



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE U.S.–SAUDI PARTNERSHIP:
IS THIS MARRIAGE HEADED FOR DIVORCE?**

by

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September 2008

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE September 2008	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The U.S.-Saudi Partnership: Is This Marriage Headed for Divorce?		5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Edward Sylvester		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.	
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) This thesis seeks to determine whether the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can continue to survive in light of the unprecedented developments that have challenged this partnership within the last decade. It will address this question through careful review of the history of the U.S.-Saudi partnership from 1931 to the present. The thesis will then analyze the information to answer the question, asserting that the relationship is more robust than generally perceived. The analysis will also support the notion that, despite the numerous disagreements that have occurred throughout the U.S.-Saudi relationship, the two nations have always reverted back to its mutually beneficial strategic partnership, enduring most of the challenges that have presented themselves.			
14. SUBJECT TERMS Saudi Arabia, Middle East, Oil Politics, 9/11, Intifada, Operation Defensive Shield, racism, xenophobia, oil history, Ibn Saud.		15. NUMBER OF PAGES 85	
		16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU

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IS THIS MARRIAGE HEADED FOR DIVORCE?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

from the

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to determine whether the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can continue to survive in light of the unprecedented developments that have challenged this partnership within the last decade. It will address this question through careful review of the history of the U.S.–Saudi partnership from 1931 to the present. The thesis will then analyze the information to answer the question, asserting that the relationship is more robust than generally perceived. The analysis will also support the notion that, despite the numerous disagreements that have occurred throughout the U.S.–Saudi relationship, the two nations have always reverted back to their mutually beneficial strategic partnership, enduring most of the challenges that have presented themselves.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my professors in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School who mentored me and expanded my thinking in an area that is often misunderstood, namely the Middle East. I hope to propagate this knowledge to my peers in the military, with the hope that a peaceful resolution will soon be realized in the Persian Gulf. I would also like to thank my family members who gave their unwavering support throughout my time here, especially my son, Christopher, who continues to place a higher value on his own education. I am also deeply grateful to my former Navy Detailer, CDR Greg “Chipper” Molinari, USN, for allowing me to attend Naval Postgraduate School in the first place, despite there being a greater need for my being in the Fleet sooner. I pledge to add my newly acquired skill set as a student of the Middle East to my FAO toolkit, seeking to “win the hearts and minds” of my Arab brethren. Long live Navy Foreign Area Officers! Diplomats of the Fleet!!

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to determine whether the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can continue to survive in light of the unprecedented developments that have challenged this partnership within the last decade. It will address this question through careful review of the history of the U.S.-Saudi partnership from 1931 to the present. The thesis will then analyze the information to answer the question, asserting that the relationship is more robust than generally perceived. The analysis will also support the notion that, despite the numerous disagreements that have occurred throughout the U.S.-Saudi relationship, the two nations have always reverted back to its mutually beneficial strategic partnership, enduring most of the challenges that have presented themselves.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very influential on the world's stage, by virtue of being the birthplace of Islam and having the largest oil reserves. With this, Saudi Arabia can wield its power by simply controlling its oil production output, making or breaking economies. By the same token, the Kingdom can utilize its oil resource for political gain, as it did during the Oil Embargo of 1973-74 when it halted oil exportation to the U.S. to protest its support for Israel. This disrupted the seemingly comfortable lives of most Americans.

The United States sees the strategic value of Saudi oil and its influence on global economies. The U.S. understands the benefits to be gained from continued access to this oil — as long as it can stay engaged in the region, providing the very defense that the Kingdom lacks.

U.S.-Saudi diplomatic relations were established on the foundation of military, political, and commercial understandings developed during and immediately following the Second World War, and replaced the British as the Kingdom's chief political and economic supporter. The U.S. and the Kingdom pursued common mutually beneficial national security objectives henceforth, in spite of recurring differences on various regional issues, with the most significant being the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Arab–Israeli conflict in 1973 brought latent tensions between the two countries to the forefront and altered prevailing political and economic dynamics of the relationship. Though the Saudis supported anti-Communist efforts around the world in the 1970s and 1980s, the end of the Cold War signaled a shift in the relationship that had previously served as its premise.¹

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. continued to apply its national instruments of power to help ensure continued flow of Saudi oil to international markets. After the U.N. Coalition achieved victory in ejecting Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, Western forces remained in Saudi Arabia to support the Clinton Administration’s policy of “dual containment” of both Iraq and Iran.

The continued U.S. presence consequently caused upheaval in the Kingdom, as traditional Muslims perceived this to be an extension of colonial power, as well an act of desecration because non-Muslims were providing the safeguard for the birthplace of Islam.² As a consequence, the Kingdom saw increased violence directed at Americans, with terrorist bombings at the Saudi Arabian National Guard Headquarters and the Khobar Towers housing facility near Riyadh, resulting in the deaths of 24 U.S. military personnel.³

Inside the Kingdom, Saudi political activists challenged the ruling family over fiscal policy, constitutional government and foreign policy that had largely been proscribed since the 1950s. Though the regime was increasingly repressing opposition movements that had surfaced since the 1990 Gulf crisis, others remained and caused new problems for the ruling family. The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights

¹ CRS Report for Congress, “Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations,” May 22, 2008; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf> [Last Accessed September 22, 2008].

² Bradley Bowman, “After Iraq: Future U.S. Military Posture in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

³ Steven Lee Myers, “At a Saudi Base, U.S. Digs In, Gingerly, for a Longer Stay,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1997.

