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US releases Saudi documents: 9/11 coverup exposed

Bill Van Auken

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The public release Friday afternoon of a section of the Congressional report on the 9/11 attacks, which had been kept secret for 13 years, has provided fresh evidence of a deliberate coverup of the role played, not only by the Saudi government, but US intelligence agencies themselves, in facilitating the attacks and then covering up their real roots.

The 28-page segment from the report issued by the “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities before and after the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001” provides abundant and damning evidence of extensive Saudi support for the 9/11 hijackers—15 out of 19 of whom were Saudi nationals—in the period leading up to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that claimed nearly 3,000 lives.

The Obama White House, the CIA, the Saudi monarchy and the corporate media have all tried to portray the documents—released on a Friday afternoon to assure minimal exposure—as somehow exonerating the Saudi regime of any culpability in the 9/11 attacks.

“This information does not change the assessment of the US government that there’s no evidence that the Saudi government or senior Saudi individuals funded al-Qaeda,” Josh Earnest, the White House press secretary said Friday, boasting that the main significance of their release was its proof of the Obama administration’s commitment to “transparency.”

In reality, the 28 pages have been kept under lock and key since 2002, with only members of Congress allowed to read them, in a Capitol Hill basement vault, while prohibited from taking notes, bringing members of their staff or breathing a word of their content.

The Obama administration, like the Bush administration before it, maintained this secrecy for several reasons. First, it was concerned that the documents would jeopardize its relations with Saudi Arabia, which, after Israel, is Washington's closest ally in the Middle East, a partner in bloody operations from Afghanistan to Syria to Yemen, and the world's biggest buyer of American arms.

Even more importantly, it was concerned that the 28 pages would further expose the abject criminality of the US government's role in facilitating the attacks of 9/11 and then lying about their source and exploiting them to justify savage wars of aggression, first against Afghanistan and then against Iraq. These wars have claimed over a million lives. The false narrative created around the September 11 attacks remains the ideological pillar of the US campaign of global militarism conducted in the name of a "war on terror."

Media reports on the 28 pages invariably refer to the absence of a "smoking gun," which presumably would be tantamount to an order signed by the Saudi king to attack New York and Washington. The evidence is described as "inconclusive." One can only imagine what would have been the response if, in place of the word "Saudi," the documents referred to Iraqi, Syrian or Iranian actions. The same evidence would have been proclaimed an airtight case for war.

Among those who were involved in preparing the report, John Lehman, the former secretary of the navy, directly contradicted the official response to the release of the previously censored section. "There was an awful lot of participation by Saudi individuals in supporting the hijackers, and some of those people worked in the Saudi government," he said. "Our report should never have been read as an exoneration of Saudi Arabia."

Similarly, former Florida Senator Bob Graham, who chaired the committee that carried out the investigation, suggested that the information released Friday was only the beginning. "I think of this almost as the 28 pages are sort of the cork in the wine bottle. And once it's out, hopefully the rest of the wine itself will start to pour out," he said.

What clearly emerges from the newly-released document, which is titled "Finding, Discussion and Narrative Regarding Certain Sensitive National Security Matters," is that there were multiple indications of funding and support for the 9/11 hijackers and Al Qaeda in general, but that investigations were either shut down or never initiated because of the close ties between Washington and the Saudi monarchy, and between US and Saudi intelligence.

"While in the United States, some of the September 11 hijackers were in contact with, and received support or assistance from, individuals who may be connected to the Saudi government," the document begins. It cites FBI sources as indicating that some of these individuals were "Saudi intelligence officers."

It goes on to indicate that FBI and CIA investigations of these links were initiated solely in response to the Congressional inquiry itself. “[I]t was only after September 11 that the US government began to aggressively investigate this issue,” the report states. “Prior to September 11th, the FBI apparently did not focus investigative sources on [redacted] Saudi nationals in the United States due to Saudi Arabia’s status as an American ‘ally.’”

The report focuses in part on the role of one Omar al-Bayoumi, who was described to the FBI as a Saudi intelligence officer, and, according to FBI files, “provided substantial assistance to hijackers Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi after they arrived in San Diego in February 2000.”

The inquiry report deals with al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar only from after they arrived in California, and says nothing about the circumstances under which they were allowed to enter the country in the first place. Both were under CIA surveillance while attending an Al Qaeda planning meeting in 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and placed on a “watch list” for FBI monitoring if they came to the United States. Nonetheless, the two men were allowed to enter the United States on January 15, 2000, landing at Los Angeles International Airport, eventually going to San Diego. From then on, they were permitted to operate freely, attending flight training school in preparation for their role as pilots of hijacked planes on September 11, 2001.

