

May 13, 2004: The Saudi Influence - New York Sun

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May 13, 2004 Senator Collins of Maine and Rep. Dan Burton of Indiana are scheduled to appear today on Capitol Hill to announce a Congressional probe of Saudi Arabia's promotion of religious violence and intolerance. Ms. Collins, who is chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, and Mr. Burton, who is a member of the House Government Reform Committee, will ask for a report of the General Accounting Office, which is the investigative arm of Congress, on "Saudi support for an ideology promoting violence and intolerance globally." The chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Michael Young, said in announcing the probe, "There have been a growing number of reports that funding coming from Saudi Arabia has been used to finance religious schools and other activities that are alleged to support religious intolerance, and in some cases, violence associated with certain Islamic militant and extremist organizations." He said, "These reports raise troubling questions about the Saudi government's role in propagating worldwide an ideology that is incompatible with both the war against terrorism, as well as internationally recognized guarantees of the right to freedom of religion or belief." There are several names for this ideology. One is anti-Semitism, or hatred of Jews. The Saudi crown prince and de facto ruler, Abdullah, made his own views clear in a May 2 speech in which he blamed "the Zionists" for a May 1 shooting in the kingdom that killed seven, including two Americans. "You all know who is behind it all. Zionism is behind it. It has become clear now. It has become clear to us. I don't say, I mean...It is not 100%, but 95% that the Zionist hands are behind what happened," Abdullah said, according to a translation by the Middle East Media Research Institute of his remarks, which were broadcast on Saudi television and reported in the Arabic press. The crown prince continued, "They got their boldness from Satan. They are Satan's helpers. They are the hangers-on of Satan and of imperialism... But I tell you that you can be 100% sure that, Allah willing, this country will be victorious, whoever the faction that turns against it may be. But we are convinced that Zionism is behind everything. This has been established, I am not saying by 100%, but by 95%." A Saudi princess, Fahda bint Saud, wrote an article in the May 6 Arab News that sought to defend her regime from the charge of anti-Semitism. "There is no denying that the September 11 attacks have served the interests of the Zionists more than they have any other group's. Can anyone dare deny this fact?" she wrote. "The people of Saudi Arabia represented by its leaders are indeed anti-Zionists but not anti-Semites," she wrote. On the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, we would refer Princess Saud to the comments of Martin Luther King, as quoted in a new pamphlet on anti-Semitism issued by the government of Israel: "You declare that you do not hate the Jews, you are merely anti-Zionist. And I say, let the truth ring forth from the high mountaintops, let it echo through the valleys of God's green earth; when people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews." President Bush this week imposed sanctions on Syria, another Arab country that had too long been immune to American penalties for its support of terrorism and of anti-Semitism. Senator Kerry responded, according to a report by the Associated Press, that, "The administration had previously acknowledged that Syria has failed to adequately police its border with Iraq, may be developing weapons of mass destruction and provides support to terrorist groups. Given all these troubling facts, it is unfortunate that President Bush failed to impose sanctions until now." Mr. Kerry has taken a similar forward leaning stance with respect to the Saudis. "Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah's outrageous anti-Semitic comments this week blaming 'Zionists' for the terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia raises serious questions about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's commitment to combating terrorism," Mr. Kerry said. "President Bush has said nothing. As president, I will never permit this kind of attack to go unanswered." The White House says it has raised the issue with the Saudis. But this is one topic on which Mr. Bush would be wise not to let Mr. Kerry or Congress get ahead of him.