

# What We Know About Saudi Arabia's Role in 9/11

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Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at The Washington Institute, specializing in energy matters and the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf.



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## The Saudi government still says it had no connection to the hijackers, but newly released classified information indicates otherwise.

Sometimes, reality is so absurd that it outstrips anything conspiracy theorists could come up with. More than 13 years after the congressional investigation published its report into the events surrounding the 9/11 attacks, the much-discussed "[28 pages \(http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/twenty-eight-pages\)](http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/twenty-eight-pages)" on Saudi involvement in the terrorist assault, which had been held back as too sensitive to publish, have been released. It turns out, there are 29 pages, not 28, numbered 415 through 443 in the congressional inquiry into the 9/11 attacks. And deletions on the pages -- sometimes words, often whole lines -- add up to the equivalent of a total of three pages. So we still are not being given the full story.

It is instantly apparent that the widely-held belief for why the pages were not initially released -- to prevent embarrassing the Saudi royal family -- is true. The [pages](https://intelligence.house.gov/uploadedfiles/declasspart4.pdf)

[\(https://intelligence.house.gov/uploadedfiles/declasspart4.pdf\)](https://intelligence.house.gov/uploadedfiles/declasspart4.pdf) are devastating:

Page 415: "While in the United States, some of the September 11 hijackers were in contact with, and received support and assistance from, individuals who may be connected to the Saudi government...at least two of those individuals were alleged by some to be Saudi intelligence officers."

Page 417: One of the individuals identified in the pages as a financial supporter of two of the 9/11 hijackers, Osama Bassnan, later received a "significant amount of cash" from "a member of the Saudi Royal Family" during a 2002 trip to Houston.

Page 418: "Another Saudi national with close ties to the Saudi Royal Family, [deleted], is the subject of FBI counterterrorism investigations."

Pages 418 and 419: Detained al Qaeda leader Abu Zaybaida had in his phone book the unlisted number for the security company that managed the Colorado residence of Saudi ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

Page 421: "a [deleted], dated July 2, 2002 [indicates] 'incontrovertible evidence that there is support for these terrorists inside the Saudi Government.'"

Page 426: Bassnan's wife was receiving money "from Princess Haifa bint Sultan," the wife of the Saudi ambassador. (Her correct name is actually Princess Haifa bint Faisal.)

Page 436: Treasury General Counsel David Aufhauser testified that "offices of [the Saudi charity] al-Haramain have significant contacts with extremists, Islamic extremists." CIA officials also testified "that they were making progress on their investigations of al-Haramain...the head of the central office is complicit in supporting terrorism, and it also raised questions about [Saudi interior minister] Prince Nayef."

On reading this, I let out a shout: "Yes!" In January 2002, *U.S. News & World Report* **quoted** (<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/fr/604180/posts>) two unidentified Clinton administration officials as saying that two senior Saudi princes had been paying off Osama bin Laden since a 1995 bombing in Riyadh, which killed five American military advisors. I followed up in an August 2002 *Wall Street Journal* **op-ed** (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB102910989960335035>), reporting that U.S. and British officials had told me the names of the two senior princes who were using official Saudi money -- not their own -- to pay off bin Laden to cause trouble elsewhere but not in the kingdom. I referred to the princes in a later *Wall Street Journal* **op-ed** (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB112303561481603445>): They were Prince Nayef, the father of the current crown prince, Muhammad bin Nayef, and his brother Prince Sultan, then-defense minister and father of Prince Bandar. Both Prince Nayef and Prince Sultan are now dead.

The *U.S. News & World Report* article quoted a Saudi official saying: "Where's the evidence? Nobody offers proof." That official was current Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, who has no doubt spent recent days lobbying members of Congress doing advance damage control -- my bet is he has probably been using the same lines.

But with the release of the 29 pages, and their detailed description of the financial connections between the 9/11 hijackers and Saudi officials, Jubeir's argument has become increasingly difficult to make. The inquiry, after all, quotes a redacted source alleging "incontrovertible evidence that there is support for these terrorists within the Saudi Government."

Upon the pages' release, Washington-based PR firm Qorvis, which has a lucrative contract with the kingdom, released its own analysis that began with a quote from an **interview** (<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/06/12/CIA-no-evidence-of-Saudi-involvement-in-Sept-11-.html>) that CIA Director John Brennan gave to al-Arabiyya on June 11. It reads in part: "[T]here was no evidence to indicate that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually had supported the 9/11 attacks."

That could very well be right. But it still allows for the possibility, indeed the probability, that the actions of senior Saudis resulted in those terrorist outrages. I have never suggested that the Saudi government or members of the royal family directly supported or financed the 9/11 attacks. But official Saudi money ended up in the pockets of the attackers, without a doubt. I once asked a British official: "How do we know?" He replied that we know what account the money came out of, and where it ended up.

On Friday, Foreign Minister al-Jubeir held a news conference at the Saudi embassy where he declared "The matter is now finished." Asked whether the report exonerated the kingdom, he replied: "Absolutely." I think not.

Simon Henderson is the Baker Fellow and director of the Gulf and Energy Policy Program at The Washington Institute. ❖

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