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Roaming Charges: Fathers and Sons, Bushes and Bin Ladens



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Chances are that George W. Bush didn't need to be tutored on how to pronounce Osama bin Laden's name, after the president was informed about the events of 9/11 while reading the story about that goat to grade-schoolers in Sarasota, Florida. The Bin Ladens and the Bushes go way back.

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Exactly how far back remains a matter of conjecture. But, like many ultra-rich Saudis, the Bin Laden brood has always had a thing for Texas. The patriarch of the Bin Laden clan, Mohammed Bin Laden, the son of a Yemeni bricklayer who moved to Saudi Arabia and struck it rich in the construction business, flew frequently to Dallas to seal deals with his associates in the oil industry, often in his private jet. There's much speculation, though no hard proof, that Mohammed knew George Bush the First and his cohort of oil, banking and political cronies in the Lone Star state.

Mohammed died in a plane crash in Saudi Arabia. One of his elder sons, Salem, died near San Antonio when his ultra-light airplane got snagged in power lines. Of all the Bin Ladens, it was Salem who enjoyed the closest relationship with the Bush tribe. The connection was a Houston wheeler-dealer named James Bath, who haunted the darker back corridors of the Bush-Reagan years, amid the fragrance of scandals from Iran/contra to BCCI to the Silverado Savings and Loan debacle to Iranian weapon mogul Adnan Khashoggi.

Bath was an Air Force fighter pilot in Vietnam who ended up in the National Guard in Houston, where he first met George W. Bush, who had fled to the Guard in order to avoid the unpleasantness of combat in Southeast Asia. Bath and Bush became fast friends, with Bush later recalling that "Bath was a lot of fun."

In the mid-1970s, Bath became vice-president of Atlantic Aviation, one of the world's top business aircraft sales companies. At the time, Atlantic was owned by Edward DuPont, scion of the DuPont chemical empire. DuPont's brother, Richard, served on the board of Atlantic. According to Gerard Colby's excellent book, [DuPont Dynasty](#), Richard's own company, Summit Aviation, was a longtime CIA contractor.

In 1976, Bath met Osama Bin Laden's brother Salem. Salem was entranced by planes and he and Bath hit it off almost immediately. Soon Salem had Bath named as a trustee for the Bin Laden family operations and considerable investments in the United States. It was through the Bin Ladens that Bath was introduced to one of their old family friends, Adnan Khashoggi, uncle of the murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. According to Robert Lacey's book, [The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud](#), Mohammad Bin Laden was a patient of Khashoggi's father, Dr. Mohammad Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi physician. The young Khashoggi became a middleman for the Bin Laden conglomerate in the late 1950s, getting his start by negotiating a big truck sale that earned him a \$25,000 fee.

It wasn't too long after Bath met Bin Laden that he made a \$50,000 investment in Arbusto Energy, a small oil company that was George W. Bush's first business venture. (Arbusto

means “bush” or “shrub” in Spanish.) In his [book on Poppy Bush](#), investigative journalist Pete Brewton asserts that one of Bath’s former business partners, Charles White, claims that it was in this very same year of 1976 that George H.W. Bush, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Ford Administration, recruited Bath to work for the CIA. White later claimed in court records that the \$50,000 came from the Bin Laden family, an allegation that Bath disputed. Brewton also cites White as saying that one of Bath’s jobs was to report on the investments of Saudi millionaires. White, by the way, was another fighter pilot and went to Annapolis with Oliver North.

Through the Bin Ladens, Bath was also introduced to Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz, the CEO of the National Commercial Bank, once Saudi Arabia’s biggest financial institution. The NCB was a prime lender Khashoggi. In 1985, at a time when the arms dealer was moving weapons to Afghanistan, Iran and the contras, NCB loaned Khashoggi \$35 million. Bath would team with Mahfouz, and former Texas governor John Connally, to buy the Main Bank in Houston, an institution that helped finance the campaigns of many Texas politicians through the late 1970s and 1980s.

Khalid’s banking empire would eventually extend to a stake in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, the institution that catered to crooks and spooks. Among other nefarious enterprises, BCCI served as Khashoggi’s chief bank for his arms deals with Iran, a depository for Oliver North’s covert action funds and the conduit for CIA money bound for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. In 1992, Mahfouz was indicted on fraud charges stemming from his involvement with BCCI. The Federal Reserve Board found that Khalid and his NCB had violated US banking laws when he teamed with BCCI to try and take over the Washington-based First Bancshares. His assets in the US were frozen and Fifth Avenue penthouse in Manhattan was seized.