(CDLR), for example created a platform for non violent dissent propagating regime-damaging socio-political and economic information into and out of the kingdom.⁴

These events have spawned renewed activism, with prominent Islamic scholars, such as Dr. Halawi, challenging the legitimacy of the ruling family, due to the regime's dependency on the United States, an ardent supporter of Israel.⁵ U.S.–Saudi relations have been further eroded by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as fifteen of the nineteen terrorists were of Saudi descent, which implied Saudi government complicity on some level.⁶ Saudi opposition to U.S. involvement in the war on terror, including perceived unjust wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, has also stirred tension. The U.S.–Saudi partnership has not suffered like this since the oil crisis of 1973, and both Western and Islamic academics question whether this alliance can continue.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the course of events that led to the complex relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is important to frame any discussion of the broader issues at play. Many authors have given their version of how the relationship came to be and how it changed global dynamics for decades henceforth.

The origins of Saudi rivalry stem from the conquests of Ibn Sa'ud, who formed a Wahhabist army and became the dominant power in the Gulf region, with the help of the British. The rivalries that existed then, have carried over and continue to exist today. Anthony Cordesman, a well-known expert on the Middle East, conveys this very effectively through his monograph entitled, "Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and the Structure of Gulf Alliances," published in 1999 and used in this thesis for background information

⁴ Daryl Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability Within Stability," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, December 1999.

⁵ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 166.

⁶ David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, "After Sept. 11, Severe Tests Loom for Relationship," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2002.

prior to the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia. This monograph gives an accurate historical account of the Gulf region under Ottoman rule and identifies the pattern of alliances of Saudi Arabia in the region.⁷

One of the primary sources used to highlight the history of U.S.–Saudi relations, specifically is Anthony Cave Brown’s book entitled, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings*. The author gives a thrilling account of the rise of *Aramco*, which was originally led by a consortium of American investors. The U.S.-owned Standard Oil of California, which later became the Arabian American Oil Company (“Aramco”), managed to penetrate a territory tightly controlled by the British, in large part due to the efforts H. St. John Philby, a British spy who had a close and trusting relationship with Saudi King Ibn Saud. Philby was the personal advisor to the King and one of the primary negotiators who facilitated the oil exploration contract of 1933, which granted the Standard Oil Company of California exclusive rights to oil exploration in the Kingdom. This work also details the role of Chicago-born entrepreneur and diplomat Charles Crane, who built a costly waterworks system, bringing drinking water into the Saudi interior. In his quest for water exploration, Crane discovered vast amounts of oil deposits and alerted his engineers to exploit this further. Aramco would later make trillions of dollars over its history, producing millions of barrels of oil daily by the late 1950s, while dabbling in international politics to protect its interests.⁸

Brown’s skill in relating the complex relations among the Saudi royal family, the secretive oil executives and the American and British governments, is also useful. He brings the reader through the post-WWII transfer of world hegemony from the British Empire to the U.S., explaining the symbiosis of corporate and Saudi politics against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Israeli–Arab conflict and the Iran–Iraq war.⁹

⁷ Anthony Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 25, 1999.

⁸ Anthony Cave Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

⁹ *Ibid.*

Another useful source for researching the chronology and the depth of U.S.–Saudi relations is the book, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*, by Daniel Yergin, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Yergin is one of the foremost U.S. authorities on energy, and this book is a major work in the field. He describes the relationship of oil to the rise of modern capitalism; the intertwining relations between oil, politics, and international power; and the relationship between oil and society. Yergin further highlights oil’s central role in most of the wars and many international crises of the twentieth century.¹⁰

Still, in the book, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership*, Parker T. Hart examines the intertwined politics of Saudi Arabia and the United States. The author personally witnessed this during his missions to the Arabian Peninsula from the late 1940s through the 1960s. The United States and Saudi Arabia were actively seeking to develop diplomatic relations, as the U.S. was eager to align itself with an oil giant while the Kingdom viewed the U.S. as a politically and economically powerful ally important to its development in the unstable Middle Eastern region. Hart’s book takes on a narrative form, and appears biased due to his position as an Embassy official, ignoring the social and political systems of the involved parties.

He provides an overview of Middle Eastern history, as well as an in-depth portrayal of various Saudi individuals and its society in general. Hart further defines the foundation of U.S.–Saudi relations by providing simplistic explanations of political intricacies in the Kingdom. Hart recognizes the importance of culture in diplomatic relations, especially after his encounter with King Faisal.¹¹ He also attributes Nasser’s failure to win over Saudi popular support, due to Nasser’s lack of knowledge therein.¹²

An Arab perspective of the Kingdom’s history was also provided in the book by Madawi Al-Rasheed entitled, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, which portrays the Kingdom as

¹⁰ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York: Free Press, New York, January 1993).

¹¹ Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 146

¹² *Ibid.*, 159.

a wealthy and powerful country that exerts influence in the West and across the Islamic world, despite it being a closed society. The author traces its history from the age of emirates in the nineteenth century to the present day. Fusing chronology with analysis, personal experience with oral histories, Al Rasheed conveys the social and cultural life of the Saudis.

