US Supreme Court declines to hear case of 9/11 families

Joe Kishore
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The US Supreme Court on Monday declined to hear a case brought by families of 9/11 victims against Saudi Arabia, four members of the Saudi royal family, a Saudi bank and a charity. The action lets stand a lower court ruling that the Saudi members cannot be held liable in US courts.

The Obama administration supported the Saudi monarchs, who were accused of financially supporting several of the individuals involved in the September 11, 2001 attacks. The administration last month intervened to ask the high court to reject the appeal.

The family members claim that Saudi princes contributed to charities that funded Al Qaeda and the 9/11 hijackers.

In August 2008, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan upheld a 2006 district court ruling that the Saudi officials and entities were protected under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act. The families argued that lower courts had made conflicting rulings on the scope of sovereign immunity, and that the Supreme Court should therefore intervene.

The Justice Department has sought furiously to prevent the release of documents assembled by lawyers for the families, which, according to a *New York Times* report, "provide new evidence of extensive financial support for Al Qaeda and other extremist groups by members of the Saudi royal family." The government has had copies of the documents destroyed and has sought to prevent judges from even looking at them.

The US government has worked systematically to conceal from the American people evidence of Saudi support for at least two of the hijackers, part of a broader cover-up of the many unanswered questions that still surround the 9/11 attacks.

The documents gathered by the 9/11 families—including a classified section of the 2003 joint congressional inquiry into the attacks—likely include material on Nawaf al-Hamzi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, two Saudi nationals who were aboard the planes that crashed on 9/11. They were known by US intelligence to be members of Al Qaeda at least since 1999.

Despite their previous association, the two men were allowed into the US, where they found accommodations with the help of a Saudi intelligence agent (Omar al-Bayoumi) and, later, an FBI asset (Abdussattar Shaikh). Al-Bayoumi received financing from Princess Haifa, the wife of the Saudi ambassador to the US, Prince Bandar.

The suit filed by the families focuses solely on the role of Saudi Arabia. However, the more fundamental question is the role of sections of the American state. The Saudi royal family has had long and intimate ties with American intelligence, and the broader exposure of Saudi links to the attacks threatens to unravel the entire official story of the September 11 attacks.

The author recommends:

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