Bath was also an investor in Skyways Leasing, a Grand Cayman-based firm, controlled by Mahfouz and, according to White, the CIA. Two of Skyways original owners, David Byrd and William Walker, were also officers in IC, Inc., which channeled some \$3.6 million in funds to North’s operation.

But the Bin Laden group’s ties to the Bushes and the elite of the US military and intelligence establishment extend far beyond the curious career of James Bath. The Bin Laden construction empire enjoyed the benefits of numerous contracts with the Pentagon, perhaps none so lucrative as those for the construction of the construction of new airstrips and troop barracks in the aftermath of the 1996 truck bombing of the Khobar Towers at a

US army base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed nineteen people and injured more than 350—a bombing that many have blamed on Osama Bin Laden’s network.

The Bin Laden group also invested at least \$2 million in the Carlyle Group’s Partners II Fund, which specialized in the acquisition of aerospace companies. The Carlyle Group is a DC private equity founded by former Pentagon staffers, which finances weapons companies and security firms. Until 2003, Carlyle was run by Frank Carlucci, who served as Secretary of Defense during the second Reagan administration. Its counselor for many years was James Baker. And, despite his pledge not to trade in his presidency for a spot on corporate boards, it also retained George H.W. Bush as a senior advisor for the group’s Asian Fund.

The Bin Laden’s money was zealously courted by the Carlyle Group. Baker, Bush and Carlucci all made pilgrimages to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, headquarters of Bin Laden Enterprises. Bush Sr. met with the Bin Laden firm twice at the behest of Carlyle, once in November 1998 and again in January of 2000. Baker had also been solicitous of the Bin Laden company. The former diplomat even flew from Washington to Saudi Arabia on the Bin Laden family jet.

Carlucci’s ties were even more involved, dating at least as far back to his days as chairman of Nortel Networks, the telecommunications giant, which engaged in several joint ventures with the Bin Laden group.

The attention appears to have more than paid off. In a September 27, 2001 story, the Wall Street Journal quoted an international financier with ties to Bin Laden Enterprises as saying that the family’s investments in the Carlyle Group were substantially larger than \$2 million, claiming that the holdings in the aerospace fund were “just an initial deposit.”

Until 1997, the Carlyle Group controlled a security outfit called Vinnell, which, as Ken Silverstein details in his book *Private Warriors*, held a contract to train the Saudi Arabian National Guard. The National Guard’s primary duty is to protect Saudi military bases and the nation’s oil infrastructure. According to Silverstein, many of Vinnell’s operatives were veterans of the CIA and the US Army’s Special Forces. Vinnell’s roots can be traced to the Vietnam War, where the company performed some of that war’s nastier work for the Pentagon, earning it the nickname “our little mercenary force.”

During the Gulf War, Vinnell operatives led Saudi units. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, Saudi Arabia remained one of Vinnell’s top clients, with the company maintaining more than 1000 employees in the country, many of them working fulltime to protect Saudi

assets against attacks from homegrown militants, including Osama Bin Laden and his followers.

This article is adapted from [Imperial Crusades: Iraq, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia](#).

Roaming Charges

+ Today is the 10th anniversary of one of the greatest acts of political resistance of our time...

+ How dumb of Nike not to sign Muntadhar al-Zaidi to a longterm contract.

+ You might think the “biggest evil” in the US is the nation’s stockpile of nuclear weapons, the droning civilians across the globe, the death penalty, the separation of children from their migrant mothers and fathers, endangering life on the planet by the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels, homelessness, systematic racism in government institutions, police violence, slaughterhouses or the sexual abuse of children by people in power over them. But you’re not Cory Booker, who contends that the “greatest evil” is the [“lack of engagement.”](#) Rarely has a political campaign died so quickly in the womb from lack of inspiration or even a reason to exist...

+ Like Cory Booker, it seems Amy Klobuchar, who once had a sense of humor, is launching her campaign with New Age nonsense. I’ve read this statement made on the day our government allowed a 7-year-old girl to die from dehydration four times and still have no idea what the hell it means. Maybe that’s the point?

+ Maybe [Marianne Williamson](#), who once counseled [Dennis Kucinich](#), has a shot after all. She’s a much more convincing ambassador for this kind of self-help politics.

