

Anti-LaRouche Operative Khashoggi Fired by Saudis

by Hussein Askary

Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi, editor-in-chief of the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*, was fired from his editor's post on May 27. The decision obviously came from "higher" authorities in the government, rather than from the newspaper itself. International news wires reported that the sacking of Khashoggi, was a defeat for the "reformists" and a victory for the "extremists."

One Arab journalist told *EIR* that the characterization of Khashoggi as a "moderate reformist" is a joke. "We had to fire him some years ago from our newspaper, because no one could stand his raving pro-bin Laden fanaticism," said this source. Khashoggi spent many years in the company of bin Laden's Arab Afghans during the Afghan war against Russia, reporting on the "heroic deeds" of the mujahideen.

AP's wire was titled "Saudi Government Fires Anti-Extremist Editor." AP described Khashoggi as "an editor whose newspaper was in the forefront of a campaign against Muslim extremism."

For Cultural 'Reforms' Only

Khashoggi started a campaign in *Al-Watan* after the bombings in Riyadh on May 12, asking the government to "purge" and strike with an "iron fist," not only supporters of terrorism, but anyone he saw as extremist and anti-Western (i.e., critical of Anglo-American policies). *Al-Watan*, according to AP, "published many critical articles in the wake of the May 12 attacks in Riyadh that killed 34 people, suggesting that Muslim fanaticism, long tolerated in the country, led to terrorism. On Saturday, Khashoggi, writing about fanaticism, said: 'It's time we treated the affliction and held those who strayed accountable.'"

Khashoggi used the newspaper to attack a number of powerful religious authorities and agencies—a matter which enraged many of the powerful religious forces in Saudi Arabia. He is regarded by many Saudi intellectuals as an agent and a member of "a fifth column" which is pushing the imperial version of reforms; i.e., free trade, privatization, more pop-culture, and video-games. Meanwhile, he undermined the call for real political and social reforms—such as elections to break the grip of the royal family on the nation's economy and politics—and the repatriation of Saudi money to be invested in infrastructure and industrial projects. "Reformists" like Khashoggi have insisted that Saudis erroneously believe that they are themselves to blame for the Sept. 11 attacks.

Khashoggi and others have attempted to use the terror bombings in Riyadh as another "Reichstag fire" to carry out a coup in the country. "Many Saudis who had hoped that their country was on a path toward change following the terror attacks against three compounds housing foreign workers were disappointed by the news of Khashoggi's dismissal," reported AP. It cited another "reformist," Turki al-Hamad, as saying: "This is a bad sign. . . . This will be considered a victory by the extremists. It's like an invitation for more attacks."

A few days before the sacking of Khashoggi, he and Al-Hamad made quite revealing statements to Murdoch's Fox News. Fox reported that "since the Sept. 11 terror attacks, some Americans have criticized the Saudi government, blaming the country's strict version of Islam for breeding militants like al-Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden. Now some Saudis are making a linkage between hard-line clerics and extremist violence. It's now a matter of the survival of the nation and society," said Turki al-Hamad, a writer and columnist. "If the government treats the attacks [in Riyadh] as an isolated incident, the other side will consider it a weakness on the government's part, and the militants' hand will be strengthened." Khashoggi told Fox News that the government allowed some extremists-turned-terrorists loose. Fox hoped that "the Riyadh attacks will mark a turning point in the thinking of Saudi rulers—an end to the blind eye toward radicals, and even a change in the implicit contract that has structured the kingdom." It added that "in return for support from clerics of the austere Wahhabi sect of Islam, the Saudi royal family has given Islamists a free hand in social matters. . . . Khashoggi links that social fanaticism to anti-Western violence."

Trying a Saudi 'Reichstag Fire'

Fox proudly said of Khashoggi: "Khashoggi, in an *Al-Watan* editorial, said the government should see Monday's attacks, which fell on the 11th of the Muslim month Rabia al-Awal, in the way Washington saw the Sept. 11 attacks: as the beginning of a new era. 'Just as their [Americans'] world changed that day, our world changed that night and we should get ready for what's coming,' wrote Khashoggi."

Khashoggi became editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* in March 2003. His first decision was to remove the popular weekly article of LaRouche associate Jeffrey Steinberg. He started a campaign in October 2002 against Lyndon LaRouche and his increasing recognition in Arabic media and institutions. Khashoggi wrote a slander article against LaRouche, first published in Kuwait and later in Lebanon, and in the London-based Saudi daily *Asharq Al-Awsat*. The Straussian Middle East Media and Research Institute in Washington translated Khashoggi's article to other languages and circulated it.

A hot item circulating in the Saudi Internet discussion groups since Khashoggi's sacking, is *EIR*'s article refuting Khashoggi's attack on LaRouche: "Why is Khashoggi worried about LaRouche?"