

Graham ties Saudi crown prince to Khashoggi killing: 'There's not a smoking gun — there's a smoking saw'

By Garrett Haake and Dartunorro Clark

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WASHINGTON — Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said on Tuesday that the evidence connecting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the brutal killing of journalist [Jamal Khashoggi](#) was so strong, it amounted to "a smoking saw."

"There's not a smoking gun — there's a smoking saw," Graham said after leaving an intelligence briefing by CIA director Gina Haspel for a small group of senators. "You have to be willfully blind not to come to the conclusion that this was orchestrated and organized by people under the command of MBS and that he was intricately involved in the demise of Mr. Khashoggi."

The crown prince is often referred to by his initials, MBS.

Graham, who sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee, has been one of the crown prince's fiercest critics after Khashoggi, a Saudi citizen and vocal critic of the Saudi government who resided in the U.S., [was killed after entering the Saudi Consulate](#) in Istanbul, Turkey, on Oct. 2. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, however, have attempted to downplay the crown prince's role in the murder.

Graham, however, told reporters on Tuesday that there was "zero chance, zero, that this happened in such an organized fashion without the crown prince."

Other senators who attended the briefing echoed Graham's assessment.

"I have zero question in my mind that the crown prince, MBS, ordered the killing, monitored the killing, knew exactly what was happening, planned it in advance," said Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "If he was in front of a jury he would be convicted in 30 minutes. Guilty. So, the question is what do we do about that?"

Corker said questions remain on what action lawmakers can take now, but he called on the Trump administration to strongly condemn the killing.

"I know that they have to have exactly the same intelligence that we have. And there's no way that anybody with a straight face could say there's any question about what has happened," Corker said.

Trump, [in exclamation point-filled formal presidential statement](#) last month, said his administration would stand by Saudi Arabia's rulers and take no actions against them over the killing of Khashoggi.

Trump called the "crime" against Khashoggi "terrible" and "one that our country does not condone," but stopped short of pointing blame at Saudi Arabia.

However, NBC News [reported](#) last month that the CIA concluded that bin Salman ordered the killing of Khashoggi, a Washington Post opinion columnist critical of the crown prince's regime, according to a person briefed on the CIA's assessment. The [Washington Post](#), citing people familiar with the matter, first reported the assessment, stating that the CIA made its conclusion with "high confidence."

Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Alaska, said Tuesday that the briefing "basically confirmed a lot of our thoughts." He also said "somebody should be punished," but said "the real problem" would be separating the Saudi crown prince and his associates from the nation itself.

Graham said he will press the Senate to vote on a resolution that would find the crown prince complicit in Khashoggi's murder, according to The Associated Press. The AP also reported that the South Carolina lawmaker said he cannot support arms sales to the country as the crown prince is its leader.

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