+ Noel Casler, one of Trump’s former staffers on The Apprentice, claims that the president is a [“speed freak,”](#) who liked to crush Adderall pills and sniff them like lines of cocaine. So Trump snorts Adderall but still can’t concentrate long enough to read his briefing book? That’s not going to do much for Adderall sales on college campuses...

+ Trump is now asserting that the campaign finance charges that his former fixer Michael Cohen pleaded guilty to were inserted by federal prosecutors solely to [“embarrass”](#) the president. But I’ve always thought the most persuasive argument against the idea that the Russians had used “kompromat” to blackmail Trump to do their bidding was that Trump is beyond “embarrassment.”

+ Newt Gingrich as [Chief of Staff](#) (or is that Staph)? Apparently Trump didn’t learn anything from the Roseanne reboot...

+ Barack Obama was just handed the Robert F. Kennedy [“Ripple of Hope Award”](#) for Human Rights. Obama and RFK have at least this much in common: Both of them had

brothers, JFK and Shrub (adopted), who started wars they came to oppose, at least rhetorically...

+ Even FoxNews' Judge Napolitano has turned on Trump, saying the information in the Michael Cohen filings indicates the president has committed felonies. Judge Nap probably won't be appearing on the "Hannity Show" any time soon.

+ This passage in Cohen's sentencing document seems pretty damning to me. But how stupid to have another person "from the campaign" present, in addition to your fixer lawyer. Especially when that person is likely to be you, Mr. President.

3. In or about August 2015, David Pecker, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of AMI, met with Michael Cohen, an attorney for a presidential candidate, and at least one other member of the campaign. At the meeting, Pecker offered to help deal with negative stories about that presidential candidate's relationships with women by, among other things, assisting the campaign in identifying such stories so they could be purchased and their publication avoided. Pecker agreed to keep Cohen apprised of any such negative stories.

+ If Trump were ever interviewed by Mueller's team, he'd set his own "perjury trap" then step into it with both feet...

+ New HBO Crossover Series: Westworld meets VEEP...Here the Pence Android has been put into sleep mode, as Trump goes one-on-two with Nancy and Chuck.

+ Rudy Giuliani sure has the Grift of Gab down, as he parlays his role as Trump's "TV Lawyer" into courting business from overseas clients.

+ Let this be a warning to any other countries thinking about coalescing with the US in a war: the Trump Administration is moving to deport refugees from the Vietnam War who have been living in the US since the fall of Saigon.

+ That "Bottomless Pinocchio" gimmick the *Washington Post* came up with for Trump's pathological lying is nothing compared to the "Bottomless Morality" happening every day on the border, where ICE has now arrested more 170 people who have shown up volunteering to sponsor undocumented migrant children now being held in Trump's concentration camps.

+ A seven year-old girl from Guatemala named Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin was seized by ICE last week in the desert along the border in New Mexico. She had a temperature of 105.7. She hadn't had food or water in days. After 8 hours in this condition, she began to have seizures. Finally, she was airlifted to a hospital, where she later died of dehydration. We have gone from separating children at the border to killing them through gross neglect.

Despicably, the Department of Homeland Security's official statement on the death blames the Jakelin's parents for fleeing the violence and poverty in Guatemala and suggests that they wanted the girl to die as a deterrent to other migrants.

“As we have always said, traveling north illegally is extremely dangerous. Drug cartels, human smugglers and the elements pose deadly risks to anyone who comes across the border illegally. Border Patrol always takes care of individuals in their custody and does everything in their power to keep them safe. Every year the Border Patrol saves hundreds of people who are overcome by the elements between our ports of entry. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts and the best efforts of the medical team treating the child, we were unable to stop this tragedy from occurring. Once again, we are begging parents to not put themselves or their children at risk attempting to enter illegally. Please present yourselves at a port of entry and seek to enter legally and safely.”

+ Barbara Ehrenreich: “A 7-year-old Guatemalan girl dies of dehydration and starvation while in Border Patrol custody. WH issues free knock-offs of Melania's “ I don't really care, do u” jacket.”

+ The USGS has issued an advisory regarding a recent eruption from Mt. Bernard, which continues to spew toxic inanities about Poppy Bush...

+ Five Democrats in the House voted with the Republicans to block a bill ending the war in Yemen.

Jim Costa

Al Lawson

Collin Peterson

Dutch Rupperberger

David Scott

Collin Peterson defended his vote by saying that “our party often gets off on tangents” and that he “didn’t know a damn thing about the war” in Yemen.

