



The Saudi Arabia Accountability Act of 2005

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ON TUESDAY, June 7, Sen. Arlen Specter took an action that may substantially improve the difficult--some might say despicable--state of U.S.-Saudi relations. Specter dropped the Saudi Arabia Accountability Act of 2005 into the hopper; the text was designated Senate bill 1171. Its co-sponsors, so far, are Sens. Evan Bayh, Susan Collins, Tim Johnson, Patty Murray, Russ Feingold, and Ron Wyden.

The legislation is concise. The bill's text stands as an indictment of Saudi Arabia, since it is mainly an inventory of evidence against the kingdom and the role of its rulers in enabling terrorism. S. 1171 summons the rulers of the Saudi kingdom to comply with United Nations resolution 1373, calling on states to refrain from supporting terrorism, to combat terrorism, and to deny safe haven to financiers and planners of terrorism. As the

home of Wahhabism, the state cult and Islamist ideology underpinning al Qaeda and its allies, Saudi territory is a rich field of targets for serious counter-terrorism.

S. 1171 points out that the Council of Foreign Relations concluded almost three years ago that Saudi Arabia is the main source of al Qaeda backing and that Saudi officials have refused to take serious action to end it. A year ago the CFR emphasized, in language incorporated in the bill, that not a single Saudi funder of terrorism has been arrested, tried, or otherwise "publicly punished."

The new bill goes on to cite reports critical of Saudi behavior, issued by the U.S. 9/11 Commission, Freedom House, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. It references the 2003 Senate testimony on Wahhabism in which David Auf-

hauser, then general counsel of the Treasury Department, called the Saudi state the "epicenter" of global terror financing. It also notes that the Saudis have subsidized half the annual budget of Hamas, the deadly terror gang in Israel, as part of a \$4 billion outlay to Palestinian extremists since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000.

Above all, the Saudi Arabia Accountability Act focuses on the Saudis' lack of effective commitment to U.S. efforts against terror. Saudi foot-dragging in investigating al Qaeda recalls Saudi obstruction of U.S. inquiries into the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers, in which 19 American service personnel died. The Saudis have further prevented our officials from interviewing terrorist suspects in their custody, including a Saudi subject knowledgeable about plans to inject poison gas into the New York City subways.

But failure to combat terrorism is only part of Saudi mischief. S. 1171 goes on to condemn the indoctrination in hatred pursued by Saudi-funded Wahhabis in mosques and schools on U.S. soil, as well by clerics on the kingdom's official payroll.

The bill has already been introduced into the House of Representatives as H.R. 2037, with the backing of 24 representatives, from Republican Dan Burton of Indiana to Democrat Henry Waxman of California. If it passes, it will express a congressional consensus that Saudi authorities must immediately cooperate in a complete and unrestricted manner with the U.S. government in the fight against terror, and permanently close all chari-

ties, schools, and other organizations or institutions that support terrorism, whether inside Saudi territory or abroad. The latter provision would include cutting off payments to the families of suicide bombers in Israel.

IN CASE THE SAUDIS don't get the message this time, the bill provides for sanctions, including a bar on exporting special military technology to the kingdom and restriction on travel by Saudi diplomats outside a 25-mile radius from their embassy and consulates in Washington, New York, Houston, and Los Angeles. Certification of Saudi compliance would rest with President Bush.

The combined House-Senate effort to make the Saudis behave like a normal and respectable country comes late, but remains urgent. Three and a half years have passed since September 11, 2001; 15 of the 19 terrorist pilots on that day were Saudis.

Saudi clerics continue to incite their followers to go to Iraq to kill Shia Muslims, non-Wahhabi Sunnis, and the forces of the new Iraqi government (as well as those in the ranks of the U.S.-led coalition). The day the bill was dropped in the Senate hopper, a Saudi subject, Fahd Nouman Suweilem al-Faqihi, stood trial in Jordan for an attempted bombing at the border of that country and Iraq. Last week the State Department named the Saudi kingdom and three other Gulf states as the worst offenders against international laws against human trafficking. And the suppression of Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish, as well as non-Wahhabi Muslim worshippers inside the kingdom, [goes on](#).

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