



George of Arabia The unholy alliance between the Bushes and the Saudis By Michael Moore

Bush still hasn't come clean

I'm not into conspiracy theories, except the ones that are true or involve dentists. I believe that all dentists must have gotten together at some point and decided that the real money was in root canals and full sets of X-rays every time you go in. No other mammal in the animal kingdom has to go through this.

The questions I have about the attacks on September 11th, however, are not about how the terrorists got past our defense system, or how they were able to live in this country and never be detected, or how all the Bulgarians who worked at the World Trade Center got a secret communique to not show up to work that day, or how the towers came down so easily when they were supposedly built to withstand earthquakes, tsunamis and truck bombs in their parking garage. These were all questions that a special commission investigating September 11th was supposed to answer. But the very formation of that commission was opposed by the Bush administration and Republicans in Congress. Reluctantly, they finally agreed -- but then they tried to block the investigative body from doing its job by stonewalling it on the evidence it sought.

Why wouldn't the Bush people want to find out the truth? What were they afraid of? That the American people would learn that they screwed up, that they were asleep at the wheel when it came to terrorist threats, that they belligerently ignored the warnings from outgoing Clinton officials about Osama bin Laden simply because they hated Clinton (Sex! Bad!)?

The American people are a forgiving lot. They didn't hold it against Franklin Roosevelt when Pearl Harbor was bombed. They didn't shun John F. Kennedy over the Bay of Pigs fiasco. And they still don't care that Bill Clinton had those forty-seven people mysteriously murdered. So why, after this monumental breakdown of national security, does George W. Bush not come clean, or, at the very least, stop preventing the truth from coming out?

Perhaps it's because George & Co. have a lot more to hide beyond why they didn't scramble the fighter jets fast enough on the morning of September 11th. And maybe we, the people, are afraid to know the whole truth because it could take us down roads where we don't want to go.

Though I myself was filled with the healthy skepticism that is required for a citizen in a democracy, I also shared the basic mind-set held by most Americans in the fall of 2001: Osama did it, and whoever helped him with it must be tracked down and brought to justice. I hoped that this was what Bush was doing. And then one night in November 2001, as I lay in bed, half asleep, reading an article in *The New Yorker* by investigative journalist Jane Mayer, I stumbled across a paragraph that made me sit up and read it again, because I couldn't believe what it said. It read, "Around two dozen other American-based members of the bin Laden family, most of them here to study in colleges and prep schools, were said to be in the United States at the time of the attacks. The *New York Times* reported that they were quickly called together by officials from the Saudi Embassy, which feared that they might become the victims of American reprisals. With approval from the FBI, according to a Saudi official, the bin Ladens flew by private jet from Los Angeles to Orlando, then on to Washington, and finally to Boston. Once the FAA permitted overseas flights, the jet flew to Europe. United States officials apparently needed little persuasion from the Saudi ambassador in Washington, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, that the extended bin Laden family included no material witnesses."

What? How had I missed this story in the news? I got up and went back through the *New York Times*, and there I found this headline: fearing harm, bin laden kin fled from u.s. The story began, "In the first days after the terror attacks on New York and Washington, Saudi Arabia supervised the urgent evacuation of twenty-four members of Osama bin Laden's extended family from the United States."

So, with the approval of the FBI and the help of the Saudi government -- and even though fifteen of the nineteen hijackers had been Saudi citizens -- the relatives of the number-one suspect in the terror attacks were allowed not only to just up and leave the country, but they were assisted by our own authorities! According to the *Times* of London, "the departure of so many Saudis worried U.S. investigators, who feared that some might have information about the hijackings. FBI agents insisted on checking passports, including the royal family's."

That's all the FBI could do? Check some passports, ask a few brief questions, like "Did you pack your own bags?" and "Have your bags been in your possession since you packed them?" Then, these potential material witnesses were sent off with a bon voyage and a kiss goodbye. As Jane Mayer wrote in *The New Yorker*, "When I asked a senior United States intelligence officer whether anyone had considered detaining members of the family, he replied, 'That's called taking hostages. We don't do that.'"