Al-Bayoumi, the report establishes, “received support from a Saudi company affiliated with the Saudi Ministry of Defense,” drawing a paycheck for a no-show job. The report states that the company also had ties to Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

According to the report, al-Bayoumi had previously worked for the Saudi Civil Aviation Association and, in the period leading up to 9/11, was “in frequent contact with the Emir at the Saudi Defense Ministry responsible for air traffic control.” Phone records showed him calling Saudi government agencies 100 times between January and May of 2000.

FBI documents also established that the \$465 in “allowances” that al-Bayoumi received through the Saudi military contractor, jumped to over \$3,700 shortly after the arrival of al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar. During this period, al-Bayoumi initially allowed the two future hijackers to stay in his apartment before finding them their own place—with an informant of the San Diego FBI—cosigning their lease and advancing them a deposit and the first month’s rent.

The report states that FBI investigations following 9/11 indicated that al-Bayoumi had “some ties to terrorist elements.” His wife, meanwhile, was receiving a \$1,200 a month stipend from Princess Haifa Bint Sultan, the wife of Prince Bandar, then the Saudi ambassador to the US and later head of Saudi intelligence.

Also named in the document as a likely Saudi intelligence agent is one Osama Bassnan, who lived across the street from the two hijackers in San Diego and was in telephone contact with al-Bayoumi several times a day during this period. He apparently placed the two in contact with a Saudi commercial airline pilot for discussions on “learning to fly Boeing jet aircraft,” according to an FBI report. Bassnan’s wife also received a monthly stipend from Princess Haifa, the Saudi ambassador’s wife, to the tune of \$2,000 a month. As well, the FBI found one \$15,000 check

written by Bandar himself in 1998 to Bassnan. The report states that FBI information indicated that Bassnan was “an extremist and supporter of Usama Bin Ladin,” who spoke of the Al Qaeda leader “as if he were god.”

Appearing before the Congressional inquiry in October 2002, FBI Executive Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Pasquale D’Amuro reacted with undisguised cynicism and contempt when asked about the payments from the Saudi ambassador’s wife to the wives of the two reputed intelligence agents involved with the 9/11 hijackers.

“She gives money to a lot of different groups and people from around the world,” he said. “We’ve been able to uncover a number of these... but maybe if we can discover that she gives to 20 different radical groups, well, gee, maybe there’s a pattern here.” Spoken like a man who believes he is above the law in defense of a figure that he clearly sees as untouchable.

Among other material in the report was the recounting of an FBI interrogation of Saleh al-Hussayen, a prominent Saudi interior ministry official, who stayed in the same Virginia hotel as three of the hijackers the night before the 9/11 attacks. While he claimed not to know the hijackers, the FBI agents “believed he was being deceptive.”

According to the report, al-Hussayen “feigned a seizure” and was released to a hospital, which he left several days later, catching a flight back to Saudi Arabia without any further questioning. During the same period, nearly 1,200 people, with no links to the attacks, were being rounded up and held incommunicado on little more evidence than that they were Arab or Muslim.

Also in the report was the fact that a phone book belonging to Abu Zubaydah, the Al Qaeda operative who is still held at Guantanamo after extensive torture at the hands of the CIA, was found to contain the unlisted numbers of companies that managed and provide security for Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar’s residence in Colorado, as well as that of a bodyguard at the Saudi embassy who, the report states “some have alleged may be a [words redacted].”

Redactions of this sort recur throughout the document in relation to individual Saudis, suggesting their membership in some sort of secret service whose name must remain unmentioned. This is only part of what the secret material still conceals. Members of the inquiry’s staff reportedly protested angrily over the failure to clearly present the evidence of Saudi involvement, leading to the firing of at least one staffer.

If the government is determined to continue to shield such Saudi connections, it is undoubtedly because they would expose the involvement of the US intelligence agencies themselves in the events of 9/11.

If such whitewashes are required, it is because elements within the US government were aware that Al Qaeda was preparing an operation on US soil, turned a blind eye to it and even facilitated it because they knew it could be used as a pretext to carry out longstanding plans for aggressive war in the Middle East.

The release of even the limited material on the Saudi-US-9/11 connection is a devastating exposure of the criminals in the US government, from George W. Bush on down, and the lies they employed to engineer wars that have devastated the lives of millions.

These new facts demand a thorough, impartial and international investigation, as well as the indictment and arrest of top-level officials, both American and Saudi. Only a powerful intervention of the international working class, on the basis of a socialist program, will see these war criminals brought to justice.