengiz. But he never came out.

For the next two weeks, the Saudi government denied any knowledge about Khashoggi’s whereabouts, claiming that he had left the consulate after an hour. Then on 20 October, state television reported that he had been murdered in an operation ordered by an intelligence officer.

But conflicting information about his disappearance continued, with differing reports on how Khashoggi had died. Then, more than a month later, Saudi Arabia’s attorney general admitted that Khashoggi had been given a lethal injection inside the consulate and that his death had been premeditated.

Since Khashoggi’s murder, 11 people have been charged over the journalist’s death, with five facing the death penalty. But a high level of impunity surrounds the case, in which none of those charged have been identified. And while world leaders such as Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that the killing came from the highest levels of the Saudi government, the crown prince has always denied his involvement.

In his first column for *The Washington Post*, Khashoggi wrote, “When I speak of the fear, intimidation, arrests and public shaming of intellectuals and religious leaders who dare to speak their minds, and then I tell you that I’m from Saudi Arabia, are you surprised?”

And yet, as *Washington Post* Global Opinions writer Jason Rezaian wrote following Khashoggi’s disappearance, Khashoggi constantly expressed love for his homeland and a desire to return, “always reiterating his belief that Saudi Arabia could and would do better.”

Read Jamal Khashoggi’s work with the Washington Post

The last column he wrote before his disappearance:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/jamal-khashoggi-what-the-arab-world-needs-most-is-free-expression/2018/10/17/adfc8c44-d21d-11e8-8c22-fa2ef74bd6d6_story.html?utm_term=.bba752887b8e



The rest of his columns:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/10/06/read-jamal-khashoggis-columns-for-the-washington-post/?utm_term=.27cea6a97eaf

Press Freedom in Saudi Arabia

- Saudi Arabia does not allow any independent media.
- The country's [World Press Freedom Index in 2019](#) is 172, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), up three points since 2018.
- The number of journalists and citizen-journalists in detention has tripled since the start of 2017, according to RSF, with most held arbitrarily and likely facing torture.
- Despite the international criticism Saudi Arabia faced following Khashoggi's murder, authorities continue to detain peaceful activists and dissidents for long periods without trial, according to [Human Rights Watch](#).
- Journalists who voice criticism or analyse political problems risk being fired or detained under criminal code provisions or under terrorism or cybercrime laws, according to RSF.
- Freedom House lists Saudi Arabia's [Freedom in the World Status](#) as well as its [Press Freedom Status](#) as "Not Free."