



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 17, 2022

Golf's Civil War: Does the Reaction to New Saudi LIV Tour Reflect Hypocrisy?

Golf may be a “good walk spoiled,” as the apocryphal quip goes (so I use a cart), but not when you’re getting \$200 million for the stroll. That’s precisely the amount of money golfer Phil Mickelson is reportedly being paid, mind you, to participate in the LIV Golf Invitational Series. A Saudi-backed venture, LIV’s big-oil-money seduction of some of the sport’s marquee names has made golf conversation a good talk spoiled, sparking an intra-game civil war.

Mickelson, 51, is joined on the LIV by former number one players Dustin Johnson, who reportedly landed \$125 million; and Greg Norman, who at 67 is commanding \$50 million to be the tour’s CEO; along with a number of lesser lights, many in the twilight of their careers.



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The PGA (Professional Golfer’s Association) Tour — the world’s premier golf stage — is none too pleased. Even though it’s a non-profit entity, the players are independent contractors all, and the LIV is a mere eight-tournament series, the PGA made clear it expected loyalty. It [later suspended](#) approximately 17 LIV-bound players.

Ostensibly, the controversy concerns Saudi Arabia’s checkered human-rights record, including its killing of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Yet also at issue is a longstanding struggle between the PGA and players who believe it abuses its near-monopoly status. This was the reason Mickelson gave, for example, for getting involved with the Saudis even though they’re, as he [put it](#), “scary m***** f*****s.”

The February publication of Mickelson’s comments caused him, previously golf’s golden boy, to get serious blow-back; he consequently apologized and exiled himself, disappearing for a spell like a vicious duck hook into a dense stand of trees.

Since then, the controversy has swirled. Former world number one Rory McIlroy has become a PGA Tour [defender](#), [saying](#) the LIV players are “fracturing game more than it already is.” Greg Norman, owner of a bit of a sharp tongue, [called](#) golf legend Jack Nicklaus a “hypocrite” after the latter said he had “zero interest” in the Saudi venture. And ex-player and Golf Channel analyst Brandel Chamblee [insisted](#) that Mickelson and Norman should be expelled from the Hall of Fame.

People in Glass Clubhouses Shouldn’t Throw Golf Balls?

Yet perhaps missed here is something about a different entity, the Hall of Shame: It’s filled to overflowing — and the PGA may be in it.



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Sports writer Ken Willis recently [pointed out](#) that while some people are treating Mickelson like an untimely shank, Joe Biden will soon visit Saudi Arabia to plead for more oil production and our State Department publishes glowing pronouncements about our House of Saud “allies.” Of course, many are inured to such longstanding U.S. policy and some dismiss it as necessary realpolitik (which is apparently good enough for government but not their people). But then there’s this:

The PGA itself has a “little-known cozy relationship with China,” as Real Clear Policy (RCP) [put it](#) in April.

“PGA Tour China is one of several developmental circuits run by the Tour,” RCP elaborated. “The PGA Tour appears unfazed by China’s appalling human rights record, which currently includes accusations of brutal persecution of its Uyghur Muslim population.”

What’s more, say what you will about Saudi Arabia — you *can* say what you will. Condemnation for the kingdom flows like its oil and is welcome; the PGA perhaps relishes it.

Not so with China. The NBA and its owners have [more than \\$10 billion in investments](#) in the nation and regularly grovel before Beijing. When then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted support for Hong Kong’s pro-freedom protesters in 2019, for example, he was [pressured into apologizing](#), his tweet was deleted, the NBA issued a *mea culpa*, players parroted the league line, and the excuse essentially was that Morey was just a loose-lipped ignoramus. Moreover, ex-dribbler Charles Barkley [dismissed](#) the NBA’s critics as “idiots” and said it was a “business decision.” (Uh, yes, Chuck — so was slavery.)

The NBA is no outlier in sports, either. RCP points out that the NHL, NFL, and MLB also pander to China for profit.

In fact, pseudo-elites in business, government, and elsewhere have long been selling us out to Beijing, a government that censors our movies, puts propaganda in our schools, and steals our intellectual property. Saudi Arabia can’t, and thus doesn’t, do those things.

China also is a major power that’s delivering a 1984-like surveillance state, is our main geopolitical adversary, and could very well knock us off our perch in its quest for world dominance. Saudi Arabia isn’t and can’t.

This isn’t to say live and let LIV (or not). It’s only to say that one truth here is plain: The golfers joining the league did so for the same reason others kowtow to China — money.

And some of those in Beijing’s bed are willing to criticize Saudi Arabia because it doesn’t cost them anything.

So what’s the morality here? In theological circles, there’s something called “material cooperation in evil” (which, though unintentional, is not necessarily unforeseen). It’s unavoidable to an extent, too. For example, it’s perhaps impossible to find a corporation that isn’t facilitating some evil woke agenda. Nonetheless, because we live in this material world, we have to buy necessities such as food, and other goods, from *somewhere* — hence the material cooperation.

The difference is that the PGA, NBA, and other entities in question certainly don’t *need* more money. The bottom line is that if the LIV players are to be condemned, they should not be alone in the dock.



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