

## Saudis Arabia Admit Hijackers of Sept. 11 Attacks were Citizens

[Saudi Arabia](#) acknowledged for the first time on Wednesday that 15 of the 19 hijackers in the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were Saudi citizens, according to a report by chinadaily.com.cn.

"The names that we got confirmed that," Interior Minister Prince Nayef said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Their families have been notified."

Previously, Saudi Arabia had said the citizenship of the 15 hijackers was in doubt despite U.S. insistence they were Saudis.

Osama bin Laden - the chief suspect in the Sept. 11 attacks the killed more than 3,000 people - was Saudi born but stripped of his citizenship in 1994.

Asked if he had information on whether bin Laden was dead or alive, Nayef said: "We have no information and we have no interest in this subject."

Nayef also said the kingdom has detained about 30 people since the attacks, based on lists provided by the [United States](#). Some have been released.

Nayef said the men still in detention "have been influenced by bin Laden's thinking."

"It's possible that we will find among them members of the (al-Qaida) organization," he added. "But so far we haven't found anything."

Nayef said the Saudi leadership was shocked to learn 15 of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia and said it was natural that the kingdom had not noticed their involvement beforehand.

"How can I place the name of a Saudi on a blacklist when I have nothing to justify the action? The Saudis are free to travel wherever they like."

"If we had known they were going to do what they had done, we would have stopped them," he said.

"I believe they were taken advantage of in the name of religion and regarding certain issues pertaining to the Arab nation, especially the issue of Palestine," said Nayef.

Nayef said the oil-rich kingdom bears no responsibility for the actions of the hijackers.

"This is the truth ... and I defy anyone to prove it," he added.

The prince said there was no evidence so far of al-Qaida cells operating in Saudi Arabia, but added:

"There may be a limited number of people that we don't know about."

He promised "no mercy" for any al-Qaida radicals discovered "just as we showed no mercy before Sept. 11."

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02/06/2002 - Updated 06:29 AM ET

## Official: 15 of 19 Sept. 11 hijackers were Saudi

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi Arabia acknowledged for the first time that 15 of the Sept. 11 suicide hijackers were Saudi citizens, but said Wednesday that the oil-rich kingdom bears no responsibility for their actions.

Previously, Saudi Arabia had said the citizenship of 15 of the 19 hijackers was in doubt despite U.S. insistence they were Saudis. But Interior Minister Prince Nayef told The Associated Press that Saudi leaders were shocked to learn 15 of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia.

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"The names that we got confirmed that," Nayef said in an interview. "Their families have been notified."

Osama bin Laden — the chief suspect in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks the killed more than 3,000 people — was Saudi born but stripped of his citizenship in 1994.

Asked if he had information on whether bin Laden was dead or alive, Nayef said: "We have no information and we have no interest in this subject."

Nayef also said the kingdom has detained about 30 people since the attacks, based on lists provided by the United States. Some have been released.

Nayef said the men still in detention "have been influenced by bin Laden's thinking."

"It's possible that we will find among them members of (bin Laden's al-Qaeda) organization," he added. "But so far we haven't found anything."

Nayef said the measures were not in response to any pressure from the United States, "but we welcome any information that's provided to us and we want to be cooperative."

Nayef said it was natural that the kingdom had not noticed the 15 hijackers beforehand.

"How can I place the name of a Saudi on a blacklist when I have nothing to justify the action? The Saudis are free to travel wherever they like," he said. "If we had known they were going to do what they had done, we would have stopped them."

"I believe they were taken advantage of in the name of religion and regarding certain issues pertaining to the Arab nation, especially the issue of Palestine," said Nayef.

Nayef said Saudi Arabia is not responsible for the actions of the hijackers.

"This is the truth ... and I defy anyone to prove it," he added.

Nayef said that Saudi banks have not frozen any bank accounts. He also said that Saudi charities "won't be allowed by the state or those who work in them ... to be used for other purposes. But you cannot guarantee that a person or more could misuse" their responsibilities.

The United States has accused some Islamic charities of funding terrorist operations. The Saudi-based Wafa Humanitarian Organization, whose operations include food distribution and construction of a clinic in the Afghan capital, Kabul, is on a U.S. list of terrorist organizations.

U.S.-Saudi relations have been strained in the wake of Sept. 11, with criticism from the United States that the Saudis are doing too little to hunt down terrorist links in the kingdom. The Saudis counter that they are being unfairly accused because of the actions of a few, and claim criticism in the U.S. media is Israeli-inspired.

Nayef alleged Wednesday that Zionism was behind an "unjustified" anti-Saudi campaign in the United States.

"Most of the American media could not understand us well and we didn't see any desire on their part to understand us," he said.

He also said the Islam preached and taught in Saudi Arabia rejects extremism.

"We are not Taliban," he said, referring to the extremist Islamic militia that once ruled Afghanistan and harbored bin Laden. "We believe and live by the right Islam."

Nayef said the United States should "take a just and evenhanded stand" in the Mideast peace process and not provide "unqualified" support for Israel if it wants to improve its image in the region.

Nayef dismissed reports that speak of widespread popularity for bin Laden in the kingdom.

Asked if Saudi Arabia was worried about possible pro-bin Laden demonstrations during the hajj — the annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca — this year, Nayef said: "Inshallah (God willing), there won't be, but as security people we don't dismiss anything. We are ready and determined to prevent anything disrupting security in the hajj."

Nayef said bin Laden was a "tool" of others rather than the mastermind of the attacks against the World Trade Center, Pentagon and in Pennsylvania. He did not say who he thought was the mastermind.

The prince said there was no evidence so far of al-Qaeda cells operating in Saudi Arabia, but added:

"There may be a limited number of people that we don't know about."

He promised "no mercy" for any al-Qaeda radicals discovered "just as we showed no mercy before Sept. 11."

He said the number of Saudi among the suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban prisoners held by the United States at a Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was just over 50 and not 100 as reported earlier. He said the kingdom was checking on their names.

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