

Once again on Saudi complicity in the 9/11 attacks

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13 April 2016

Sunday night's broadcast of the CBS News program "60 Minutes" drew public attention to the longstanding US government cover-up of a major aspect of the 9/11 terrorist attacks: the role of Saudi government officials and Saudi money in supporting the network of Al Qaeda operatives while they were in the United States preparing the suicide hijackings of four jetliners.

For nearly 15 years, successive administrations have blocked publication of the final chapter of the report prepared by a joint congressional committee on the 9/11 attacks, because the 28 pages of this chapter summarize evidence of an official Saudi connection to the hijackers. Fifteen of the 19 were Saudi citizens.

The co-chairmen of the bipartisan panel, Democratic Senator Robert Graham and Republican Representative Porter Goss, have long urged the release of the chapter on the Saudis, and disputed US government claims that there was a valid "national security" reason for the continuing censorship. Nothing more was involved, they said, than an effort to avoid embarrassing the Saudi monarchy, next to Israel the most important US ally in the Middle East.

The "60 Minutes" segment did not make public any new details of the Saudi-9/11 connection, or reveal any of the specific pieces of evidence reviewed in the 28-page chapter that continues to be held in a vault in a Capitol Hill basement. Congressmen and senators may read the chapter, but may not bring their staff, take any notes, or speak about the contents of what they have read.

CBS correspondent Steve Kroft interviewed five high-level former officials who have read the 28 pages, all calling for their declassification. In addition to Graham and Goss, these include three members of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission appointed by President Bush: former Senator Robert Kerrey and former Representative Timothy Roemer, both Democrats, and former Pentagon official John Lehman, a Republican.

All five of these men maintain close connections with US diplomatic, military and spy operations. Goss left Congress to become CIA Director, Roemer was US ambassador to

India, and all have carried out high-level foreign policy missions for the US government. So their decision to participate in the "60 Minutes" program has the character of a public demonstration by a section of the military-intelligence apparatus, directed at putting pressure on the Obama administration and the Saudi monarchy.

The timing of the broadcast is suggestive, coming only 10 days before President Obama travels to Saudi Arabia to visit King Salman and hold talks on the Iraq-Syria war, the nuclear deal with Iran, and other contentious issues. There is also mounting tension between Saudi Arabia and the United States over economic policy, since the Saudi decision to maintain high levels of oil production despite the dramatic slide in oil prices has bankrupted much of the US-based fracking industry.

Even without making public any new details from the 28-page chapter, Senator Graham made an effective argument to substantiate his claim that the official claim of no Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks has no credibility. He told "60 Minutes," "I think it is implausible to believe that 19 people, most of whom didn't speak English, most of whom had never been in the United States before, many of whom didn't have a high school education, could've carried out such a complicated task without some support from within the United States."

Graham's language is significant, since it could suggest not only official Saudi support to the hijackers during their months in the US—the focus of the "60 Minutes" report—but support to the hijackers by other individuals or other agencies, including the US government itself. It was reported after 9/11 that the lead hijacker, Mohammed Atta, was well known to the US government, and had been under surveillance during his residence in Germany before he came to the United States to get flight training.

Two other hijackers, the San Diego-based Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, were also known to the US government. The CIA had observed them participating in an al Qaeda planning meeting in 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and placed them on a "watch list" for FBI

monitoring if they came to the United States. Nonetheless, under circumstances that have never been clarified, 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 where they attended flight training school, preparing for their role as pilots of hijacked planes on September 11, 2001.

The “60 Minutes” report makes no reference to how al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar entered the US, or the claims and counter-claims between the CIA, the National Security Agency, which monitored their phone calls, and the FBI, which conducts domestic counterterrorism, over which agency was responsible for permitting them to operate so freely. Instead, it focused entirely on what the two men did once they arrived in Los Angeles.

They needed money, a place to live, and a mosque, and found all three through the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles. As correspondent Steve Kroft summarized it: “The two Saudi nationals, arrived with extremely limited language skills and no experience with Western culture. Yet, through an incredible series of circumstances, they managed to get everything they needed, from housing to flight lessons.”

During the interview, Kroft asked Graham whether Saudi government, charities, or wealthy benefactors were involved in aiding the hijackers. “All of the above,” Graham replied.

Two Saudis played the main role: Fahad al-Thumairy, a diplomat at the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles, and Omar al-Bayoumi, who held what Kroft described as “a no-show job at a Saudi aviation contractor outside Los Angeles while drawing a paycheck from the Saudi government.” According to Senator Graham, Bayoumi was listed as a Saudi agent in FBI files.

The “60 Minutes” narration continues: “Bayoumi found them a place to live in his own apartment complex, advanced them the security deposit and cosigned the lease. He even threw them a party and introduced them to other Muslims who would help the hijackers obtain government IDs and enroll in English classes and flight schools.”

Bayoumi was in regular contact with the imam of a San Diego mosque, Anwar al-Awlaki, the same individual who a decade later was assassinated by a CIA drone-fired missile in Yemen. At that time, however, although “60 Minutes” did not discuss this, Awlaki was considered a “moderate” by US security agencies. He later moved to Falls Church, Virginia, and after 9/11 was in regular contact with Pentagon officials, before breaking with the US government and moving to Yemen.

Anticipating Saudi government claims that the 9/11 Commission report exonerates the Kingdom of any responsibility for the terrorist attacks, “60 Minutes” interviewed an attorney who is suing Saudi Arabia on behalf

of the families of 9/11 victims, as well as Senator Kerrey, a member of the 9/11 Commission. Both agreed that the sentence in the report long cited by the Saudi government and its apologists, that the Commission “found no evidence that senior Saudi officials individually funded al Qaeda,” was deliberately crafted to leave open the possibility that lower-level officials did in fact fund al Qaeda and aid the hijackers. Kerrey added, “You can’t provide the money for terrorists and then say, ‘I don’t have anything to do with what they’re doing’.”

Kerrey said that the Commission had neither the resources nor the authority to conduct a thorough investigation of the Saudi connection. In truth, the entire 9/11 Commission was a whitewash, not only of Saudi Arabia but of the vast US military-intelligence apparatus, which was certainly tracking the activity of some, if not all, of the future hijackers. The \$15 million budget for the commission to investigate an attack in which nearly 3,000 people were killed was only one quarter of the \$60 million spent by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr to investigate Bill Clinton’s relations with Monica Lewinsky.

Perhaps the most significant comment in the “60 Minutes” report was the statement by former representative Goss, later CIA director, that it was the FBI Director Robert Mueller who played the main role in maintaining censorship of the 28-page chapter on the Saudi connection to 9/11. Why would the FBI be in charge of deciding whether US relations to Saudi Arabia would be affected by release of the document? That would normally be a concern of the State Department, CIA or Pentagon.

There is every reason to believe that the “60 Minutes” report was triggered by ongoing bitter conflicts within the US security apparatus relating, not to the investigation into 9/11, nearly 15 years old, but to the deepening crisis in US imperialism’s current interventions in the Middle East, which includes bitter conflicts with the Saudi monarchy, long Washington’s most reliable stooge in the region.



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