

SENATE REBUKES TRUMP ON YEMEN

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Ties under stress: Prince Mohammed bin Salman, centre, with President Donald Trump at the White House in 2017.

The Senate on Thursday voted overwhelmingly, by 56-41, to end the U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. A second resolution, which passed in the Senate unanimously, held Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) personally responsible for journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder. The resolutions are the strongest rebuke to date of the Trump administration's handling of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and the death of *Washington Post* columnist Khashoggi.

The resolution calling for an end to U.S. support of the war in Yemen, introduced by Bernie Sanders (Independent, Vermont) and Mike Lee (Republican, Utah), invoked, for the first time, the War Powers Act of 1973, which was introduced as part of Congress's reaction to the Vietnam War.

"Today, we declare we will not long participate in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, which has caused the worst humanitarian crisis on earth, with 85,000 children starving to death," Mr. Sanders said. "Today, for the first time, we are going to go forward utilising that legislation, and tell the President that the constitutional responsibility for making war rests with Congress, not the White House."

'Inconclusive evidence'

The second resolution blaming Prince Mohammed for the murder, introduced by Bob Corker, a Republican Senator who heads the Foreign Relations Committee, is another rebuke of the administration.

The President and top officials, including Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, have refrained from blaming the Crown Prince, saying the evidence is inconclusive despite the CIA concluding that the Prince ordered the killing of Khashoggi.

The Corker resolution says the Senate "believes Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi" and asks the Saudi government to "ensure appropriate responsibility" for all those responsible for the murder.

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't!" Mr. Trump had written in a statement on November 20 on the Prince's role in the murder of Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

The administration has taken a soft stand towards Saudi Arabia and the Prince, citing billions of dollars in arms purchases with the kingdom and the role Saudi Arabia plays as an ally in West Asia. A group of House Democrats and Republicans received a briefing from CIA Director Gina Haspel on Wednesday — her briefing with the Senate earlier this month had left many Senators convinced that the Crown Prince was behind the murder of Khashoggi.

However, on Thursday, Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Mattis had briefed the House on the investigation into Khashoggi's death and argued for U.S. logistics support and intelligence sharing with Saudi Arabia, the *New York Times* reported.

Earlier this month, the *Washington Post* reported that shortly after Mr. Trump won the Presidency, the Saudis had paid for 500 nights at his Washington DC hotel in just three months. Since October, 11 Democratic Senators had asked, twice, for Mr. Trump and the Trump Organization to reveal the Organization's financial ties to the kingdom.

Among the Republican Senators who joined Democrats in voting for the War Powers resolution were Susan Collins (Maine), Jeff Flake (Arizona) and Rand Paul (Kentucky).

Concerned about upsetting the Saudi-U.S. relationship, Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell had earlier urged Senators to not vote for the first resolution but to support the Corker resolution, blaming Prince Mohammed. "The Sanders-Lee resolution is neither precise enough or prudent enough," Mr. McConnell said, adding that the second resolution "does a good job of capturing bipartisan concerns."

The resolution calling for an end to Yemen war support is unlikely to pass in the House, which is under Republican control till the end of the year. House Republicans passed a measure earlier this week blocking Yemen-related resolutions from being taken up in the House until year-end.

The process would have to be taken up again next year when the new Congress convenes with a House under Democrat control.

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