

MFRO4019218

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Telephone Conversation with the Deputy Chief of Mission, Rihab Massoud, Embassy of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Date: 05/11/2004

Time: 11:45 AM

Special access issues: none

Prepared by: Chris Kojm

Team Number: Front Office

Location: K St.

Participants: Chris Kojm

Minister Massoud called from Saudi Arabia, in a follow-up to a call from Philip Zelikow to the Saudi Ambassador, Prince Bandar. I ran through a series of questions prepared by Tom Eldridge; Tom was unable to join the call.

Minister Massoud stated that he initiated an inquiry on behalf of the government of Saudi Arabia to allow the early departure of members of the Bin Ladin family from the United States. He called Dale Watson at the FBI "some days after" 9/11. He does not remember the exact date; he is checking his records. He recalls he spoke twice to Dale Watson, once to initiate the request, and once to tell Dale Watson that he was providing names and basic biographical information, including date and place of birth and passport information on these individuals. He spoke to others at the FBI, but does not recall their names.

Minister Massoud thought the FBI was the appropriate agency for his phone call, because the Embassy was working closely with the FBI on counterterrorism issues.

He made clear that the plan was to gather all members of the Bin Ladin family on one flight. The flight made several stops in the United States where members of the family were gathered before it departed the United States.

Massoud disputed that there were six Saudi flights. He claimed this represented "confusion" between the number of stops by the so-called Bin Ladin flight internally within the United States and its ultimate departure from the United States, which was only one flight.

When asked whether the Embassy assisted with the departure of any other Saudi nationals, Massoud said the Embassy helped with two additional flights. One was a

flight from California by the Governor of Mecca on an American-registered aircraft that belonged to the President of Gabon. The second was a flight on Saudia Airlines by the Saudi Deputy Defense Minister from New York City. When questioned again about six Saudi flights, he specifically denied that the Saudi Embassy helped with any additional flights or departure of Saudi nationals in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 other than the Bin Ladin family flight and the two cases mentioned above.

Massoud stated that at each stop within the United States of the so-called Bin Ladin flight, all passengers got off the plane. Both new passengers and continuing passengers had their names and documents checked by law enforcement, including the FBI, before they boarded the plane. Therefore, each passenger was checked at least once and most were checked several times by law enforcement.

He mentioned that when he asked the FBI about the departure of the Bin Ladin family, the FBI had one requirement: it wanted the names and personal information of all departing passengers. The Embassy provided such information to the FBI, and has also made such information available to the Commission. The Embassy further told the FBI: "if you want to talk to any of them now, we will make that happen. If you want to talk to any of them later, after they have returned to Saudi Arabia, we will make that happen, too." The FBI set no other requirements before the departure of Bin Ladin family members. Massoud said the FBI made its checks at the time, before the departure of Bin Ladin family members, and did not ask subsequently to interview any members of the family after their return to Saudi Arabia.

Massoud said he and the Embassy took no other steps to facilitate these flights than to provide names, personal information, the names of pilots, pilot licenses, etc. to the FBI. Neither he nor the Embassy spoke to any other agency of the U.S. government. He specifically denied any contact with the White House or State Department on this question.

Massoud specifically denied seeking any permission for the departure of the Bin Ladin family or other Saudi nationals (the two flights referenced earlier) before the reopening of U.S. airspace. He stated that these flights took place after U.S. airspace reopened.