Al-Rasheed's book was especially useful when attempting to understand the general sentiment of the average Saudi in light of prolonged Western troop presence in the Kingdom after the first Gulf War in 1991 and how this presence spawned elements of Saudi society to question the legitimacy of the ruling family because they had mismanaged the economy in order to bolster the military. This supposedly "modernized" military responded dismally to Saddam's threat to the Kingdom, necessitating the use of non-Muslim Western troops for its defense.¹³ Furthermore, revolt within the traditional Islamic sect transpired, as "infidels" were present in the holiest land of the Islamic faith, waging war against their brethren Muslims.¹⁴

Other publications that played an important role in defining the U.S.–Saudi relationship as they stand today, include the numerous periodicals appearing in major newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Many of these articles were comprised of feeds from Associated Press, providing late-breaking news of potential scandals, such as the Saudi purchase of Chinese Missiles in response to U.S. refusal to provide the same.¹⁵ These reports often exposed events before they actually happened, like the potential of the Beirut Summit offering a viable solution to the Israeli–Palestinian dispute, only to be violently disrupted by terrorist bombings in Israel and the subsequent Israeli response that resulted in Operation *Defensive Shield*, further polarizing the Arab world against the Jews.¹⁶ Also, the foresight and analysis

¹³ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ John M. Goshko and Don Oberdorfer, "Chinese Sell Saudis Missiles Capable of Covering Mideast," *Washington Post*, March 18, 1988.

¹⁶ Bandar bin Sultan, "Why Israel Must Stop The Terror," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2002.

provided, regarding Saudi discontent with the ongoing Western troop presence after the first Gulf War, which ultimately led to their withdrawal, proved very insightful.¹⁷

Finally, the annual reports, produced by the Congressional Research Service on the current state of U.S.–Saudi relations, proved most helpful. These publications provided seemingly unbiased accounts compiled by analysts of Middle Eastern affairs, of the issues that threatened the partnership, as well as progress made since the reports from previous years. Issues, such as regulating Saudi banking to curb terrorist financing and improved Saudi cooperation in the fight against terrorism, were identified and helped chart the improvements and pitfalls of the relationship.¹⁸

B. HISTORY

1. Saudi Arabia and Its Gulf Neighbors

One defining premise behind the U.S.–Saudi relationship was the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom’s need for protection from external threats. A review of the brief history of the Gulf region clarifies the background of the Kingdom’s relationships with its neighbors and the patterns that repeat themselves. The rivalries and the alliances appear to have remained much the same, and the U.S. has now assumed the role of major protector in the Gulf—a role played by Britain throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

In early Gulf civilization, power was associated with trade and militarism. Initially, the principal trade routes in the region bypassed the Gulf. “Military invasions and the silk route moved through Central Asia, or across Iran and Iraq.”¹⁹ The silk route never involved a high volume of trade and had utilized land or the Red Sea for its route. Control over Mecca and Medina was imperative to the trade market and created Islamic power in the Red Sea area, briefly making Arabia dominant in the region. Islam

¹⁷ David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, “Saudis May Seek U.S. Exit; Military Presence Seen as Political Liability in Arab World,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2002.

¹⁸ CRS Report for Congress, “Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations,” May 22, 2008; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf> [Last accessed September 22, 2008].

¹⁹ Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” 8.

proceeded to create the Caliphate that eventually replaced the Parthian Empire, consolidating Arab and Islamic political power.²⁰

Arab nationalism persisted, despite centuries of Ottoman rule.²¹ An alliance was created between the Sa'ud family and a new, puritanical Islamic sect led by Muhammad Wahab, prompting Saudi Arabia and alliances in the Gulf to revolt, seizing Mecca and Medina in 1803–1806.²² The Sa'ud uprising had a limited impact along the Gulf coast and Muhammad Ali ultimately recaptured most of the Arabian Peninsula for Turkey, again shifting power to the Ottoman Turks.

By the mid-1800s, the Gulf had under utilized routes for trade, and the region, consequently had little economic importance aside from the minor impact of the pearling industry.²³ Iran's Qazar Dynasty was on the brink of collapse and Iraq was a debilitated region on the eastern fringe area of the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ At this point in history, little trade passed through the Gulf to Turkey.²⁵

There were small villages in the Gulf that eventually became Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. These fishing villages were centers of tribal rivalry and feuds, and their meager economies were “based mainly on pearling and piracy.”²⁶ Modern Saudi Arabia arose from disparate tribal areas, with the most important enclave dominated by the Hashemite family who acted as the *Sherif* of Mecca. The Sa'ud family had essentially become obscured and, even in its home region of Najd, was no longer the most influential family.²⁷

²⁰ Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” 8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 9.

²³ Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

2. The al-Sa'ud family – British Alliance

The obscurity of the Sa'ud family changed dramatically, as they regained prominence as a result of an alliance with the British. In a joint effort with the British, the Sa'ud family sought to suppress piracy in the Gulf. The British also utilized the Suez Canal as a major trading route to India, and created coaling stations along this route in various ports. More importantly, the British sought to protect these routes, as they feared a Turkish–German attack on India during World War I. This British fear prompted a gradual creation of a new structure of alliances wherein small Southern Gulf states became protectorates of Britain. Thus, a newly created dependence on the “West” provided the Sa'ud family with a counter-balance to Turkish and Persian military power, as well as a source of protection against invasion by neighboring families and states.²⁸

A study of the pattern of alliances between the Sa'ud family and the British illustrates an ironic parallel to the U.S.–Saudi relationship. Namely, the Sa'ud family alliance with the British revolved around “Western” power at a time when Saudi Arabia and Iraq were little more than sheikdoms, and that there existed a “complex balance of power between Turkey, Persia, weak Southern Gulf states, and British power projection.”²⁹ Similarly, the U.S.–Saudi relationship consists of a complex balance of power between Iran, Iraq, the Southern Gulf and U.S. power projection.³⁰

3. The Creation of Modern Saudi Arabia

Modern Saudi Arabia was created shortly before World War II when Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdur Rahman Al-Faisal Al Saud (“Ibn Sa'ud”) led a fierce raid that seized Riyadh from a nearby family, thereby beginning a new Arab uprising under the guise of the Wahhab Islamist sect. Upon the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, newly drawn demarcation lines resulted in the creation of Iraq, causing a

²⁸ Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” 9.

