

# Dubai should not be allowed to operate

BY CLARK KENT ERVIN

Who could have imagined that, in the post-9/11 world, the United States government would approve a deal giving control over six major American ports to a country with ties to terrorism? But this is exactly what the secretive Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States has done.

Since 1999, the ports of New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and other cities have been operated by a British concern, P & O Ports, which has now been bought by Dubai Ports World, a company controlled by the government of the United Arab Emirates. Defenders of the deal are claiming that critics, including the Republican and Democratic leaderships in Congress, are acting reflexively out of some bias against Arabs.

This is simply not true. While the United Arab Emirates is deemed by the Bush administration to be an ally in the war on terrorism, we should all have deep concerns about its links to terrorists. Two of the 9/11 hijackers were citizens of the emirates, and some of the money for the attacks came from there. It

was one of only three countries in the world that recognized the Taliban regime. And Dubai was an important transshipment point for the smuggling network of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who supplied Libya, Iran and North Korea with equipment for making nuclear weapons.

Most terrorism experts agree that the likeliest way for a weapon of mass destruction to be smuggled into our country would be through a port. After all, some 95 percent of all goods from abroad arrive in the United States by sea, and yet only about 6 percent of incoming cargo containers are inspected for security threats.

It is true that at the ports run by the Dubai company, Customs officers would continue to do any inspection of cargo containers and the Coast Guard would remain "in charge" of port security. But, again, very few cargo inspections are conducted. And the Coast Guard merely sets standards that ports are to follow and reviews their security plans. Meeting those standards each day is the job of the port operators: they are responsible for hiring security officers, guarding the cargo and overseeing its

unloading.

Probably few Americans knew until this week that major ports were operated by a foreign company. Now several members of Congress are introducing bills that would prohibit such ownership. While President Bush has threatened a veto, certainly it is reasonable to reconsider whether such strategic assets should be controlled by any foreign entity.

The debate over the sale should also shed light on the mysterious workings of the Committee on Foreign Investment, an interagency body led by the secretary of the Treasury. Under current rules, the committee can approve deals in which foreign companies take over American properties with national security importance after just a 30-day review, and without the approval of the president.

If the committee does not approve a sale within this period it can — or if the acquirer is a foreign government it must — take an additional 45 days to conduct an "investigation," after which it has to make a recommendation to the president, who then has 15 days to approve or reject the deal. While the president must inform Congress of his decision, it has

no review power. In this instance, even though the acquirer was a foreign government, no investigation was conducted and the president was not informed.

Obviously, the committee has a worrisome amount of power and the process is too rapid. At a minimum, the law should be changed to take away its power to decide matters with such a major bearing on national security on its own. And where a foreign power would be in control, the committee should thoroughly investigate and make a recommendation to the White House. Then, if the president approves the deal, Congress should have the ability to review and reverse it.

If our nation's treaties and trade agreements are important enough to require Congressional approval, then surely ceding control of our most important strategic assets to a foreign power should as well — especially in the new age of terrorism.

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— The New York Times



## The uproar over US ports is at best flawed and

News that a Dubai-based company will soon manage six American ports has sparked an uproar in the United States, with several lawmakers from both political parties vowing to scupper the deal. The reasoning behind the frenzy is that Arab management of the ports could lead to a terrorist attack. This logic is at best flawed, and at

worst racist.

Critics of the agreement point out that Dubai Ports World is owned by a foreign government whose nationals took part in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. But nobody was alarmed when the ports were run by a British firm, even though terrorists have also carried British passport. And no one was worried

about the U.K. being involved with U.S. ports, although the British Army once burned Washington.

The real objection to the deal is that the company is owned and run by Arabs. This racist thinking ignores the fact that DPW is a reputable business operating ports in countries around the world, including Germany and

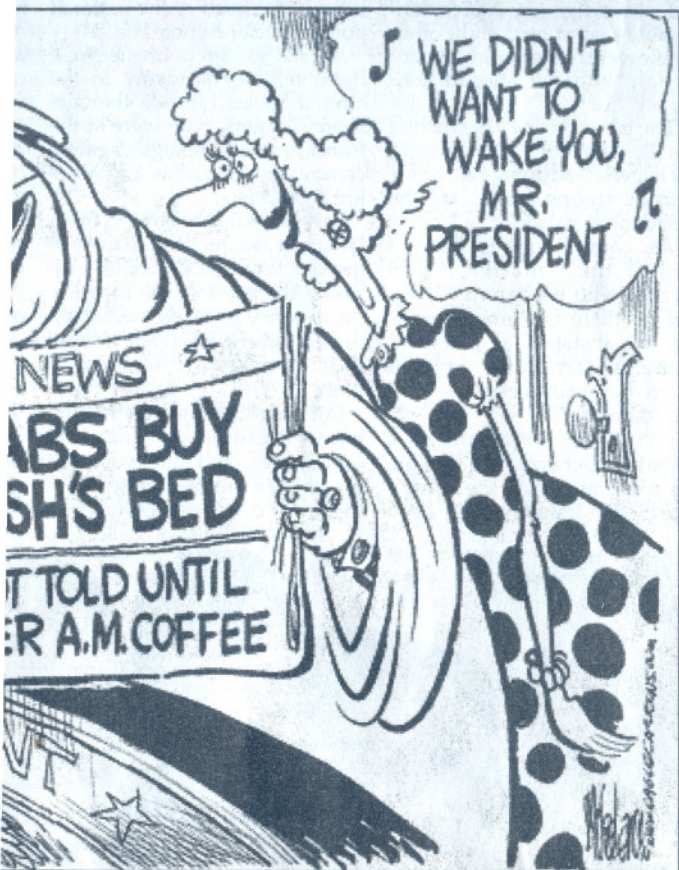
Australia, and soon, the U.K. By inking deals with DPW, these countries did not hand over their security to the U.A.E. Likewise, no matter who is managing U.S. ports, American authorities will be the guardians of U.S. security. Customs officers will still inspect cargos, the Coast Guard will still patrol and protect the harbors, the Transportation Security

Agency will still do background checks of port employees, and the Department of Homeland Security will still oversee port security efforts.

The criticism of the deal is not based on facts, but on politics, with an eye toward November elections. But it makes no sense to raise this issue now while ignoring the mountain of serious

errors committed by the Bush administration — including its handling of the Iraq war and its reckless spending binge. It only sends a message to the people of the U.A.E. and other Arab countries is that no matter how much commitment they show toward the war on terrorism, the Americans will always consider them terrorist suspects.

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This is not to say that port security is not important. Contrary to what the ever-tongue-tied U.S. president said Thursday, that "people don't need to worry about security," protecting the ports ought to be of paramount concern.

The U.A.E., after so much negative press, will no doubt be doubly committed to preserving US

port security.

And with the oil money that it has to invest in the most cutting-edge technologies and staff training - money that some US politicians apparently want to see invested in other countries - DPW will only bring an added layer of defence to America's borders.

- The Daily Star