

FBI holds 80,000 pages of secret documents on Saudi-9/11 links

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14 May 2016

The American FBI has a secret cache of documents, more than 80,000 pages in all, concerning possible ties between the 9/11 hijackers and an upper-class Saudi family who lived in Florida and fled the United States two weeks before the suicide hijackings that killed nearly 3,000 people.

A federal judge in Tampa, Florida has been reviewing the documents for more than two years as a consequence of a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit brought by a trio of online reporters—Anthony Summers, Robbyn Swan and Dan Christensen. The review process has been extremely slow because of restrictive FBI rules on how many pages Judge William Zloch may access at any one time.

The existence of the document trove was revealed Friday in a front-page article in the US-based web publication the *Daily Beast*. The article identified the Saudi family as Abdulaziz al-Hijji and his wife Anoud, who was the daughter of Esam Ghazzawi, an adviser to a nephew of Saudi King Fahd. Ghazzawi owned the home in which they were staying in a gated community in Sarasota, Florida. The home was raided by the FBI after 9/11 but the residents had all departed in evident haste on August 30, 2001.

Visitor logs in the community, known as Prestancia, showed that the alleged ringleader of the 9/11 hijackers, Mohammad Atta, had visited al-Hijji, along with two other 9/11 hijackers, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan Al-Shehhi.

Former Senator Robert Graham, co-chair of the joint congressional committee that investigated the 9/11 attacks, told the *Daily Beast* that he had never known of the FBI documents on the Sarasota home until they were uncovered by the investigative journalists. He later viewed a portion of these records and confirmed that they identified the three 9/11 hijackers as visitors.

Throughout this period, the FBI had denied that the al-Hijji family had any connection to the 9/11 attackers. The agency changed its story only when Graham said he would testify under oath about what he had read in the file of documents. At this point the FBI conceded the existence of 35 pages of documents.

When Judge Zloch ordered a further search for records, the Tampa office of the FBI came back with 80,226 pages of files marked PENTTBOM, which stands for “Pentagon/Twin-Towers Bombing” in FBI jargon. Judge Zloch has been reviewing these since May 1, 2014 and has given no date by which he expects to finish.

The al-Hijji family exited its Sarasota home, leaving behind three cars, an open safe and disarray that suggested a hasty departure. The security guards at the gated community noted their departure, but did not consider it suspicious until the 9/11 attacks two weeks later.

The FBI initially made only a perfunctory response and did not open a formal investigation until eight months later, in April 2002, “based upon repeated citizen calls” about the conduct of the family during their stay in the United States. One of the few documents released said that this investigation “revealed many connections” between a member of the family “and individuals associated with the terrorist attacks.”

The *Daily Beast* report adds to recent revelations of evidence of Saudi regime ties to the 9/11 hijackers that has been covered up by the US government under both the Bush and Obama administrations.

Graham has actively campaigned for the release of 28 pages of material on the Saudi-9/11 connection comprising an entire chapter of the joint congressional committee report on the 9/11 attacks in which he

participated. This material has been withheld for more than 13 years. On April 10, Graham was the main witness interviewed by the CBS program “60 Minutes” in a segment on the continuing cover-up of Saudi-9/11 connections.

In an op-ed column this week in the *Washington Post*, Graham reiterated his demand for release of the 28 pages, noting that President Obama had promised a decision on declassifying the material by next month. Graham denounced CIA Director John Brennan, who responded to the “60 Minutes” program by publicly opposing any release of the 28 pages.

Also Friday, the *Guardian* newspaper published an interview with a former member of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission appointed by President George W. Bush, who flatly declared that there was extensive Saudi involvement in supporting the hijackers. Of the 19 perpetrators, 15 were Saudi citizens, most of them having recently arrived in the United States when they seized control of four jetliners on September 11, 2001.

Former Navy Secretary John Lehman, a Republican, told the newspaper: “There was an awful lot of participation by Saudi individuals in supporting the hijackers, and some of those people worked in the Saudi government.” While only one Saudi consular official in Los Angeles, Fahad al-Thumairy, was implicated in supporting the hijackers, according to the official account, Lehman believes that at least five officials were involved.

Al-Thumairy was linked to the two hijackers who lived in San Diego before the 9/11 attacks, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, but he was deported rather than charged with a crime. The other five, whom Lehman did not name, “may not have been indicted, but they were certainly implicated. There was an awful lot of circumstantial evidence.”

Another former 9/11 commissioner, who spoke to the *Guardian* without direct attribution, recounted what the newspaper called “a mostly unknown chapter of the history of the 9/11 commission: behind closed doors, members of the panel’s staff fiercely protested the way the material about the Saudis was presented in the final report, saying it underplayed or ignored evidence that Saudi officials—especially at lower levels of the government—were part of an al-Qaida support network that had been tasked to assist the hijackers after they arrived in the US.”

The 9/11 Commission director, Philip Zelikow, who later served in the Bush administration as senior counselor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, fired one staffer who protested over the suppression of the Saudi ties to 9/11 after she obtained a copy of the suppressed 28 pages of the joint congressional committee report. Zelikow and the commission members overruled staff protests on the soft-pedaling of the Saudi connection.

These press reports confirm what the *World Socialist Web Site* has long maintained: the official 9/11 investigations were a series of whitewashes aimed at concealing the role of the Saudi government and US intelligence agencies during the period leading up to the terrorist attacks.

There has long been evidence that sections of the US government were aware of the plot to hijack and suicide-crash airliners, but turned a blind eye because such an atrocity could be used to stampede American public opinion and provide a pretext for escalating US military interventions throughout the Middle East and Central Asia.

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