²⁹ Cordesman, “Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances,” 9.

³⁰ Ibid.

broader Arab revolt in Arabia. The fall of the Qazar dynasty during that time also created modern Iran from what was once known as Persia.³¹

The new Arab uprising, the creation of Iraq and the fall of the Qazar dynasty created a power vacuum in the Arabian Peninsula resulting in the Sa'ud family becoming the dominant regional military power.³² Ibn Sa'ud formed a religious army called the *Ihkwan*, comprised of supporters of the Wahhab sect, which conquered most of the region in the early 1920s, including the Hashemite family, who were forced into exile becoming the rulers of Transjordan and Iraq.³³

By the mid-1920s, the Sa'ud family, utilized their new position of power and threatened all of the Southern Gulf states, Iraq, and Jordan. British power was vital in preventing Ibn Sa'ud and the *Ihkwan* from conquering Kuwait, Jordan and the other Trucial States.³⁴ Ultimately, as a result of this upset, a series of treaties were signed between Saudi Arabia and Transjordan, Iraq, and Egypt during 1933–1936, shaping many of Saudi Arabia's contemporary borders.³⁵

The last major conquest resulted from the Yemeni attack on Saudi Arabia in 1934. As a result of this attack, Saudi Arabia annexed a large part of Eastern Yemen, which remains a contentious issue to this day.³⁶

4. The Dynamic Shift in the Saudi–British Alliance

Saudi Arabia's alliance with Britain provided the Kingdom with the protection it needed to establish its modern presence. However, Saudi relations with Britain differed sharply from those of most other states in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.³⁷ Regardless of Saudi Arabia's achievements attributable to the alliance with Britain, from

³¹ Cordesman, "Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances," 10.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cordesman, "Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances," 10.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

a Saudi perspective, the British presence in the region was far more of a constraint than a source of security. Ultimately, the Saudi's concerns were validated as the dynamics of Britain's involvement with Saudi Arabia changed.³⁸

After 1925, Britain protected its interests by halting the Saudi advance on Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan, further inhibiting the Saudis' ability to seize the Trucial city-states which were made up of Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman.³⁹ Moreover, Britain made Hashemite the rulers of Iraq and Jordan in opposition to the desires of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁰ British efforts to monopolize oil concessions in Saudi Arabia and keep out rival American companies further exacerbated the eroding alliance.⁴¹

Britain's continuing interference in Iranian and Iraqi affairs, and their subsequent occupation of both countries during World War II, created a concern for Saudi Arabia as they feared suffering the same fate. Based on the eroding alliance and the fear of a potential invasion by Britain, Ibn Sa'ud allowed the U.S. to create a major air base in Dhahran, eventually used as a base for U.S. strategic bombers during the Cold War.⁴² The flirtation between United States and Saudi Arabia had, thus begun and the two countries explored further opportunities for a union.

³⁸ Cordesman, "Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances," 9.

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cordesman, "Saudi Arabia, the US and the Structure of Gulf Alliances," 11.

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II. U.S.–SAUDI RELATIONS

A. HISTORY

1. U.S. – Saudi Beginnings

The xenophobic, Wahhabist *Ikhwan* opposed any foreigners in Arabia, as they considered outsiders “infidels” and distained all forms of innovation, which they deemed as “un-Islamic.”⁴³ Furthermore, Wahhabism is described as follows:

Unitarian movement, emerged from the teachings of Muhammed Bin Abdul Wahhab (1703–92). It advocates God’s oneness and undivided almightiness and proved to be a potent force in the expansion of Al Sa’ud rule, providing religious legitimization for the conquest of the Arabian Peninsula while inculcating the population with a unifying belief system. Abdul Wahhab’s aim was to abolish all innovation following the 3rd Islamic century. His teachings are based on the idea that Islam has sunk into impiety, and a return to its supposed former purity remains Wahhabism’s basic tenet. Anything that departs from the oneness of God as defined by the Wahhabis is guilty of idolatry, and implies disbelief.⁴⁴

King Ibn Sa’ud, however, embraced technology, such as the telegraph and sought the counsel of outsiders to facilitate the consolidation of his power.⁴⁵ The King then turned on the *Ikhwan* in 1929, with the assistance of the British, and the battle of Sibila subsequently crushed the *Ikhwan*, squelching their opposition. After the U.S.–Saudi relationship was established, the al Sa’ud was criticized by the Wahhabists for opening the door to Western technology — an issue that would plague the Kingdom for years to come.⁴⁶

⁴³ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia,” (PressEsc.com, June 16, 2007); http://pressesc.com/01181971170_Saudi_Arabia_human_rights_double_standards [Last accessed September 13, 2008].

⁴⁴ Mai Yamani, “Reform, Security and Oil in Saudi Arabia,” Royal Institute of International Affairs; <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7BDEB6F227-659B-4EC8-8F84-8DF23CA704F5%7D/Yamani%20Paper.pdf> [Last Accessed September 26, 2008].

