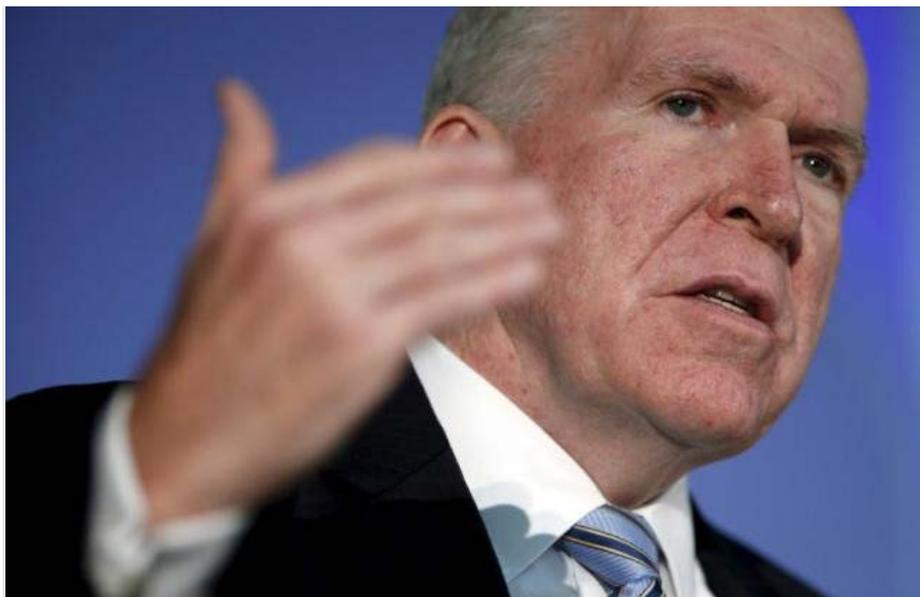


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CIA chief expects release of 9/11 documents to clear Saudi Arabia



CIA Director John Brennan speaks at the Overseas Security Advisory Council's (OSAC) 30th annual briefing at the State Department in Washington November 18, 2015. REUTERS/KEVIN LAMARQUE

CIA chief John Brennan said on Sunday he expects 28 classified pages of a U.S. congressional report into the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States to be published, absolving Saudi Arabia of any responsibility.

"I think the 28 pages will be published and I support their publication and everyone will see the evidence that the Saudi government had nothing to do with it," Brennan said in an interview with Saudi-owned Arabiya TV. His comments were dubbed into Arabic.

The withheld section of the 2002 report is central to a dispute over whether Americans should be able to sue the Saudi government, a key U.S. ally, for damages.

The U.S. Senate passed a bill on May 17 allowing the families of Sept. 11 victims to do so, setting up a potential showdown with the White House, which has threatened a veto.

Saudi Arabia denies providing any support for the 19 hijackers - most of whom were Saudi citizens - who killed nearly 3,000 people in the Sept. 11 attacks. Riyadh strongly objects to the bill.

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Brennan called the 28-page section merely a "preliminary review."

"It was found later, according to the results of the report, that there was no link between the Saudi government as a state or as an institution or even senior Saudi officials to the Sept. 11 attacks," he added.

The Office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence is reviewing the material to see whether it can be declassified.

Former U.S. Senator Bob Graham, who co-chaired the congressional inquiry into the attacks, said in April that the White House will likely make a decision by June on whether it would release the classified pages.

(Reporting By Ali Abdelatti and Noah Browning; Editing by Kevin Liffey and Paul Simao)

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