

Editorial: Defamation

Arab News
26 July 2003

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/234848>

arab news

The 900-page US congressional report into the events of Sept. 11, just released, has targeted and defamed Saudi Arabia. It has accused Riyadh of providing assistance to the hijackers and failing to cooperate with the US intelligence agencies — not with facts but by baseless innuendo and suggestion.

There was no assistance to the hijackers. There were just the normal contacts, the normal provision of facilities and assistance that any Saudi studying and staying in the US could expect. At no point prior to Sept. 11 was there reason to believe that they were anything other than ordinary people doing ordinary things.

The report oozes institutional racism. The hijackers were allowed into the US; they attended courses at US institutions. Does that make those institutions or the people who approved their stay in the US guilty? Does it make them complicit in what happened? Of course not. Rightly, there is nothing said about them or the other Americans who provided the terrorists with assistance; they are exonerated because they did not know the truth of the matter. Not so Saudis. Different standards are applied.

Congress, like the American public opinion it represents, is into the blame game; it does not care who or what gets destroyed in the process — in this case decades of close Saudi-US friendship. So it shuts its eyes to the fact that Saudi Arabia is fully involved in the war against international terrorism.

It does it because American public opinion needs to blame someone as the real villain of the piece — not someone simply incompetent like the CIA, but someone imagined to be deliberately plotting against the US; and preferably foreign, with plenty of money who can be sued in the courts.

What has been produced is nothing less than a charter for Saudi-bashing, all the more so because of the 28 pages supposedly dealing with Saudi links to the hijackers, blocked on White House orders. Anyone who thinks that President Bush is doing us a favor can forget it. Whatever the intention, this is an invitation to the US and other media to speculate. ***It would be far better if the section were published. This way, it will be open season on Saudi Arabia.*** Urged on by the anti-Saudi lobby in Washington, the media and every attention-seeking politician in town will invent facts to blacken the Kingdom's name, attributing them to "reliable" sources. Saudis and Saudi Arabia will be found guilty through innuendo, invention and outright lies. It is already happening; the US press continues to describe a Saudi citizen mentioned in the report, Omar Al-Bayoumi, as an agent of the Saudi government even though Saudi Arabia has categorically denied it. *[emphasis added]*

Such defamation is outrageous and is bound to poison the two countries' already troubled relationship.

[Note: Although this is apparently a Saudi Arabian news outlet, it is not clear whether it speaks for the Saudi government in this particular instance.]