⁴⁵ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The U.S. took initiative by officially recognizing the Saudi Kingdom in 1931, though their mutual interests were not well defined until 1933 after Saudi Arabia signed an oil concession with the U.S. firm of Standard Oil of California (Socal).⁴⁷

The relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had been precipitated by a visit to the Kingdom in 1931 by Charles R. Crane, “a Chicago millionaire and philanthropist, world traveler, former ambassador, and associate of American presidents.”⁴⁸ King Ibn Sa’ud’s British advisor, John Philby, a Muslim convert, had implored the King to encourage Crane’s visit, as Crane might be able to facilitate exploration for assets beneath the soil of the impoverished Kingdom, starting with water, of which the Kingdom was in short supply.⁴⁹ Crane’s visit would have a meaningful and lasting impact on the Kingdom and the ensuing alliance with the U.S.

Crane brought in engineers for a more accurate assessment and discovered that the area had tremendous potential to yield an even more valuable commodity, namely oil. In May 1933, after careful negotiation between H. St. John Philby, the representatives of Socal and the Saudi Minister of Finance, the King was persuaded to accept a sixty-year contract with *Socal*, providing Socal with exclusive rights to exploration and extraction in the al-Hasa region, on the shores of the Gulf (the “1933 Contract”).⁵⁰

Opportunistically, the potential for a U.S.–Saudi Alliance developed concurrently during King Ibn Sa’ud’s consolidation of his power, which terminated the King’s income other than the meager earnings he received from levies imposed on pilgrims traveling through Mecca and Medina.⁵¹ The pilgrimage traffic through Mecca and Medina, however, had dried up due to the Great Depression, thereby cutting off the King’s income.⁵² The King looked to outsiders to provide a stream of income as money was

⁴⁷ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings*, 9-56.

⁴⁸ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Arabists: Romance of an American Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 68-72.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 9-56.

⁵¹ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia.”

needed to purchase loyalty from the tribes and to import food.⁵³ The U.S. became that “outsider” thus fulfilling that need for the King and his Kingdom.

The relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia began cautiously and slowly because the remote Kingdom was still viewed by the U.S. as part of the British sphere of influence in the region, thereby minimizing its importance.⁵⁴ The significance of the U.S.–Saudi relationship was more of a priority to the Saudi King, however because he saw America as a potential counterbalance to longstanding and unwelcomed British domination of the region.⁵⁵ The King was not without trepidation, however, and the King’s concerns were clearly delineated in the terms of the 1933 contract, which contained the “anti-imperial” clause, explicitly rejecting “any company influence over the Kingdom’s internal affairs.”⁵⁶

King Ibn Sa’ud communicated Saudi demands with William A. Eddy, then Chief of the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Jeddah.⁵⁷ The King told Eddy that Saudis would use U.S. “iron,” though the U.S. “must leave Saudi faith alone.”⁵⁸ Specifically, the King emphasized that the Qur’an “regulated all matters of faith, family and property, to the exclusion of the involvement of unbelievers.”⁵⁹ Moreover, the King acknowledged that the U.S. had much that the Saudis needed and that they were willing to accept technology, such as “radio, airplanes, pumps, oil drilling rigs and know-how.”⁶⁰ The King was quick to qualify the Saudi’s acceptance of U.S. assets while, on the other hand, demanding that the U.S. respect Saudi “patriarchal authorities and the failing of women”

⁵³ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia.”

⁵⁴ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 37.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 52.

⁵⁷ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*,” 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55.

as issues that did not concern the U.S.⁶¹ This acceptance of technology was far in advance of his people and the King had to battle bigots for the acceptance of the alliance.⁶²

To ease the societal acceptance of this alliance, Standard Oil of California was renamed the Arabian American Oil Company (“Aramco”) and in 1938, Aramco extracted oil in commercial quantities, exporting it the following year.⁶³

Though official U.S.–Saudi ties began during the Great Depression, it was not until 1940 that an American diplomat first visited Saudi Arabia in a formal capacity. This 1940 visit to Saudi Arabia was by the U.S. envoy to Egypt, Bert Fish who was co-accredited to the Kingdom (then called the Kingdom of the Hijaz and Najd and Dependencies).⁶⁴ As he left to serve in Cairo, Fish traveled to Jeddah to meet the Saudi King.

Though the foundation of the U.S. – Saudi relationship had been established, the cultural differences between the two countries created some apprehension and distrust. During the first few years of interaction between the Saudis and Americans, the exchanges were controlled and subdued. Wahhabi religious authorities in Saudi Arabia wanted to minimize exposure of their citizens to Westerners and their culture.⁶⁵ The first historic meeting between King Ibn Sa’ud and FDR is a preview of the cultural differences constantly challenging the alliance.

This historic meeting took place on February 14, 1945, aboard the USS *Quincy* in Egypt’s Great Bitter Lake. The arrangements for the meeting were as complicated as the subject matter, due to the differences in culture and requirements of the Saudis. The Saudi King wanted to bring his own sheep aboard the *USS Quincy* because of his belief

⁶¹ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*,” 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶³ Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York University Press, NY, October 1, 2000), 316-18.

⁶⁴ Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 35-37.

⁶⁵ Anthony Sampson, *The Seven Sisters: The Great Oil Companies and the World They Shaped* (New York: Viking, 1975), 235.

that good Muslims eat only freshly killed meat. Additionally, the King brought 48 travelling companions and insisted that they be able to construct tents on the deck of the ship rather than sleep in the cabins provided.⁶⁶

Despite these drastic cultural differences, the Saudis knew they were incapable of defending their borders without external assistance, so they were compelled to keep the U.S. nearby.⁶⁷ The U.S. acknowledged this and because of its mutual interest, the U.S. maintained a continuous military presence, mostly made up of small training missions, and the option to rapidly expand that presence should the situation warrant this. Hence, the U.S. has had some sort of military presence in Saudi Arabia since the end of the Second World War.

