

Obama pledges to veto legislation allowing 9/11 victims to sue Saudi government

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On Friday, the United States House of Representatives voted in favor of legislation that would permit September 11 victims and their families to sue the government of Saudi Arabia, based on its role in the terrorist attacks that resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people. The bill, which the Obama administration has threatened to veto, was passed by the Senate in May.

The bill, together with the Obama administration's opposition to it, marks the continued unraveling of the official narrative of the September 11 attacks.

As confirmed by secret government documents released in May and July of this year, sections of the Saudi state apparatus were likely complicit in the September 11, 2001 attacks. At least two of the hijackers—15 out of 19 of whom were Saudi nationals—were directly aided by Omar al-Bayoumi, who was identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a Saudi intelligence agent with “ties to terrorist elements.” Some hijackers received paychecks for fictitious jobs from a company affiliated with the Saudi Ministry of Defense.

Al-Bayoumi, meanwhile, worked closely with an Emir at the Saudi Defense Ministry. According to phone records obtained through a US government investigation, al-Bayoumi called Saudi government agencies 100 times between January and May of 2000. Meanwhile, three of the hijackers stayed at the same Virginia hotel as Saleh al-Hussayen, a Saudi interior ministry official, the night before the attacks.

Both the Bush and Obama administrations sought to cover up these and other facts pointing to Saudi complicity in the September 11 attacks. The involvement of the government of Saudi Arabia in the attacks—one of America's key allies in the Middle East for more than half a century—was deemed too embarrassing. It would have raised too many questions about the possible foreknowledge of the attacks within any section of America's military or intelligence apparatus.

Indeed, the documents released this year confirm that American intelligence agencies had a policy prior to September 11, 2001 of not following the activities of Saudi intelligence agents within the US, on the grounds of Saudi Arabia's status as a major US ally. For this reason, US intelligence agencies paid little to no attention to the activities of Saudi agents like al-Bayoumi while they organized and facilitated the attacks. The possibility that this state of affairs was intentional has not been ruled out, and nobody was ever prosecuted for what amounts—if the official story is to be believed—to systemic incompetence and colossal negligence.

For 13 years, the infamous so-called 28 pages were redacted from the official report known as the “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities before and after the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001.” Until their release in July, members of Congress were only given access to these pages via a locked basement vault where they were not permitted to take notes.

The bill passed on Friday—sponsored by Republican Senator John Cornyn of Texas and Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer of New York—is a response to information pointing to Saudi involvement in the September 11 attacks. The bill would permit victims and their families to argue in American courts that the Saudi government should be held liable for its role in the attacks. The bill would allow an exception to a 1976 law that generally provides that foreign nations are immune from lawsuits in US courts.

The “Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act,” Senate Bill 2040, would amend the federal judicial code to allow US courts “to hear cases involving claims against a foreign state for injuries, death, or damages that occur inside the United States as a result of... an act of terrorism, committed anywhere by a foreign state or official.”

The text of the bill makes no direct reference to Saudi Arabia. Instead, it is couched in terms of providing “civil

litigants with the broadest possible basis... to seek relief against persons, entities, and foreign countries, wherever acting and wherever they may be found, that have provided material support, directly or indirectly, to foreign organizations or persons that engage in terrorist activities against the United States.”

The Obama administration has cloaked its opposition to the bill on procedural and diplomatic grounds, citing the necessity of maintaining friendly relations with Saudi Arabia. The White House has also argued that permitting lawsuits against foreign nations in American courts would set a precedent under which the US government could be sued in foreign courts by foreign victims.

“There are always diplomatic considerations that get in the way of justice, but if a court proves the Saudis were complicit in 9/11, they should be held accountable,” Schumer wrote in a statement issued to the press. “If they’ve done nothing wrong, they have nothing to worry about.”

The Saudi government threatened to retaliate if the bill was passed by selling off up to \$750 billion in US assets before they could be seized by legal procedures in American courts.

Sunday marked the 15th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, which have been invoked incessantly over the intervening years by both the Bush and Obama administrations as a justification for war as well as for vast changes to American politics, law and society. The September 11 events “changed everything,” the population was told, necessitating an indefinite “war on terror.”

The September 11 attack was a godsend to the Bush administration, which had come to power following a stolen election in the year 2000. Having lost the popular vote, Bush was installed as president only after the Supreme Court ordered a halt to the counting of votes in Florida. Composed of ultra-right “neocons” who had spent the previous decades on the fringes of the state apparatus, the Bush administration seized on the September 11 attacks to implement a far-reaching transformation of American political life, imposing an agenda of military aggression abroad and constructing the framework of a police state at home.

The phrase “9/11” was used to terrorize and browbeat the population with the prospect of a future attack, trample democratic rights, and bully and intimidate dissent. Pursuant to the new legal and political framework instituted as part of the so-called war on terror, the American government asserted the power to

“preemptively” wage war against any country; depose any government; spy on the entire world’s population; and abduct, torture and assassinate anyone in the world.

The repressive apparatus of the state, from airport security checkpoints to local police forces, was militarized and armed to the teeth. To this day, anyone passing through a Transportation Security Agency checkpoint is confronted with a shrine dedicated to the victims of the September 11 attacks.

The population has been told for 15 years that the September 11 attacks inaugurated an existential conflict between the American government and Islamic extremism. The reality is that the September 11 attacks were sponsored by sections of the government of a US ally, which itself is a bulwark of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. Meanwhile, a question mark remains over the unaccountable failure of the American intelligence agencies to prevent the attacks.

The US has been a key supporter of Islamic extremism in the Middle East throughout its 70-year alliance with the Saudi monarchy. During the Cold War, and especially in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the US sought to use right-wing Islamic militants as a counterweight to Soviet influence in the region.

American support for Islamic fundamentalist forces did not end with the liquidation of the Soviet Union. While verbally opposing Islamic extremism abroad, the US has supported Chechen terrorists against Russia as well as Al Qaeda affiliates in Libya and in Syria. It armed and funded the latter forces as part of its regime-change efforts against the governments of Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad.



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