Was he serious? I was dumbstruck. Had I read this correctly? Why wasn't this being reported more widely? Not that this is personal or anything, but I was stranded in Los Angeles on the morning of September 11th. I scrambled to find a rental car, and then drove 3,000 miles to get back home -- all because traveling by air was forbidden in the days

following the attack. Yet private jets under the supervision of the Saudi government -- and with Bush's approval -- were allowed to fly around the skies of America and pick up twenty-four members of the bin Laden family and take them to Europe, out of the reach of any U.S. officials. One FBI agent I spoke to told me that the bureau was "furious" that it was not allowed to keep the bin Ladens in the country to conduct a real investigation -- the kind police like to do when they are trying to track down a murderer. Usually, the police like to talk to the family members of the suspect to learn what they know, who they know, how they might help capture the fugitive. None of the normal procedures were followed.

This is mind-boggling. Here are two dozen bin Ladens on American soil, and all Bush can do is come up with some lame excuse that he's worried about "their safety." Might it have been possible that at least one of the twenty-four bin Ladens would have known something? Or maybe just one of them could have been "convinced" to help track Osama down?

Nope. None of that. So while thousands were stranded and could not fly, if you could prove you were a close relative of the biggest mass murderer in U.S. history, you got a free trip overseas!

I started wondering what else was going on that we weren't being told. So I got out a big-ass legal pad and started making a list of all the questions that just didn't add up. Of course, I was never good at math, so to help me add it all up and analyze what it all meant, I figured I needed the help of, say, a graduate of the Harvard Business School.

So, George W., how about giving me a hand? Seeing how most of the questions involve you personally, you are probably the best individual to help me -- and the nation -- sort through what I've dug up.

My first question is: Is it true that the bin Ladens have had business relations with you and your family off and on for the past twenty-five years? Back in 1977, when your dad set you up with an oil company named Arbusto, you received financing from an old buddy of yours named James R. Bath. He had been hired by Salem bin Laden -- Osama's brother -- to invest the bin Ladens' money in various Texas ventures. Some \$50,000 -- or five percent of control of Arbusto -- came from Mr. Bath.

After leaving office, your father became a consultant for the Carlyle Group, an investment firm with billions in defense holdings. The bin Laden family has invested a minimum of \$2 million in the Carlyle Group. Frank Carlucci, secretary of defense under Reagan and now the head of Carlyle, also happens to sit on the board of directors of a think tank called the Middle East Policy Council along with a representative of the bin Laden family business.

After September 11th, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* both ran stories pointing out this strange coincidence. Your first response, Mr. Bush, was to ignore it, hoping, I guess, that the story would just go away. Your father and his buddies at Carlyle did not renounce the bin Laden investment. Your army of pundits said, We can't paint these bin Ladens with the same brush we use for Osama. They have disowned Osama! They have nothing to do with him! They hate and despise what he has done! These are the good bin Ladens. And then the video footage came out. It showed a number of those "good" bin Ladens -- including Osama's mother, a sister and two brothers -- with Osama at his son's wedding just eight months before September 11th. *The New Yorker* reported that not only have the family members not cut ties to Osama, but they have continued to fund him as they have for years. It was no secret to the CIA that Osama bin Laden had access to his family fortune (his share is estimated to be at least \$30 million), and that the bin Ladens, as well as other Saudis, kept Osama and Al Qaeda well funded.

Mr. Bush, weeks went by after the attacks on New York and the Pentagon, yet your father and his friends at the Carlyle Group refused to buckle in their support for the bin Laden empire. Finally, nearly two months after the attacks, with more and more people questioning the propriety of the Bush family being in bed with the bin Ladens, your father and the Carlyle Group were pressured into giving the bin Ladens their millions back and asked them to leave the company as investors. Why did this take so long?

To make matters worse, it turned out that one of bin Laden's brothers -- Shafiq -- was actually at a Carlyle Group business conference in Washington, D.C. the morning of September 11th. The day before, at the same conference, your father and Shafiq had been chatting it up with all the other ex-government Carlyle bigwigs.

Mr. Bush, in case you don't understand just how bizarre the media's silence is regarding your family's connections with bin Laden, let me draw an analogy to how the press or Congress might have handled something like this if the same shoe had been on the Clinton foot. If after the terrorist attack on the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, it was revealed that President Bill Clinton and his family had financial dealings with Timothy McVeigh's family, what do you think your Republican Party and the media would have done with that one? Do you think at least a couple of questions might have been asked, like "What is that all about?" Be honest, you know the answer. They would have skinned Clinton alive and thrown what was left of his carcass in Gitmo.

