

of this group had wanted to donate \$10 million to New York after the 9/11 attacks. Somehow, though, the name of leader was forgotten in the News Corp report, a very unusual phenomenon in the news world. Of course, since that leader happened to be a partner in News Corp, the reason for the omission became glaringly self-evident.

Alwaleed also owns a significant share

in Time Warner and is the sole owner of his own Arabic news company. (Rupert Murdoch is a significant shareowner in this company.)

After the Arab Spring began, with a series of revolutions across Arabic and Muslim nations, Alwaleed invested \$300 million in a social media company. That company was partially responsible for the organized revolutions, having been used by students to

communicate and synchronize their efforts. (The unrest was beginning to affect Saudi Arabia when the royal family quickly spent \$130 billion on public benefits in order to calm down the populace.)

The \$300 million investment only served to increase public speculation about the source of the money. It would make a lot of sense for the Saudi royal family to stake

a large claim in such a company in light of the rebellious mood of the Arab populace. Ownership of the company could help it forestall the possibility of that service being used against the Saudi government.

These and other investments make some people very uneasy about the real motives behind the face of the man called the Warren Buffett of Arabia. ■

## The Tallest Skyscrapers... And Biggest Egos...



The competition in the Middle East for the tallest building in the world has literally been driven sky-high. Oil sheikhs who have more money than they can possibly spend in a lifetime are outdoing each other in their attempts to satisfy their overblown egos. Now one Saudi prince has decided to build the tallest building possible...

*Aryeh Cohen*

**I**t was early on the morning of September 11, 2001, when world-famous architect Adrian Smith joined a meeting in Chicago. Smith was responsible for some of the tallest buildings the world has yet seen. Now he sat with real estate development mogul Donald Trump and other powerful individuals. On the wall hung three sketches that Smith had drawn up for a skyscraper that Trump planned to erect in Chicago. The buildings in each of the three designs were 2,000 feet tall.

Trump had decided to build a tower that would not only be the tallest building in Chicago, or even in America, but would be the tallest building in the world and would be known as—you guessed it—the Donald Trump Building.

The conference had been in session for a while when one of the men present switched on a television at the exact



moment that the second airplane crashed into the World Trade Center. The mood in the room suddenly changed to one of dread and nobody was interested in continuing the discussion. The meeting was adjourned and everyone headed home.

When the men gathered again a while later, nobody had the courage to build the world's tallest building anymore. "Let's make it 900 feet tall," was the consensus.

The attacks of 9/11 brought an abrupt halt to America's fascination with super-tall superstructures. The race for the tallest building that had been going on for 70 years was suddenly irrelevant. Americans were facing a new reality, a world of terror in which a hidden enemy was out to destroy any outstanding monuments to national pride.

For a while all plans for skyscrapers were shelved, collecting dust in the architects' drawers. What point was there in building a structure that would stand empty because Americans were rightfully worried about renting space there? However, at the same time, that sentiment was tempered by an outcry to resume building tall superstructures. Many Americans wanted the Twin Towers rebuilt to their former glory, or even outdone by a new skyscraper at the same site.

In fact, in 2002, New York City officials and various local real estate magnates united to announce that the world's tallest building would soon stand at Ground Zero. That proud statement was later retracted by the overriding security concerns. Instead, the present Freedom Tower was designed to reach the symbolic height of 1,776 feet into the Manhattan sky (see *Zman* 12, Shevat 5771/January 2011).

In the end, the halt in the development of the phenomenal landmarks was only temporary. Just five years after the attacks, skyscrapers returned – and returned with a vengeance. After years of the world's tallest buildings standing at 1,400 feet, new towers were being designed and built to 2,000 feet and even higher.

The only difference was that now the attention had shifted away from North America.



Artist's rendition of the completed Bank of America building in Manhattan, reaching 1,200 feet.

## America Drops Out of the Skyscraper Super-Race

Skyscrapers that will not win the world record for top height are being erected at a phenomenal pace all over the globe. The Federation Tower in Moscow contains 93 stories and reaches 1,470 feet. In London, rewritten zoning laws permit the construction of new skyscrapers. And a 1,000 foot tower is now being built in Boston.

Even in Manhattan, the location hit hardest on September 11, several new skyscrapers have gone up in recent years. These include the New York Times (1,046 ft.), Hearst (597 ft.) and Condé Nast buildings (809 ft.), as well as the Bank of America building (1,200 ft.).

One may wonder: If the fear and



The Donald Trump Building in Chicago, completed in 2009, reaches 1,389 feet.

nervousness engendered by the terror attacks are largely a thing of the past, why has America not rejoined the race for the tallest building? After all, America held the title from 1930 until 1998.

The answer is that America's ambivalent attitude toward super-towers has little to do with fear. The race to reach the sky has been stymied mostly by restrictive zoning, similar legal regulations and other technical impediments that are hindering the ongoing development of skyscrapers. American cities are notorious for their safety and zoning regulations, a significant obstacle to building skyscrapers.

At present, even building an ordinary home in New York City requires one to comply with extensive safety codes and environmental protection laws. While for

the most part such regulations are certainly well justified, some of them border on obsession. The result can be laws that do little or nothing to improve safety and ecology, but create major cost barriers for developers.

If that's true for humble abodes, how much more so are skyscrapers affected by laws that choke them out of existence? In addition, because skyscrapers have been in America for so long, there has been plenty of time for lawmakers to ruminate about them. Legislation has been passed over the years to make every stage of their construction a nearly unsurpassable run-in with the law. In the Middle East, where superstructures are relatively new, there is little legislation in effect concerning their construction.

Developers in Arab and Asian nations do not have to deal with unions that tremendously inflate the cost of erecting a building. Workers can be forced to settle for low wages and miserable working and safety conditions. Several years ago angry rioting broke out at one such construction site in Dubai. Hundreds of disgruntled workers demonstrated against their poor treatment and the even poorer wages they were receiving. Between the work delays and property and mechanical damage, the riots cost over \$1 million.

In America developers must also face constant legal harassment from conservationist and preservationist groups that oppose every major construction project for one reason or another. Sometimes it is the local ecology; sometimes it is due to historical interest. In short, even if the demand and capital for skyscrapers existed, it would still be a long, uphill battle in the US.

## Arab Sheikhs Stand In

Despite this, America's top skyscraper architects are kept very busy—in foreign countries! All their knowledge and experience, honed over decades of building America's tallest buildings, are being put to good use in the Middle and Far East.

Why have skyscrapers become so popular in Arabia and Asia? The traditional reason is the same there as in Chicago and