

As others condemn Saudi Arabia, Germany takes action

As the Trudeau government faces increasing pressure to cancel a \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia — a move that the prime minister warns would leave Canadians “holding a billion-dollar bill” — most other Western countries, with the exception of Germany, have done little more than condemn the slaying of dissident Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi.

In addition to pulling out of a Saudi investment conference that began Tuesday, here’s a look at some of their responses.

On Sunday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that arms sales to Saudi Arabia “can’t take place in the situation we’re currently in.”

Her Economy Minister, Peter Altmaier, expanded that statement Monday in an interview with German public broadcaster ZDF, saying, “We won’t, at this point, approve any further arms exports because we want to know what happened.” German officials are now pressuring fellow European Union countries to follow suit, though none have announced similar plans as of yet.

“(O)nly if all European countries agree will this make an impression on the government in Riyadh,” Altmaier added in the interview. “It will have no positive consequences if we, as we are doing, currently don’t pursue our arms exports, if at the same time other countries fill this gap.”

It remains unclear if Germany will also block weapons sales that have already been approved. According to The Associated Press, US \$479 million worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia were greenlighted by Germany in the first three quarters of 2018. Merkel and her coalition government partners, however, declared earlier this year that they would not sell arms to countries directly involved in the bloody war in Yemen, which Saudi Arabia is spearheading.

United States

Although U.S. President Donald Trump has said that he is “not satisfied” with Saudi Arabia’s official explanation of Khashoggi’s death, he has also rejected calls

from members of his own party to enact sanctions and scrap billions of dollars of weapons sales to the kingdom, which would invariably hurt powerful U.S. arms manufacturers and eliminate jobs.

“I don’t want to lose all of that investment that’s being made in our country,” Trump said, according to The Associated Press.

Saudi Arabia is the world’s largest purchaser of U.S. arms. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Saudi Arabia purchased approximately US\$9 billion worth of weapons from the U.S. between 2013 and 2017, accounting for 18 per cent of all U.S. arms sales in that period. In Saudi Arabia on his first foreign trip as president in May 2017, Trump also announced a US\$110 billion arms agreement with the country that could be expanded to US\$350 billion over 10 years.

United Kingdom

Much like other European countries, the U.K. has condemned Khashoggi’s killing and questioned the credibility of Saudi Arabia’s account of the incident.

In an Oct. 19 interview with the BBC, British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt warned there would be “consequences” if it was determined that Saudi Arabia’s leaders plotted Khashoggi’s murder. According to multiple Oct. 20 reports, the U.K.’s Foreign Office is now considering “next steps.”

“(T)hose responsible must be held to account,” the office reportedly stated.

The Foreign Office did not, however, explain what such “steps” could be.

According to the BBC, the U.K. exported the equivalent of CA\$7.1 billion worth of goods to Saudi Arabia in 2017. The U.K. is also the second largest supplier of arms to the kingdom after the U.S. while Saudi Arabia is the biggest importer of British weapons, according to SIPRI.

France

France joined Germany and the U.K. in a joint Oct. 21 statement condemning Khashoggi’s slaying.

“Nothing can justify this killing and we condemn it in the strongest possible

terms,” the statement read. “The quality and significance of the relationship we have with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also rests with the respect we have for the norms and values to which the Saudi authorities and us are jointly committed under international law.”

At an Oct. 22 press conference, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian hinted at potential punitive measures over the Khashoggi affair without elaborating on what they could be. France, Le Drian explained, is awaiting results of further investigations into Khashoggi’s death before taking “necessary measures, if required.”

France, he added, wants “the utmost clarity on this murder, which is not the case today.”

France is one of the top five arms exporters in the world. On Oct. 23, French President Emmanuel Macron refused to answer journalists’ questions about halting arms sales to Saudi Arabia, according to multiple media reports. The French government has previously said that it exported the equivalent of CA\$16.5 billion of arms to the kingdom between 2008 and 2017.

With files from The Canadian Press and The Associated Press

Source: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/as-others-condemn-saudi-arabia-germany-takes-action-1.4147222>

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