The alliance between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was the modern world's most improbable bilateral alliance, based on the extreme contrast of the two powers. No two countries and no two societies could have been more dissimilar. The social environment and governmental system of each was alien and distasteful to the other and yet, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. worked together to the general satisfaction of both, in spite of the endless nuances of politics in the Middle East. . This success can be attributed to the one fundamental policy followed by all U.S. Administrations since FDR: **“The United States does not interfere with Saudi Arabia’s internal affairs. How Saudi Arabia treats its citizens is not the business of the United States.”**⁶⁸

2. The Cold War

The U.S. military had already entered Saudi Arabia for the first time, prior to the Cold War.⁶⁹ The United States had also completed the modern airbase at Dhahran, near the al-Hasa oilfields. Originally intended for logistical support to the Burma Theater, one of the focal locations where the Allies were fighting the Japanese, completion of the

⁶⁶ Thomas Lippman, *Inside the Mirage: America’s Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Basic Books Publishing, May 2005), 27-29.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Rethnavibushana, “Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Dahran airbase did not actually take place until after the war in 1946. The U.S. Air Force subsequently leased the Dhahran Airfield for over a decade, providing both reassurance and discomfort to their Saudi hosts, creating Saudi ambivalence that would persist for years to come.⁷⁰

The base at Dhahran set another precedent and caused consternation over American military presence in the Kingdom, and the broader security relationship. While the United States might deter a potential aggressor during difficult times, too much of an American presence also created a standing provocation to the ultra-conservative religious authorities, or *ulama*, and served as a propaganda weapon to external and internal foes alike, especially in the Muslim world. Consequently, Saudi leaders have alternated between enhanced security via the U.S. and minimizing that tie when deemed too unpopular.⁷¹

The Americans in turn, attempted to balance Saudi security concerns and the implementation of their own strategies for the containment of Soviet power, ranging from alliance-building to nuclear deterrence.⁷² The attitudes of the U.S. and the Saudis resulted in a series of highs and lows in the relationship, depending on the alignment of the security needs of the Saudi state and the American policy of Soviet containment.

Complications in the relationship arose in the early 1950s as a result of the American partnership with Britain, then a major regional power whose bases were within close proximity of the Kingdom. The British were entangled in Arabian Peninsula border disputes, aligning themselves with the Saudis' traditional rivals in Iraq and Jordan, ruled by kings of the Hashemite dynasty. King Ibn Sa'ud had displaced the Hashemites from the Red Sea emirate of Hijaz, home to the holy places of Mecca and Medina. This posed a perceived threat to the Saudis because of the Hashemites' proximity to the oil fields, their expansionist ambitions, and their British-trained military forces. This resulted in the

⁷⁰ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 85-89.

⁷¹ Khaled bin Sultan and Patrick Seale, *Desert Warrior: A Personal View of the War by the Joint Forces Commander* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 25.

⁷² Bruce D. Callander, "Lucky Lady II," *Air Force Magazine* 82, No. 2 (March 1999), 72.

Saudis entering into a mutual defense assistance pact with the United States in 1951, which included a long-term lease of Dhahran Airfield.⁷³

U.S. strategy during this period focused on containing Soviet expansion and supported the formation of alliances to propagate this. One such alliance that was formed in the region in 1955 was known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), more commonly referred to as the “Baghdad Pact,” initiated by the U.S. and NATO allies, including Great Britain. CENTO involved cooperation for security and defense, while refraining from any interference and respecting the internal affairs of its member countries.⁷⁴ Signatories from the region included Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, many of which had been rivals and foes of the Kingdom. King Sa’ud, the son and successor of Ibn Sa’ud, was not pleased with this arrangement, as he deemed the U.S. insensitive to the Kingdom’s history. As a result, Sa’ud expelled the American aid mission from the country, and in October 1955, signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt’s Nasser, who had established a pro-Soviet revolutionary regime, and invited Egyptian military trainers into the Kingdom.⁷⁵

Saudi–American relations improved considerably after the Suez Crisis of 1956, when the U.S. prevented the British, French, and Israelis from seizing Egypt’s Suez Canal, fearing that these neo-imperialistic overtures would compel the region to seek the support of the Soviets.⁷⁶ The crisis enhanced America’s image in the region, but also made the newly popular Nasser, the primary threat to the Kingdom. The Saudis consequently renewed the American lease at Dhahran the following year.⁷⁷ In 1958, after Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic (UAR) and the revolution in Iraq ensued, Sa’ud desired to downplay his involvement with the Americans, in an effort to appease his more powerful Arab neighbors. This resulted in his refusal to renew the lease

⁷³ Callander, “Lucky Lady II,” 73.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State, “The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO); <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/98683.htm> [Last Accessed September 12, 2008].

⁷⁵ Naday Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 67.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁷ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 64-9.

of Dhahran airbase in 1961.⁷⁸ USMTM remained in place, though a large, high-visibility American military presence of indefinite duration would not return to the Kingdom until 1990.

