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FROM THE PUBLISHER

“The marketplace of ideas” and “the free, unfettered flow of information” are concepts that need to be taken seriously by all journalists—we certainly do here at *USA TODAY* magazine. Our pages are designed to serve as an open forum for any individual, group, concern, organization, etc. with a responsible opinion. We like to have experts in the field author our pieces, although that certainly is not a prerequisite for earning space in this publication. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that we have no political bent. The personal opinions and political, scientific, and religious inclinations of the staff, editorial board, and trustees, as well as the publisher in no way serve as an indicator or censor with regard to what appears in our pages. That last point cannot be emphasized enough. If someone has something to say, we want you, the reader, to hear it and decide for yourself as to its interest and worth. That being said, we still have a responsibility—indeed, a grave one—to assure the validity of any article that goes to press. Controversy is one thing; unsubstantiated facts are another.

Our lead piece in the November 2004 issue, in the National Affairs section, was titled, “The President and the Terrorist: Does George W. Bush Have Business Ties to Osama bin Laden?” It was submitted by Marc Umile, a documentary filmmaker who recently authored the book, *Bush Unplugged! The True Patriot's Guide to*

George W. Bush. The ensuing furor after the article appeared was almost immediate. Two entities that felt particularly disparaged by Mr. Umile's article, and who contacted us to express their outrage and displeasure, were The Carlyle Group and Mr. Khalid Bin Mahfouz. We certainly are not strangers to this type of reaction. When printing opinion pieces that involve business and politics, it is not unusual for feelings to run high—and, in this case, justifiably so. Since the creation of *USA TODAY* more than 25 years ago, our solution to such situations has remained steadfast. The offended parties should state their case in an article of their own or with a Letter to the Editor. Again, the concept of an open forum serves as our guiding force. The Carlyle Group opted to pen a detailed piece to dispel what they feel are the many myths circulated in the media about their company—and a well-written and fascinating story it is, appearing on page 22 of this issue. Mr. Bin Mahfouz, on the other hand, had his counsel send us an impassioned letter seeking to clarify who he is and what he does (see below).

We at *USA TODAY* deeply regret any damage that may have resulted to the reputation of Mr. Bin Mahfouz or that of his family—and to The Carlyle Group—because of the article in question.

The power of the press is just that: powerful. As such, it must be accurate as well.

Wayne M. Barrett

I am writing to respond to statements concerning Mr. Khalid Bin Mahfouz made in an article entitled “The President and the Terrorist” by Marc Umile that appeared in the November 2004 issue of *USA TODAY* magazine. The piece refers to Mr. Bin Mahfouz as a “terrorist financier,” claiming that he has “been identified by Saudi and U.S. intelligence as [a] financial backer of numerous Islamic terrorist organizations including Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network.”

In fact, Mr. Bin Mahfouz is a well-known and well-regarded businessman and citizen of Saudi Arabia, who formerly served as chairman of Saudi Arabia's largest bank, the National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia (which is not, as the article claims, a “rogue bank”). Mr. Bin Mahfouz has absolutely no connection to Osama bin Laden nor to Al Qaeda. He and his family publicly have condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, especially the fiendish events of Sept. 11, 2001. Neither Mr. Bin Mahfouz nor any member of his family has ever been designated by the United States government or any other government as a supporter of terrorism. Indeed, to our knowledge, Mr. Bin Mahfouz never has been the subject of any U.S. government investigation relating to terrorism.

The article also asserts that in October of 1999 there were media reports that Mr. Bin Mahfouz was placed under “house arrest” after an audit ordered by the Saudi Royal Family discovered that Mr. Bin Mahfouz and others had transferred funds to Al Qaeda. These assertions are completely false and totally without merit. Mr. Bin Mahfouz never has been placed under arrest of any kind and senior executives of the National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia repeatedly have denied that any such audit ever took place.

Moreover, the article states that a son of Mr. Bin Mahfouz was on the board of directors of the Muwafaq Foundation, which has been “designated by the U.S. Treasury Department as a front operation shifting funds to Al Qaeda.” In fact, the Muwafaq Foundation never has been designated by the United States, United Nations, the European Community, or any other governmental body as an organization that supports terrorism. The Muwafaq Foundation, which wound up its activities by 1998, was not a “front operation,” but a well-respected charity that worked to fight hunger and disease with many other well-known charities, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the UN's World Food Programme, Save the Children, and others.

Finally, the article maintains that Mr. Bin Mahfouz is married to Osama bin Laden's sister. In fact, Mr. Bin Mahfouz is neither married to any sister of Osama bin Laden, nor is Osama bin Laden married to any of Mr. Bin Mahfouz's sisters. Several leading publications have printed corrections in regard to this allegation, including the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sunday Independent* (Erie), *Fortune* magazine, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Mail on Sunday*, and Penguin Books. These corrections, along with other retractions and apologies for claims similar to that made by Mr. Umile, are all available on the Bin Mahfouz family website (www.binmahfouz.info).

Needless to say, allegations such as those set out in the article are extremely distressing to Mr. Bin Mahfouz and his family. We are dismayed that Mr. Umile both ignored publicly-available information refuting his claims and failed to make any attempt to contact Mr. Bin Mahfouz or his representatives regarding the statements made in the article.

Timothy J. Finn
Counsel to Khalid Bin Mahfouz