+ The Democrats heard the fierce objections to giving Joe (King Coal) Manchin their [top seat on the Senate Energy Committee](#) and they did it anyway...

+ I’m not a huge fan of AOC (why is a socialist in a neoliberal party?), but few political figures seem to [irritate all the right people](#) the way she does....

+ Too bad the Democrats aren’t resolute enough to shut down the government in order to stop the kidnapping of children on the border.

+ The great Bill Blum’s last speech...

+ It appears things really could have been [even crazier](#) than they are now...

Soon after President Donald Trump took office, his National Security Council aides considered trying an unusual new approach to Iran.

Officials wondered whether Trump should record a dramatic video message congratulating the Iranian people on their new year. The twist? Trump would appear alongside an Iranian royal who lives quietly in the Washington area: Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the country’s late shah, the U.S.-allied leader toppled during Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution.

Story Continued Below

+ Swamp Things: Javanka, Inc. pushed for tax breaks on so-called “[Opportunity Zones](#)” that they are now poised to cash in on...

+ Was Rick (“[That’s Latin for Asshole](#)”) Santorum paid by CNN for announcing he wasn’t in the running for Trump’s chief of staff [on CNN](#)?

+ Rick Santorum, here posing with the Russian gun girl [Maria Butina](#), is still a CNN contributor and [Marc Lamont Hill](#) isn’t.

+ Sarah Sanders says that Trump insults female reporters in order to treat them as equals. You've come a long way, baby...

+ Ann Coulter said this week that's she's "not a big fan of the First Amendment," which demonstrates that when the right speaks of their devotion to the founding fathers and the original intent of the Constitution and the lost America they want to make great again that's not what they're really talking about. The first Amendment was first for a reason...

+ Lands that will lose Clean Water Act protection under Trump's new plan...



+ Why doesn't this direct assault on the public health spark an uprising like the one we are seeing France....or an uprising of any kind?

+ Robert Macguire: 'The billionaire President of the United States who likely had an affair with a porn star while his third wife was nursing his fifth child still profits from a luxury hotel rented by a group of religious supporters who came to pray against the "deep state."'

+ Sitting GOP senators who voted to toss President Clinton from office for obstruction of justice:

BLUNT

BURR

CRAPO

ENZI

GRASSLEY

GRAHAM* (Lindsey was House impeachment manager)

HATCH

INHOFE

MCCONNELL

MORAN

PORTMAN

ROBERTS

SHELBY

THUNE

WICKER

+ To anyone who thinks Vladimir Putin wants to return Russia to the days of the Soviet Empire, I advise them to read his recent tribute to [Alexander Solzhenitsyn](#). He's dialing the time machine back to the Russia of the Romanovs...

+ A former British paratrooper who was investigated for his role in the 1972 Bloody Sunday killings that left 14 people dead in Londonderry told the BBC he believes the massacre was "[a job well done](#)." This butcher will probably be back in business if Brexit seals off the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

+ Last Words

Eric Garner: "I can't breathe."

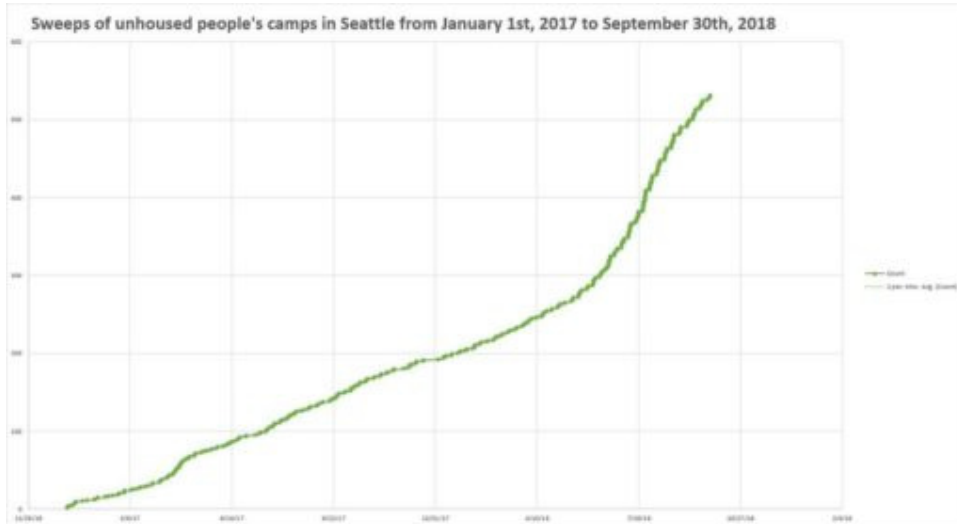
Jamal Khashoggi: "I can't breathe."

