
SHIITE IRAQ'S GAINS AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE SPUR FUNDRAISING IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Iraq's current military offensive against the Islamic State in the city of Fallujah has sparked a flurry of new fundraising campaigns in Saudi Arabia.

You cannot control the sympathies of people, said Saudi Maj. Gen. Mansour al-Turki, a spokesman for his government's Interior Ministry. But what Saudi Arabia can control, he said, are potentially fake campaigns to raise money in the name of the children of Fallujah that actually funds terrorism.

Charitable solicitation or giving for any cause outside the country has been monitored by the government since 2004, and all private donations going abroad must use official channels, he said. Some 226 people have been convicted of terrorism financing activities.

Turki spoke Wednesday to reporters invited to question him remotely at the Saudi Embassy in Washington. The Saudi mission has sharply stepped up its outreach and lobbying activities in recent months, amid a new wave of allegations of foreign financing of the Sept. 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacks in the United States.

Questions about possible official Saudi links to the attacks have ebbed and flowed in the past 15 years, although the official 9/11 Commission report, published in 2004, found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials were involved in backing the hijackers.

The current allegations involve two separate but related issues. Many in Congress have been pushing for legislation that would allow victims of terrorism on U.S. soil to sue involved foreign governments. That led to renewed pressure to release the 28 pages from a 2002 congressional report on the 9/11 attacks that were classified by the administration of President George W. Bush and not published.

The Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, known as JASTA, passed the Senate last month by unanimous consent, as lawmakers on both sides of the aisle said that families of those killed in the 9/11 attacks, as well as surviving victims, deserved both accountability and compensation.

The administration has said President Obama would veto the legislation as a terrible precedent that would eliminate sovereign immunity for all countries — including the United States, should anyone overseas decide to sue on the basis of U.S. actions.

Some who have read the 28 pages withheld from the report say that they describe a network of Saudis who helped facilitate the pre-attack activities of some of the 15 Saudis who were among the 19 hijackers who turned passenger jets into missiles.

Former senator Bob Graham (Fla.), then the Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee that authored the 2002 investigation, has said that the missing pages point a strong finger at Saudi Arabia.

Others who served on the committee disagree with Grahams view but say the pages should be declassified. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), the top Democrat on the current Intelligence Committee, said last month that she saw nothing in the pages that would implicate Saudi Arabia or any other government but that releasing the pages would clear the air.

The document has been described by several knowledgeable individuals, speaking anonymously to discuss classified information, as uncorroborated reports and allegations assembled into a work plan for the FBI. The results of the FBI investigation were turned over to the 9/11 Commission and reflected in its report.

Releasing the pages now, CIA Director John Brennan has said, would allow some to seize upon that uncorroborated, unvetted information that was in there that was basically just a collation of this information that came out of FBI files. Taking the information as pointing to Saudi involvement, he said on NBC's Meet the Press, would be very, very inaccurate.

The administration has said that declassification of the pages was being studied by Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr., who will make a decision this month.

The Saudi government has long urged declassification of the pages, saying it has nothing to fear. But the prospect of the informations being released out of context — without a point-by-point refutation available, at least in part, in the footnotes of the 9/11 Commission report, makes the Saudi government both nervous and angry, Saudi officials have said.

As they wait for Clappers decision, the Saudis have taken matters into their own hands. In recent weeks, the usually reticent government and embassy have released a 104-page white paper on Saudi Arabias Effort to Combat Terrorism and Terror-Financing, along with a compendium of media and official statements playing down the importance of the pages.

In his news briefing Wednesday, Turki, of the Saudi Interior Ministry, noted that Saudi Arabia itself has suffered from terrorism, including more than 63 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, 26 of those in the past two years, with more than 200 civilians and police officials killed.

U.S. concerns about wealthy Saudis funneling money to terrorist organizations have largely abated in recent years, according to U.S. Treasury officials who have spoken publicly about steps the Saudi government has taken. Any such thing actually is criminalized in Saudi Arabia, Turki said.

The government, he said, monitors all appeals for charitable funds via television, the Internet and social media, and maintains a 990 number for private citizens to contact authorities to express any suspicions they have about fundraising campaigns.

Kaynak/Source: