

Congress overrides Obama veto of bill allowing 9/11 lawsuits

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On Wednesday, the US Congress overturned President Obama's veto of legislation that would permit victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks and their families to sue Saudi Arabia. Declassified documents released this year confirm the involvement of Saudi intelligence agents in the funding, organization, and planning of the attacks—facts which were covered up for years by the Bush and Obama administrations.

The vote, 97-1 in the Senate and 348-77 in the House of Representatives, represents the first and only congressional override of Obama's presidency. Under the US Constitution, the president's veto can be overturned only by a two-thirds majority vote in both houses of Congress.

The Obama administration and the military and intelligence agencies, backed by sections of the media, including the *New York Times*, have vigorously denounced the legislation. Obama personally, together with Central Intelligence Agency director John Brennan, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford among others, have all publicly opposed the bill.

In a letter to Congress opposing the legislation, Obama warned that the bill would “threaten to erode sovereign principles that protect the United States, including our U.S. Armed Forces and other officials, overseas.”

In a lead editorial on Wednesday, the *New York Times* similarly warned that “if the bill becomes law, other countries could adopt similar legislation defining their own exemptions to sovereign immunity. Because no country is more engaged in the world than the United States—with military bases, drone operations, intelligence missions and training programs—the Obama administration fears that Americans could be subject to

legal actions abroad.”

In other words, the bill would set a precedent for families of victims of American aggression abroad—such as the tens of thousands of victims of “targeted killings” ordered by Obama personally—to file lawsuits against US war criminals in their own countries' courts.

Obama denounced the vote with unusual warmth on Wednesday. “It's an example of why sometimes you have to do what's hard. And, frankly, I wish Congress here had done what's hard,” Obama declared. “If you're perceived as voting against 9/11 families right before an election, not surprisingly, that's a hard vote for people to take. But it would have been the right thing to do ... And it was, you know, basically a political vote.”

“Oh, what a tangled web we weave,” Sir Walter Scott famously wrote, “When first we practice to deceive!” As the tangled web of lies surrounding the September 11 attacks continue to unravel, one senses that the American ruling class and its representatives do not see a clear way out of the dilemma.

Openly torpedoing the legislation is tantamount to an admission of guilt. Indeed, the Obama administration, the military and intelligence agencies, and the *New York Times* are publicly working to cover up a crime perpetrated by Al Qaeda and its backers in Saudi Arabia, which in turn is an ally of the United States. The mere fact that Obama vetoed this bill constitutes an admission that the US government is hiding something with respect to the September 11 attacks.

The alternative, from the standpoint of the American ruling class, is also fraught with risks. Court proceedings initiated by the families of September 11 victims will inevitably expose the role played by the Saudi monarchy, an ally of both Al Qaeda and the

United States, in the September 11 attacks. This, in turn, will highlight long and sordid history of American support for Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, which continues to the present day in Syria and Libya.

Perhaps most dangerously of all, a full public accounting of the roles of Saudi intelligence agents in the September 11 attacks will once again raise questions about the role of the American state in the attacks. Why did US intelligence agencies ignore the activities of Saudi agents before the attacks, based on Saudi Arabia's supposed status as a US ally? Why did the US government deliberately cover up the Saudi connection after the fact, instead claiming that Afghanistan was a "state sponsor of terrorism" and that Iraq was developing "weapons of mass destruction?" Why was nobody prosecuted?

The *New York Times*, for its part, simply lied about the evidence of Saudi complicity. "The legislation is motivated by a belief among the 9/11 families that Saudi Arabia played a role in the attacks, because 15 of the 19 hijackers, who were members of Al Qaeda, were Saudis," the editors wrote. "But the independent American commission that investigated the attacks found no evidence that the Saudi government or senior Saudi officials financed the terrorists."

In fact, at least two of the hijackers received aid from Omar al-Bayoumi, who was identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a Saudi intelligence agent with "ties to terrorist elements." Some of the hijackers were paid for work in fictitious jobs from companies affiliated with the Saudi Defense Ministry, with which Al-Bayoumi was in close contact. The night before the attacks, three of the hijackers stayed at the same hotel as Saleh al-Hussayen, a prominent Saudi government official.

These and other facts were confirmed by the infamous 28-page suppressed chapter of the 2002 report issued by the Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001. After 14 years of stalling, the document was finally released to the public this summer.

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Yet the *New York Times* continues to describe the Saudi monarchy, the principal financier and sponsor of Islamic fundamentalist groups throughout the world, as

"a partner in combating terrorism."

The Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, passed Wednesday, is a direct reaction to these revelations of Saudi complicity in the September 11 attacks, under pressure from organizations of survivors and families of victims. The law amends 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."

Although the bill nowhere names Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government has threatened massive retaliation, including by moving \$750 billion in assets out of the country before they can be seized in American legal proceedings. This reaction alone confirms the monarchy's guilt.

During Wednesday's session, many of the statements on the floor of the Senate were nervous and apprehensive. Casting his vote in favor of the bill, Republican Senator Bob Corker declared, "I have tremendous concerns about the sovereign immunity procedures that would be set in place by the countries as a result of this vote." More than one legislator noted that if the bill had unintended consequences, it would be modified or repealed.

The anxious comments of legislators and the crisscrossing denunciations within the ruling elite reflect the significance of this controversy for the entire American political establishment. For 15 years, the American population has been relentlessly told that the events of September 11, 2001 "changed everything," warranting the elimination of democratic rights, the militarization of the police, renditions, torture, assassinations, totalitarian levels of spying, death and destruction across the Middle East, and trillions of dollars of expenditures.

The collapse of the official version of that day's events shows that American politics for 15 years has been based on a lie.



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