The American military would return on occasion to the Kingdom for brief visits, however, especially if Saudi oil resources were in any way threatened. In late 1962, when the Egyptians began attacking Saudi territory from bases in Yemen, the Saudis reversed course once again, pursuing an expanded U.S. Air Force “training mission” to be based in Jeddah.⁷⁹ The Americans agreed, but insisted on basing their aircraft at Dhahran, near the oilfields, and much farther from the Yemeni border..⁸⁰

President John F. Kennedy’s primary concerns were the continued independence of the Kingdom and the security of its oilfields.⁸¹ Kennedy’s administration was also concerned with avoiding any conflict with Nasser, then considered an alternative to Soviet influence. Thus, the Americans did not regard the Kingdom’s southern borders as a top priority for defense. Pursuant to the Saudi’s request, the U.S. jet fighters arrived in July 1963, staying for approximately six months.⁸²

The Saudis, once again sensed peril, when President Jimmy Carter declined to intervene on behalf of the faltering regime of the Shah of Iran, formerly considered as having played a significant stabilizing role in the Persian Gulf since British withdrawal in 1971. The Saudis, having increased their oil production to stabilize prices during the crisis in Iran and to ensure regional stability, requested U.S. presence in the region. Carter complied by sending U.S. fighter jets to the Kingdom the following month, as a display of force.⁸³

The U.S. continued its efforts to offset Soviet influence in the region throughout the 1970s. Though sometimes straining the U.S.–Saudi partnership, the Kingdom also

⁷⁸ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 82-87.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 136-162.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 192-229.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 210-33

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 85-89.

derived benefit from this. This became especially apparent when the People's Republic of Yemen and its Marxist regime was established directly to the south of the Kingdom.⁸⁴ Moreover, the Kingdom had disposable revenue from its lucrative oil industry and became a major financial contributor to various causes, including anti-Communist movements fighting U.S. wars of proxy.⁸⁵

Not all Saudi aid policies supported American preferences, however and sometimes even contradicted U.S. foreign policy. One such instance was the Kingdom's funding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and other rejectionist Arab states, countering America's mediation of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1978–1979.⁸⁶ There were conversely, Saudi efforts made to appease U.S. foreign policy objectives, especially in its proxy war in Central America.

During the 1980s, U.S. financial support for the Nicaraguan *Contra* rebels was cut off by Congress and a new source of funding was necessary for their continued fight against their leftist foes. Reagan's National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane turned to Saudi Ambassador Bandar in May 1984 to fill the void, as a way to circumvent the rebels from being completely off. The Saudis subsequently began transferring \$1 million per month into a Miami bank account. When this scandal came to light during the *Iran-Contra* hearings, Bandar denied complicity outright.⁸⁷

B. THE ORIGINS OF TENSION

1. The Oil Weapon

The Cold War revitalized the U.S.–Saudi partnership and had the benefit of overshadowing a potential complication in the form of America's connection to Israel. America's relationship with Israel started behind the scenes in the 1940s, escalating to an

⁸⁴ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 136-162.

⁸⁵ Steven V. Roberts, "Prop for U.S. Policy: Secret Saudi Funds," *New York Times*, June 21, 1987.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Jeff Gerth, "The White House Crisis; Evidence Points to Big Saudi Role in Iranian and Contra Arms Deals," *New York Times*, November 30, 1986.

arms supply relationship in the mid-1960s, and becoming part of the anti-Soviet alliance in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸⁸ Though the Saudis were not pleased with the American–Israeli connection, the Saudi’s displeasure had practically no effect in Washington. The Arab–Israeli conflict, however, polarized the entire region, putting considerable pressure on states friendly to America. These crises threatened the regime’s legitimacy, but, by the same token, also provided it with opportunities to assert its independence from American policy. The regime’s challenged legitimacy and opportunities for independence resulted in the culmination of the oil embargo of 1973–1974.⁸⁹

Reflecting Arab sentiment and the Kingdom’s special identity as the home of the holy places of Islam, namely Mecca and Medina, Saudi leaders stood opposed to a sovereign Jewish presence smack in the middle of the Arab world from the start.⁹⁰ The Palestinian question was consistently a matter of contention, even before the first meeting between Saudi and American heads of state in 1945.⁹¹

President Truman supported the UN General Assembly resolution of November 29, 1947, which called for separate Jewish and Arab states in Palestine.⁹² By December, the King indicated that his own failure to withdraw Aramco’s oil concessions in response to the resolution, invited danger from Iraq and Transjordan. The King requested assistance against such an eventuality, including weapons. The U.S. government, however, was reluctant to provide the requested assistance.⁹³

The following year, soon after Israel’s declaration of independence, Aramco’s President warned Washington that the Saudis had threatened possible consequences affecting U.S. access to Saudi resources should the United States provide arms to the

⁸⁸ Yergin, *The Prize*, 556.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 181-85.

⁹¹ Yergin, *The Prize*, 403-5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 188.

Israel.⁹⁴ The Americans remained unaffected by the threat and did not alter its plans. The Saudis and other Arab oil exporters had made similar threats against the British and French during the 1956 Suez crisis, though there were no serious consequences as a result.⁹⁵

The crisis in 1967 fueled tensions with the Kingdom, once again as closer U.S.–Israeli ties were seen negatively by Arabs throughout the region. This put undue pressure on Saudi Arabia, as it was perceived as too dependent on the United States and not sufficiently supportive of Egypt. Opposition to the ruling family raised the level of internal unrest, resulting in unprecedented violence. The U.S. Embassy and USMTM facilities were bombed in June 1967 while Saudi Oil Minister Yamani threatened to nationalize the oil industry, as a warning to Aramco officials for U.S. support of Israel.⁹⁶

On June 6, 1967, the second day of the Arab–Israeli war, an Egyptian radio broadcast claimed that American and British carrier-based aircraft had attacked Egyptian airfields.⁹⁷ Egypt and five other Arab states responded by immediately severing relations with both the U.S. and Britain.⁹⁸ The next day, a series of demonstrations broke out in Saudi Arabia, and at a rally in Riyadh, King Faisal bin Abd al-Aziz (“Faisal”) proclaimed that the Kingdom would cut off oil supplies “to anyone who aided Israel.”⁹⁹ A combination of labor actions and mob violence shut down Aramco’s operations, and Riyadh informed oil officials that no shipments to the U.S. or Britain would be allowed.¹⁰⁰

American, Venezuelan, Iranian, and Indonesian oil production ramped up output to fill the gap, and by early September 1967, the Arab producers gave up the embargo.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Yergin, *The Prize*, 426.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 491-92.

