

Memorandum for the Record

Meeting with HRH Prince Talal bin Abdel Aziz

Date: October 14, 2003

Location: Prince Talal's AGFUND office

Commission participants: Philip Zelikow, Daniel Byman, and Kevin Scheid

Other participants: PolOff Matthew Teuller, MFA protocol representatives, members of Prince Talal's staff, and Prince Talal's sons Khalid and Turki'

Writeup by: Dan Byman

Reviewed by: Philip Zelikow

Notes: This memorandum is a summary of the key points of the meeting

Philip Zelikow began with an overview of the Commission's work and asked questions on the Kingdom's willingness and capacity to fight terrorism, both before and after September 11, 2001. Talal responded to the questions and raised several additional issues for consideration.

Talal noted that the Kingdom built mosques in numerous foreign countries, particularly Islamic ones. In these efforts, the Kingdom tries to spread traditional versions of Islam, but its efforts are often perverted by radicals. Since September 11, the Saudi government has taken numerous steps to curb abuse. For example, it has limited cash contributions through mosques.

Saudi Arabia's desire to fight radicalism is strong. For example, in the early 1990s it arrested four radical preachers (including Safir al-Hawali and Salman al-Auda) and converted them to moderation. On October 11, Al-Auda even appeared on *Al Jazeera* to defend the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has also changed its school curriculum, making references to Christians and Jews less hostile. If there are gaps in the Kingdom's effort to fight radicalism, it will fill them - as long as the gaps are brought to its attention.

Talal anticipates that Saudi Arabia will face more attacks from radical Islamists in the coming years. U.S. policy to the region worsens the problem of terrorism, in his view. He notes that radicals call the Al Saud and other defenders of America "agents for America," but that U.S. policies regarding Palestine and Iraq make it hard for these defenders to show that engaging Washington pays dividends. He also remarked that if he speaks up for the United States publicly, his life is at risk. Similarly, pro-U.S. efforts such as increasing oil production after the September 11 attacks were played down at home because they would anger the public. Talal offered several suggestions for U.S. policy to help Iraq.

Saudi Arabia, however, has not articulated a strategy or programs for confronting the terrorism problem. King Fahd's address to the *majles al-shura* gave some hints of this, but it was not complete. Talal noted that restoring the Consultative Council that was abolished by King Saud is necessary for Saudi Arabia's political health. He was

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noncommittal as to whether the Saudi leadership understood the problems the Kingdom faced.

Talal emphasized the importance of U.S.-Saudi relations. He was angry when the United States left Prince Sultan Air Base because it was a continuation of the close military relations established under his father, King Abdel Aziz. He noted that cooperation with the United States was essential.

On a personal note, Talal noted that he supported Egyptian President Nasser when he was young but changed his mind. He was attracted to Nasser's call for unity, but his dictatorial measures repelled 'him.'