

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write deeply troubled by the numerous, alarming instances of state-sponsored incarceration and murder of journalists and dissidents by foreign governments. Recent cases show that some foreign governments increasingly believe that silencing critics through violence and coercion is an acceptable practice for curbing dissent. These governments, however, should recognize that the United States disagrees with their strong-arm tactics and will continue to be the loudest global voice advocating for the rights of those speaking out against corruption and repression. No one should get a free pass.

This weekend's media reports about the disappearance of noted journalist and dissident Jamal Khashoggi again highlight this concerning trend. Although we lack a full understanding of the circumstances that led to his disappearance, media reports indicate that the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia might have played a role. According to press reports, Khashoggi — a *Washington Post* columnist and critic of the Saudi government — disappeared after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey and may have been murdered while inside.¹

Although the Saudi government denies any wrongdoing, its recent actions cracking down on dissent within the Kingdom — for instance, in the cases of dubiously jailed activist Raif Badawi and his lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair — and retaliating against global criticism make plausible allegations of Saudi official involvement. We were disappointed by the State Department's initial response, which merely “call[ed] on the government of Saudi Arabia to support a thorough investigation of Khashoggi's disappearance and to be transparent about the results of that investigation.”² We are disappointed that the Trump administration apparently intends to rely on a government that habitually crushes dissent to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation, and are skeptical that it can or will do so. This case deserves your full attention and a clear, forceful statement that the United States does not tolerate this kind of behavior.

¹ Peter Bergen, *The awful disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi*, CNN (Oct. 8, 2018),

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/08/opinions/the-awful-disappearance-of-jamal-khashoggi-bergen/index.html>.

² Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, *Journalist Jamal Khashoggi*, Press Statement, Department of State (Oct. 8, 2018), <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/10/286506.htm>.

Furthermore, the Khashoggi case is part of a troubling trend. Around the globe, journalists and dissidents alike — and the very concepts of a free press and freedom of speech — are under increasing attack. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, thus far in 2018, 43 journalists have been killed. Since 2017, 267 journalists have been arrested and detained. The very same day that Khashoggi's disappearance was first reported, stories appeared in international media on the rape and murder of Bulgarian investigative journalist Viktoria Marinova, the third journalist killed in an EU country this year.³ Just this past week, the Chinese Communist Party detained the INTERPOL President, Meng Hongwei, under suspect circumstances, and Chinese authorities have reportedly threatened his wife and family.⁴ The government in Burma recently convicted two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, for reporting on the military's role in the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State.

There are also disturbing examples from Pakistan, Honduras, Russia, and China. Last month, the Committee to Protect Journalists released a report condemning the government of Pakistan for cracking down on its press and calling for an end to “the disturbing trend of impunity and attacks on journalists to shore up this faltering pillar of democracy.”⁵ Journalists covering the trial of four intelligence officers accused of the 2016 assassination of prominent Honduran human rights defender Berta Cáceres have received multiple death threats. Russia's state-sanctioned killings of journalists and political activists exposing corruption in that country's government are well documented. And the Chinese government continues to repress free speech and expression, having detained a number of Uyghur journalists and academics. China also recently denied a visa for the president of Hong Kong's Foreign Press Club.

These are just some of many examples of how foreign governments are attacking and undermining freedom of the press and voices of dissent. Without a stronger response by the United States, this trend almost certainly will continue. In fact, many are concerned that America's inaction abroad, accompanied by President Trump's caustic rhetoric toward America's own press and those who disagree with him, are creating a permissive environment for those inclined to pursue repressive behavior. Authoritarians worldwide have noticed and are mimicking the President's constant, self-serving cries of “fake news” and his false assertion that the nation's journalists are “the enemy of the American people.”⁶ Leaders of at least twenty countries have used similar accusations of “fake news” as a means to “justify the closure of

³ *Suspect in Bulgarian journalist's murder to be released*, Al Jazeera (Oct. 9, 2018), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/suspect-arrested-bulgarian-journalist-murder-report-181009113724699.html>.

⁴ Rosie Perper, *'You listen, but you don't speak.' Wife of missing former Interpol chief says Chinese agents threatened her over the phone*, Business Insider (Oct. 10, 2018), <https://www.businessinsider.com/interpol-chief-wife-meng-hongwei-says-china-threatened-her-2018-10>.

⁵ Ayaz Gul, *CPJ: Pakistan's Press Freedom Climate Fraying*, VOA (Sept. 12, 2018), <https://www.voanews.com/a/cpj-pakistan-s-press-freedom-climate-fraying/4568559.html>.

⁶ Michael M. Grynbaum, *Trump Calls the News Media the 'Enemy of the American People'*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 17, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html>.


critical news outlets, to imprison reporters, to censor content, and to block public access to the Internet and social media sites.”⁷


America must retain its moral high ground and continue working to protect individual freedoms around the world. A free, vibrant press and the right for anyone to openly voice dissent ensures that people around the world stay informed, world leaders remain accountable, and every individual may speak truth to power. We respectfully request that you evaluate how the U.S. government can better bring to bear its full set of tools and resources to more forcefully oppose authoritarian efforts aimed at silencing critics around the world and brief us on your findings as soon as possible. As a country built on the foundation of freedom of speech, we cannot be silent when this fundamental right is being quashed elsewhere.


We in the United States Senate stand ready to work with you on this important issue. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

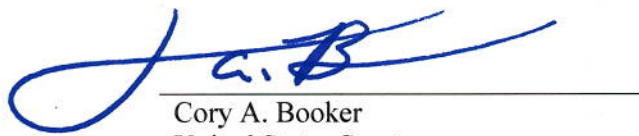

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Tammy Duckworth
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⁷ Editorial, *What despots hear when Trump calls the press the “enemy of the people,”* Baltimore Sun (July 30, 2018), <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-0731-trump-nyt-20180730-story.html> (quoting Caroline Lees, *Fake News: The Global Silencer*, Index On Censorship, (Apr. 9, 2018), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0306422018769578?journalCode=ioca>).



Patty Murray
United States Senator



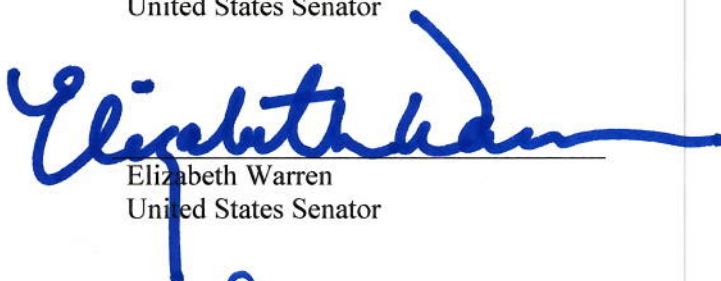
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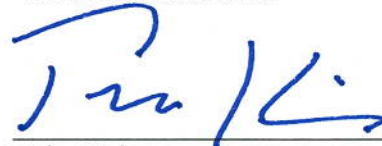
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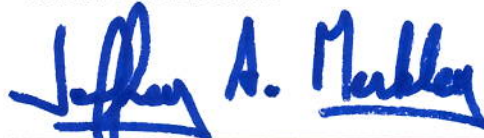
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