Or, to use the Clinton analogy again, imagine, in the hours after the Oklahoma City bombing, Bill Clinton suddenly started worrying about the "safety" of the McVeigh family up in Buffalo -- and then arranged a free trip for them out of the country. What would you and the Republicans have said about that? Suddenly, a stain on a blue dress probably wouldn't have been the top priority for a witch hunt, would it?

Mr. Bush, the bin Ladens are not the only Saudis with whom you and your family have a close personal relationship. The entire royal family seems to be indebted to you -- or is it the other way around?

The number-one supplier of oil to the U.S. is the nation of Saudi Arabia, possessor of the largest known reserves of oil in the world. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, it was really the Saudis next door who felt threatened, and it was your father, George Bush I, who came to their rescue. The Saudis have never forgotten this, and, according to a March 2003 article in *The New Yorker*, some members of the royal family consider your family to be part of their extended family. Haifa, wife of Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, says that your mother and

father "are like my mother and father. I know if ever I needed anything I could go to them."

As Robert Baer -- who was a case officer in the CIA's Directorate of Operations from 1976 to 1997 -- revealed in his book *Sleeping With the Devil*, your dad even has a special name for the Saudi prince: He calls him "Bandar Bush." Prince Bandar invests in the Carlyle Group, and he attended your mother's seventy-fifth-birthday party. He donated \$1 million to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in Texas and arranged for \$1 million more to be donated to Barbara Bush's literacy program. It has been a fruitful relationship all around.

When there was all that nasty stress surrounding the hanging chads in the Florida ballot boxes in the late fall of 2000, your close friend Prince Bandar was there for your family, offering his support. He took your father on a pheasant-hunting trip to England, to help take his mind off all the chaos, while the royal family's lawyer -- your lawyer, James Baker -- went to Florida to direct the battle for the ballots. (Baker's firm later represented Saudi royals in the lawsuits filed against them by the families of September 11th victims.) To be fair, Mr. Bush, it's not just your family members who are the recipients of the Saudis' largesse. A major chunk of the American economy is built on Saudi money. They have a trillion dollars invested in our stock market and another trillion dollars sitting in our banks. If one day they chose to suddenly remove that money, our corporations and financial institutions would be sent into a tailspin, causing an economic crisis the likes of which has never been seen. Couple that with the fact that the one and a half million barrels of oil we need daily from the Saudis also could vanish on a mere royal whim, and we begin to see how not only you but all of us are dependent on the House of Saud.

Maybe that's why you've blocked attempts to dig deeper into Saudi Arabia's connections to the attacks of September 11th. The headlines blared it the first day, and they blare it the same way now, two years later: terrorists attack United States. Terrorists. I have wondered about this word for some time, so, George, let me ask you a question: If fifteen of the nineteen hijackers had been North Korean, and they killed 3,000 people, do you think the headline the next day might read, North Korea attacks United States? Of course it would. Or if it had been fifteen Iranians or fifteen Libyans or fifteen Cubans, I think the conventional wisdom would have been, Iran (or Libya or Cuba) attacks America! Yet when it comes to September 11th, have you ever seen the headline, have you ever heard a newscaster, has one of your appointees ever uttered these words: "Saudi Arabia attacked the United States"?

Of course you haven't. And so the question must be asked: Why not? Why, when Congress releases its own investigation into September 11th, do you, Mr. Bush, censor twenty-eight pages that deal with the Saudis' role in the attack? What is behind your apparent refusal to look at the one country that seems to be producing the "terrorists" that have killed our citizens? Why are you so busy protecting the Saudis when you should be protecting us?

Two nights after the attacks, according to a *New Yorker* article written by Elsa Walsh, you went out on the Truman Balcony of the White House to relax and smoke a cigar. It had been a horrific forty-eight hours, and you needed to wind down. In that private moment, you asked one close friend to join you. As he entered the White House, the two of you embraced, and then you took him out to the balcony, where he had a drink that you offered him. The two of you then lit up your cigars and stared out across the Ellipse toward the Washington Monument. You told him that if the United States couldn't get any Al Qaeda operatives who may have been involved in the attack to cooperate, "we'll hand them over to you." It was an offer that I am sure he appreciated. After all, he was your good friend "Bandar Bush," the prince from Saudi Arabia. As the smoke from the ashes still billowed through the air over Manhattan and Arlington, the smoke from the Saudi prince's cigar wafted through the balmy night air of Washington, D.C., with you, George W. Bush, by his side.

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