

## **Saudi Arabia's Ostriches Won't Fly**

**By Elizabeth and Stephen Alderman,  
Thomas E. Burnett, Sr., Beverly Burnett and Deena Burnett,  
April D. Gallop, and Edward Russin**

Talk about having one's head in the sand. Just last week, Saudi Arabia's interior minister, Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz, said that al Qaeda was "weak and almost nonexistent."

That must have come as news to the hundreds of people who were injured and the families of the more than 30 people who were murdered days later by al Qaeda suicide bombers in three foreign compounds in Riyadh.

Just as we paid the price — in injuries and the loss of our loved ones — more than 18 months ago, now Saudi Arabia is starting to suffer the consequences of its ostrich approach to terrorism. This was brought into even starker relief by revelations that the Saudis failed to respond to an urgent request by the U.S. ambassador to beef up security at the targeted compounds.

Saudi Arabia will never be the partner in the war on terrorism it claims to be until it stops being in denial and confronts its responsibility for the atrocities of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the creation of the still-alive and kicking global monstrosity known as al Qaeda.

It is no accident that 15 of the 19 September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers were Saudi Arabians. It is no coincidence that the most of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners are from Saudi Arabia. It is not happenstance that the governmentally-sanctioned Wahhabi sect preaches hatred of Westerners and gives religious legitimacy to mass murder in mosques and schools throughout the country. And it is no fluke that most of the money that financed the murders of our loved ones and our injuries came from Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's toxic mix of governmental repression, religious extremism and abundant oil money produced Osama bin Laden, his followers and his financiers. But the government's

response to terrorism has been to stick its head in the sand and instead try its hand at public relations.

Recently, for example, the Saudi Arabian government boasted of strengthening its oversight of the charities that sponsor al Qaeda, questioning 2,000 people, and arresting 300 individuals to the courts. By any measure, these are baby steps.

As the Council on Foreign Relations' Independent Task Force on Terrorist Financing recently reported, "For years, individuals and charities based in Saudi Arabia have been the most important source of funds for al-Qaeda; and for years, Saudi officials have turned a blind eye to this problem. . . . Saudi Arabia has taken two or three important steps to improve its capability to cooperate on these matters with the United States, for which it should be commended. A hundred more steps and Saudi Arabia may be where it needs to be."

What would these hundred steps entail?

First and foremost, the Saudi Arabian government must end its pact with the Wahhabi clerics, deny them official sanction, and stop their chokehold on the country's educational system. Until this happens, Saudi Arabia will remain a breeding ground for terrorism and an endless well of financing for the likes of al Qaeda.

Second, it must take a hard look at the culpability of the royal family itself. For example, Prince Naif has controlled the activities of the country's Islamic charities since 1975. The groundbreaking legal action we and 3,600 other 9/11 family members and survivors have taken against terrorist financiers alleges that he made payoffs to al Qaeda and authorized payments to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers. It is patently absurd that after 28 years of encouraging, tolerating and/or ignoring the charities' funneling of hundreds of millions of dollars to terrorists, he is supposed to be the government official in charge of reforming them.

Similarly, Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz al Saud has donated at least \$6 million since 1994 to four charities that finance al Qaeda, our action alleges. Yet on May 1<sup>st</sup>, he

and Prince Naif were reappointed to their posts, despite a Cabinet reorganization. This was hardly the action of a government serious about stopping terrorism.

Third, Saudi Arabia must stop supporting Palestinian suicide bombers, to whom it has sent more than \$40 million, according to an official government press release.

Finally, one of Saudi Arabia's hundred steps should involve making amends to those harmed by Saudi money. This does not require compensation — the Saudi government is not a defendant in the 9/11 families' action. Rather, its "reparations" should include cooperating with our investigation, making it possible for all Saudi defendants to testify under oath in the U.S. Courts, and freezing appropriate assets to ensure payment by those who are held liable.

Through these and other measures, Saudi Arabia can transform itself from an ostrich into a hawk in the war on terrorism. Only then will all Americans be safer and the world more secure.

###

**Elizabeth and Stephen Alderman of Armonk, N.Y., are the parents of Peter Alderman, 25, who was killed at the World Trade Center. Thomas E. Burnett, Sr., and Beverly Burnett of Northfield, Minn., are the parents of Thomas E. Burnett, Jr., 38, who was killed on United Flight 93; Deena Burnett of Little Rock, Ark., is his widow. April D. Gallop and her son, Elisha, of Woodbridge, Va., were injured in the attack on the Pentagon. Edward Russin of Morganville, N.J., is the father of Steven H. Russin, 32, who was killed at the World Trade Center. They are among the founders of 9/11 Families United to Bankrupt Terrorism.**