

BAE Financing Of al-Qaeda

I just got handed a case from Justice. . . . There seems to have been a kickback deal going between the Saudis and a British defense contractor. . . .

The big deal leaked out five or so years ago. The British Serious Fraud office was mucking around with some BAE files and realized the company had been making under-the-table payments to several of the princes in the Saudi royal family. It started with toys—a gold Rolls-Royce here, a Mayfair apartment there. Then it turned to cash. . . . [T]he Serious Fraud folks had verified that BAE Systems had forked over about two billion pounds when they had the rug pulled out from under them.

Tony stiffened, “Two billion pounds? Hell, that’s

better than a five percent payoff. And you say they might have found even more if what?”

If Prime Minister Tony Blair hadn’t stepped in and shut them down. He slammed the door on any more snooping around, saying it was a threat to one of Britain’s most important strategic relationships.

Tony leaned back on the bench and recalled a late-night session during the 9/11 inquiry. In the Capitol’s fourth-floor secure room, committee members were questioning an FBI agent. Where did the money come from to support the hijackers? Billington pressed for more details on bank records. The besieged agent spluttered for a while, then finally said that the FBI was restricted in its access to the accounts. The senator blew up, stormed out of the room, got the attorney general on the phone and demanded he get somebody competent on the case. The AG wasn’t happy. . . .

Excerpted from “Keys to the Kingdom,” 2011.