Planet Earth: "I can't breathe."

+ The rate of suicides are one of the best indicators for how your country is doing. In the US, the suicide rate has increased by 25% since 2000 and gun deaths, many of them suicides, now [outnumber deaths in car accidents](#).

+ There are more than 25,000 homeless people in the Bay Area, [6,000 more](#) than estimates from the state of California...

+ Meanwhile, 800 miles up the coast, Seattle's raids of homeless camps have increased by

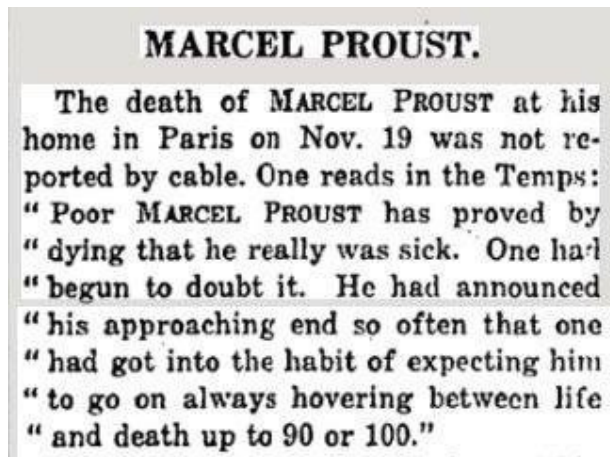


+ Let's check that scorecard on Trump vs. the Deep State...."[Trump reverses course, tells Pentagon to boost budget request to \\$750 billion.](#)"

+ One of the weirdest things I've seen at a Trump rally are people wearing "Kill the Deep State" t-shirts cheering madly when Trump brags about passing the "biggest military budget in history."

+ Trump on serial child rapist Jeffrey Epstein: "He was a lot of fun to be with...And it's even said that he likes beautiful women as much as I do, and many of them are on the younger side." (2002 interview with *New York* magazine.)

+ How the *New York Times* noted the death of Marcel Proust:



+ For a brief, shining moment, [The Big Heat](#) was the Number One new book in Nature Writing. This may have been true for only the next four or five minutes, but what the hell...pop a cork, Josh.

+ Temperatures in the Arctic are warming more than twice as fast as the overall planet's average temperature, with temperatures this year in the highest latitudes (above 60 degrees

north) coming in 1.7 degrees Celsius (3.1 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 1981-2010 average.

+ Stephen Jay Gould wrote a great book about the Permian Extinction ([Wonderful Life: the Burgess Shale and the Nature of History](#)), which functioned as a kind of Alt Control Delete reset for life on the planet. Is the Earth about to experience [another mass extinction event](#), this one propelled by humanity's addiction to fossil fuels...

+ Finally, some real collusion: Saudi Arabia, Russia and the Trump gang conspired to [sabotage efforts](#) to get the IPCC 1.5° climicide report officially adopted at COP24.

+ Brendan Kelly, University of Alaska Fairbanks, on the scale of the climate crisis and the response from academics and government officials: "It's sort of as if there's a meteor coming at the planet and we thought, you know, I think I'll start a couple PhD dissertations."

+ Sixty years after their release, two of the greatest albums of the 20 Century were finally certified as having attained [Gold status: Giant Steps](#) and [My Favorite Things](#).

My Favorite Things

Sound Grammar

What I'm listening to this week....

[Bitter-Sweet](#) by Bryan Ferry

[Long Ago and Far Away](#) by Charlie Haden / Brad Mehldau

[The Western Tapes, 1983](#) by Lone Justice

In Their Marble Homes and Granite Banks

Peter Weiss: "Don't be taken in when they pat you paternally on the shoulder and say that there's no inequality worth speaking of and no more reason for fighting. Because if you believe them they will be completely in charge in their marble homes and granite banks from which they rob the people of the world under the pretense of bringing them culture. Watch out, for as soon as it pleases them they'll send you out to protect their gold in wars whose weapons rapidly developed by servile scientists will become more and more deadly until they can with a flick of the finger tear a million of you into pieces."