

Saudi-U.S. Relations

Information Service

Item of Interest

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Views on the Saudi-U.S. Relationship

Editor's Note:

The Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Service would like to thank *Arab News* for permission to share with you these views on important issues that concern the Saudi-U.S. relationship.

Terrorism: Trial by Media Will Not Do Dr. Sulaiman Al-Juraid • Special to *Arab News*

RIYADH, 10 August 2003 — While it is true that some Saudi nationals were among the terrorists of Sept. 11, it is a far cry from saying that the Saudi government or the Saudi people were somehow involved or condoned such a diabolical crime. If we accept this kind of logic, then we would conclude that the U.S. government and the American people were somehow involved in terrorism because John Walker, an American citizen, was caught with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Another charge leveled at Saudi Arabia in connection with terrorism is that the country's educational system breeds terrorism. But if this is true, then the U.S. educational system breeds racism and bigotry as the Ku Klux Klan amply demonstrates in its hatred of non-whites.

The Israeli expert used by some influential American circles to buttress their arguments about Saudi Arabia's connection to terrorism by pointing to our educational system should look closer at home.

In a recent survey, it was found that 31 percent of Israel's elementary students attend religious schools — a number unparalleled by any other country in the world. In fact some terrorism experts described the Sept. 11 terrorists as “adults with education and skill, not hopeless young zealots...they mingled in secular society, even drinking forbidden alcohol, hardly typical of Islamic militants.”

Terrorism expert, Ehud Sprinzak, went further by stating that these terrorists owed their allegiance, not to Islam or any religious belief, but to Osama bin Laden. As he put it,

“Perhaps...loyalty to Osama bin Laden is even more powerful than the religious and nationalist fanaticism that has been behind other suicide attacks”.

Timothy McVeigh who was responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing and the unabomber, responsible for many terrorist acts in the U.S., were American citizens but in neither case did anyone jump to the conclusion that the two represented the American people or the American government and none of their families or relatives were accused of the crimes the two had committed.

This is a fair way of looking at things and no individual or nation should be tried and convicted by innuendo and guilt by association through selected leaks to the mass media by individuals who may have hidden agendas and who do not give the accused the chance to defend himself by facing his accusers.

I lived for many years in the U.S. and I know that the American people are fair-minded and, if they are presented with the facts, they will pass a fair judgment.

This brings me to the recently published report by the U.S. Congress on the causes of the 9/11 terrorist acts in the US, a heinous crime which Saudi Arabia and its people condemned in the strongest terms because Saudi Arabia itself had been the target of terrorism in the past.

The latest example was the terrorist bombing in Riyadh on May 12, 2003. Yet the Congressional report left out 28 pages that pertained to the role of Saudi Arabia on the pretext that US national security demanded it. But as Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, stated publicly “Saudi Arabia has nothing to hide” and he demanded that the deleted portions concerning the role of Saudi Arabia be published so that the American people and the whole world would know the facts and so judge for themselves. Congress gets its information from the likes of Dore Gold, the former Israeli Likud ambassador, hardly an objective observer in this regard, and from Sen. Charles Schumer of New York, a well known supporter of Israel and a biased critic of Saudi Arabia. Innuendoes and trial by the mass media without presenting facts is a form of blackmail if not a form of terrorism.

— *Dr. Sulaiman Al-Juraid is Member of the Shoura Council.*

The Civilization Bridge That Never Was **Dr. Khaled M. Batarfi • kbatarfi@al-madina.com**

A Saudi concerned with the state of our relations with the West in general and the United States in particular asked me: “Who is responsible for the mess? Us or them?”

The truth is that we are all responsible. In decades of easy communication and transport, both sides missed many opportunities to build that elusive bridge between our civilizations. Yes, there was a bad blood between us — religious crusades, colonization and all. Yes, there is Israel and the West’s responsibility for its creation, expansion, and oppression of our Palestinian brethren. But most of this is now history.

New generations of good and decent people came and went without being introduced to each others. If they had been, they would certainly discover that what we have in common is much more than what makes us different. After all, we are the same species, living in the same boat, facing the same challenges to our environment, interests and future.

The real question then becomes: Why no one went first to say hello, I am Mohammad or John, this is my identity, culture and interests. What about you?

Is it fear of the unknown? Is it the need to feel superior to others, especially the different others? Or is it that the people in the middle whose exclusive religious, political and social authority is threatened if the “we against them” mindset is to become “we are all equal and same”?

I believe all those reasons are important, but the most important one is the failure of our thinkers and media, education and social institution in their most crucial task of bringing people of different civilizations and heritage together to work on common problems, dreams and interests. Instead, they worked in isolation or in competition to advance limited national aspirations.

While the world is increasingly becoming one village, the people who are freer to move and cooperate today are inadequately equipped to make the best of such freedom and material cooperation. They don't know much about each others' cultural environments, and they don't appreciate the benefit of mixing different backgrounds for the advancement of human identity.

What can we do to change this? I would say: Go direct! With the miracle of the Internet and cheap, reliable communication and transportation we are able to speak to and learn about one another without biased and agenda-laden mediators. After years of communicating with friends all over the Earth, I have found this to be the best bridge of understanding and friendship.

ABOUT THE SAUDI-US RELATIONS INFORMATION SERVICE

The Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Service (SUSRIS) web site is part of a private sector, information service highlighting the characteristics, strength and importance of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

The SUSRIS is a public service of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations as an element of its mission: *To educate Americans about Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world through leadership development, people-to-people programs, lectures, publications, and grassroots outreach.*

The Forum consists of a web site and an email information service.
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You can contribute your ideas and feedback to the SUSRIS through direct email to:
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*Thank you for your support of the Saudi-U.S. relationship and the
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