



U.S. Port Deal: Xenophobia or Security Concern?

House Homeland Security Chairman Challenges Arab Company Buyout

Feb. 20, 2006 — - Democrats and Republicans are challenging the Bush administration's plan to give a company based in the United Arab Emirates significant control over the nation's biggest ports -- including New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia.

The Bush administration has approved the sale of British firm P&O, according to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. The administration refuses to release specifics about the selection process but reiterates that Dubai Ports World was carefully vetted and poses no threat.

"We make sure there are assurances in place in general sufficient to satisfy us the deal is appropriate from a national security standpoint," Chertoff said Sunday on ABC News' "This Week with George Stephanopoulos."

'No Reason To Say This Is Safe'

But critics remain.

"I strongly disagree with Mike Chertoff on this," Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, said today on ABC's "Good Morning America." "The fact is, this was a very compressed investigation -- at most 20 to 25 days, and only a few days was spent looking at the security aspects."

King believes that aside from looking if there was anything flagrant in the company's file, there is "no reason to say this is safe," King said.

In his opinion, securing the nation's ports is difficult enough. So why add to the complications by letting a "company which could have an al Qaeda infiltration," know U.S. ports' security measures.

Senators also voiced their concerns.

"Since 9/11, we have to change the way we do things," Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said Sunday. "And I just don't think any foreign company, period, ought to be running our ports."

"Most Americans are scratching their head wondering why this company, from this region, now," Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., added.

Others point out that at least two 9/11 hijackers came from the United Arab Emirates and that some of the money to finance the plot was laundered there.

Some family members of the attacks just don't understand. Peter Gadiel who lost a family member on Sept. 11 said, "It's simply beyond belief that the president would tolerate this kind of insanity."

ABC News' Pierre Thomas contributed to this report.

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