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Feds hail city's $10M slap at apologist prince

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and RITA DELFINER

The State Department yesterday backed Mayor Giuliani in blasting a billionaire Saudi prince for tying the Sept. 11 terror attacks to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A ticked-off Giuliani rejected Saudi Arabia's Prince Alwaleed bin Talal's $10 million donation to the Twin Towers Fund Thursday after the royal suggested U.S. Mideast policy was partly to blame for the attacks.

"We do object to Prince Alwaleed's remarks," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said yesterday.

"We find [them] highly inappropriate. We find those kind of remarks highly objectionable," he said.

"What we find objectionable is linking the Sept. 11 attacks with Israeli policy or U.S. policy in the Middle East. We think there's no excuse for the murder of innocent civilians," Boucher said, adding:

"I think history has shown that al Qaeda [Osama bin Laden's terror organization] is out to kill Americans, whatever is going on in the Middle East, and they could care less about most of the governments in the Middle East who are working for peace."

Boucher said it was up to New York City and the fund whether to accept the check the prince offered to Giuliani during a visit to ground zero.

After his visit, the prince said in a statement that the United States should "adopt a more balanced stance toward the Palestinian cause. Our Palestinian brothers continue to be slaughtered at the hands of Israelis."

At City Hall Thursday, Giuliani said the prince's comments were "highly irresponsible" and "there is no moral equivalent for this attack."

The prince, the world's sixth-richest man, stuck by his remarks yesterday, saying it was a misunderstanding to interpret them as a justification for the attacks.

He called The Associated Press from his palace in Riyadh to say he felt obliged to speak about how to go about solving the problem of terrorism.

At ground zero yesterday, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, praised Giuliani for his "act of courage" in turning down the check.

"For him to come here to try to take advantage of this sacred site, and of the tragedy that took place, for narrow political goals, there was only one response and that was what the mayor did," he said.

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