



## The murder and the famine

There are calls to boycott a Saudi Arabian economic conference, known as 'Davos in the desert'. On sports pages, there is even pressure on Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic to cancel an exhibition tennis match in Saudi Arabia due to happen in December.

The reason? It seems that the journalist Jamal Khashoggi was horrifically tortured and killed in the Saudi Arabian embassy in Istanbul on the orders of the Saudi Arabian government, under Crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

This is a horrific crime, and if the Saudi government is involved, it is appalling. That much is true.

But what is odd is that this individual case, horrific though it is, carries quite such standing. Were it not for Khashoggi, there would seemingly be no issue with, say, Djokovic and Nadal playing a tennis match in Saudi.

Yet just consider this. 13 million people, yes 13 million people, in Yemen are in danger of dying of hunger. The reason? The war between Saudi Arabia and Iran taking place in Yemen, with citizens caught in the crossfire, and food supplies blocked.

On one level, it is a more complicated issue: Saudi Arabia is nominally supporting the internationally recognised government. That much is true.

But all now agree that prolonging this war could cause literally millions of deaths. For now, the deaths

are in their hundreds: this may well, though, turn into thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands and then worse. (And, by the way, there are British made weapons involved.) Yet this, it seems, is not such an issue for international diplomats.

There are two reasons for the discrepancy.

The first is that there seems to be a tape involved. Horrific, but clear evidence, and crucially the sort of thing that could be put onto a website in due course, perhaps appropriately edited, but this could be eminently clickable. For news websites, this is crucial.

The second is that Khashoggi was a journalist. And journalists, who control the media, have double concerns about their own. To some extent, this is understandable, even admirable. But the danger is when their perspective warps the judgement of the world at large.

Surely, the 13 million potentially dying in Yemen should be enough to cancel conferences/ tennis matches/ arms sales/ anything at all. Surely the 13 million should be the key focus. Khashoggi's case is awful, but can we not focus on the 13 million who can still be saved?

For sure, it may not be as exciting a story. It doesn't have the torture-gone-wrong scene that might crop up in Hollywood films. It's just a humdrum scenario of many, many poor people dying an unexotic death, in a land far far away. But 13 million... Come, on.