



**WMRC Article**

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Report on 11 September  
Terrorist Attacks Opens Old  
Wounds

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## United States: Report on 11 September Terrorist Attacks Opens Old Wounds

*A special report following the US Congress' investigation of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 has revealed a number of failures by US intelligence services and raised renewed concerns over the role of the Saudi government in terrorist activities, creating a new set of political problems for US President George W Bush and possibly straining US-Saudi relations.*

<b>WMRC Perspective</b>	
<b>Significance</b>	The release of the Congressional report on its investigation into the terrorist attacks of 11 September is highly critical of US intelligence agencies and the alleged role of Saudi Arabia in supporting terrorism.
<b>Implications</b>	The report recommends a number of changes to US security policy, highlighting the areas in which the US is still vulnerable to potential terrorist attacks. It invokes a new political storm around the Bush administration and its policies regarding intelligence gathering and its relations with the Saudi government.
<b>Outlook</b>	The most controversial section of the report, the section regarding Saudi Arabia, has been removed by the Bush administration, which will provoke an even greater furore over the issue, as Bush will be seen as encouraging a cover-up or glossing-over of the most critical concerns. The recommended changes to US security policy are either cosmetic or duplicative of a number of the wholesale reforms already under way.

### Nine-Hundred-and-Eleven Pages...

A special committee of the House and Senate Intelligence committees of the US Congress began its own investigation into the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 more than a year ago. The establishment of the committee and the ensuing inquiry was highly controversial at the time because it followed the Bush administration's investigation that found a number of intelligence lapses and other errors leading up to the attacks and made a number of sweeping recommendations as to how the various intelligence agencies would gather, analyse and share information. The recommendations also led to the creation of the US Department of Homeland Security, the US\$41bn agency overseeing border control, immigration, airport screening, co-ordination of intelligence gathering and analysis, among a host of other functions. The Congressional report focuses on the already embattled Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and again highlights the failure of the domestic security agency to share disparate information even within the agency. Had this failure not occurred, the report suggests, the attacks of 11 September could have possibly been prevented. The report reveals that, despite the FBI's prior claims that it did not know anyone with connections to the hijackers, the 19 terrorists had a 'web of contacts' in the United States that included 14 people who were investigated by the Bureau for links to terrorism before the attacks. Four of those 14 were under active FBI scrutiny while the hijackers lived in the United States.

### Congressional Report on 11 September Terrorist Attacks - Key Recommendations

Topic	Recommendation
<b>Director of National Intelligence</b>	Create cabinet-level post to serve as the President's principal advisor on intelligence.
<b>National Security Council</b>	Create a government-wide strategy for combating terrorism.
<b>Al-Qaida, Hamas, Hezbollah</b>	Develop more human resources to penetrate terrorist groups in the US and abroad.
<b>Covert Anti-Terrorism Operations</b>	Provide more resources to the CIA's paramilitary and US military special operations forces to directly engage suspected terrorists.
<b>National Intelligence Officer for Terrorism</b>	Create a new position on the President's National Security Council to co-ordinate anti-terrorism strategies.

<b>National Intelligence Centre</b>	Create a division with the US Department of Homeland Security that is a central repository of terrorism-related intelligence.
<b>Federal Bureau of Investigation</b>	Develop new strategies to improve the FBI's ability to gather and analyse intelligence gathered in the US and abroad and to recruit more people with adequate language and technical skills.

### ...Minus Twenty-Eight Pages

The most controversial part of the report is the section that most people will never see. It is the section that alleges a more troubling role of the government of Saudi Arabia in the 11 September attacks and the support of terrorists in general. At the behest of the Bush administration, citing reasons of 'national security' - an official means by which the government can classify information it wants to be kept secret - the 28 pages of the report highlighting the allegations against the Saudis have been removed. However, because Saudi citizens made up 15 of the 19 hijackers involved in those attacks, and the leader of the terrorist network, Osama bin Laden, is a member of a prominent Saudi family, not all of the damaging allegations of Saudi involvement have been taken out. For example, there is a lot of information about Omar al-Bayoumi, a student who had access to seemingly unlimited funding from Saudi Arabia, and who gave financial assistance to two of the hijackers. The report also says that a number of government officials complained about the lack of Saudi co-operation on terrorism investigations both before and after the attacks. Among the removed pages, reports suggest that they specifically criticise the Saudi government's financial support for fundamentalist groups with alleged ties to terrorist activities and for not cracking down on Al-Qaida despite the urging of the US government since 1996.

### The Politics of Secrecy

- Keeping a Secret:** In the US, the only thing that can generate more interest in a controversy is when someone is obviously trying to avoid one, especially when it comes to politics and government. The fact that the Bush administration, for whatever reason, has removed 28 pages from the Congressional report simply makes them the only 28 pages people are truly interested in seeing. At this point, although speculation abounds, it is uncertain what is actually contained in those pages and, moreover, whether the assumed assertions against the Saudis are defensible. But what is certain is that the 28 pages will eventually be made public, one way or another. The media in the US never accepts the word 'no', especially when it involves a story the White House does not want to be told.
- Political Quandary:** The demand for the sections of the report relating to Saudi Arabia puts President Bush in a difficult position. While his administration probably agrees with the report's assertions and complaints regarding the role of the Saudi government, Saudi Arabia is, at the very least, giving the impression that it supports the US-led war on terrorism, much of which is directed against Saudi Arabia's neighbours and often its citizens. This support has increased in real terms since a terrorist attack in Riyadh in May 2003 that killed 34 people. Saudi Arabia remains one of the US's most important strategic allies in the Middle East, as well as one of the biggest suppliers of US oil imports, making it difficult for the Bush administration to be overly critical of the government. However, at home, Bush is facing another sticky political issue that questions his credibility and the transparency of his administration involving the use of bogus intelligence regarding Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons programme. The more Bush tries to keep secret, the more his critics and opponents imply he has something to hide.

### Outlook and Implications

One of the leading authors of the Congressional Report is Florida Senator Robert Graham, a Democratic candidate for president. Senator Graham is lagging in the polls and this report and Bush's excising of 28 controversial pages presents him with an opportunity to criticise Bush and elevate his own stature. Adding to the pressure to release the pages, families of victims of the 11 September attacks are also calling for Bush to stop hiding behind national security concerns and release information that could help them in their wrongful death lawsuits, some of which are demanding remuneration from the Saudi government for its alleged complicity. Bush will eventually bend to the political pressure and authorise the release of the 28 pages. It may not occur in as overt a manner as a press conference in the White House Rose Garden, but the Bush administration will eventually, quietly allow for the documents to come out. The diplomatic fallout with the Saudis will be minimised as Bush can claim that he 'fought the good fight' and tried as best he could to protect the Royal Family, losing in the end to the porous nature of the US government and the demanding appetite of the Washington press corps and his political opponents to bring it to light. Domestically, Bush will deflate the conspiracy theorists and frustrate his opponents' hopes of finding a smoking gun.

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