⁹⁶ Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America’s Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 181-209.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 268-80.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Not until a few years later, when growing demand had outstripped America's remaining spare oil production and the Arabs gained greater cooperation from other members of the OPEC cartel, did market realities create the opportunity for an effective deployment of the "oil weapon."¹⁰²

In light of the 1967 War, the royal family received growing pressure from Arab radicals. The Saudi royal family, hoping to resolve or at least lessen these tensions, continually urged the Americans to press Israel to withdraw to the pre-war lines.¹⁰³ In December 1969, the Nixon administration responded to the Saudi's request and announced an American peace plan, called the Rogers Plan, after then-Secretary of State William Rogers.¹⁰⁴ The Israelis resisted the proposal, enabling the Americans to put some distance between themselves and Jerusalem, but accomplishing little else.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, in the face of growing Soviet support for the Egyptians, Rogers' initiatives gave way to a more pro-Israeli policy.¹⁰⁶

The contradictions of the U.S.–Saudi relationship reached a breaking point in the crisis of 1973–1974, when senior officials in Washington openly threatened the seizure of Persian Gulf oil fields, either in Saudi Arabia or in neighboring Arab countries.¹⁰⁷ The crisis also marked a decisive shift in the balance of relations in terms of oil. Saudi Arabia emerged as the world's "swing producer," possessing the bulk of global spare production capacity, and thus the last word on any attempt to drive up prices through cutbacks.¹⁰⁸

From the outset of the crisis, Americans and Saudis stood on opposite sides. Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat's earlier decisions to end the Arab–Israeli "War of Attrition" and then to expel Soviet forces had seemed to President Nixon and national security adviser Henry Kissinger, to validate their uncompromising Middle East policy.

¹⁰² Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 268-80.

¹⁰³ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 140-147.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*, 209.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 299-301

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

To the Saudi royal family, Washington's failure to reassess aid to Israel after the Soviet threat to the region subsided, amounted to a betrayal, and the Saudis consequently began providing weapons and aid to Sadat's Egypt.¹⁰⁹

Faisal was gravely concerned with Arab alienation because of his continued U.S. support of Israel. In May 1973, he warned ARAMCO officials that oil concessions were in jeopardy, expressing disappointment in American policy that polarized Israel against its "Arab friends." He further stated in a televised interview that, "America's complete support for Zionism and stance against the Arabs makes it extremely difficult for us to continue to supply the United States with oil, or even to remain friends with the United States."¹¹⁰ When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visited Riyadh in August 1973 to disclose his war plans, Faisal responded by offering unwavering financial support and executed his plan to use the "oil weapon."¹¹¹

The coordinated Egyptian and Syrian surprise attacks of October 6, 1973 strategically occurred on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, and also during a meeting of OPEC and oil company representatives in Vienna, Austria. Unable to settle with the companies on oil prices, the exporters' delegation adjourned to Kuwait City on October 15, where they proclaimed a unilateral 70 percent hike.¹¹² Saudi Arabia's Oil Minister, Yamani told his colleagues, "This is a moment for which I have been waiting a long time. The moment has come. We are masters of our own commodity."¹¹³

The Arabs soon exercised their newfound power and mastery. On October 17, the Arab oil ministers agreed to cut back production by 5 percent each month. On October 19, the U.S. Government announced an immediate, large-scale military aid package to Israel, in response to their pleas. When Egyptian defeat seemed inevitable, the Arab exporters announced the suspension of all oil supplies to the United States, negatively

¹⁰⁹ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 152-55.

¹¹⁰ Yergin, *The Prize*, 595-97.

¹¹¹ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 155.

¹¹² Yergin, *The Prize*, 598-606

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 606-617.

effecting America's domestic life and economy.¹¹⁴ U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger subsequently made numerous diplomatic visits to the Middle East to facilitate an Egyptian–Israeli disengagement, while also visiting the Kingdom. Once a resolution to the crisis was effectuated, in March 1974, the Saudis and most other Arab producers agreed to end the embargo.¹¹⁵

The embargo illustrated to both countries, the limitations of the U.S.–Saudi relationship. Each subsequent American administration recognized the potential for another disaster, and pursued its own Middle East peace plans. The Saudis refrained from using the oil weapon in subsequent Israeli–Arab crises, apparently concerned about the effect of a renewed embargo on the long-term market for oil, given its harsh consequences for Western economies and the potential for the development of alternative energy sources. Saudi policymakers instead strived to keep the price of oil at an acceptable level intended to maximize demand and revenues over time, a strategy limited only by OPEC's share of world production and ability to cooperate.¹¹⁶

2. U.S. Weapons Sales to the Kingdom

The explosive growth of Saudi oil revenues in the 1970s enabled the Kingdom to purchase large quantities of advanced weaponry.¹¹⁷ This was especially vital to the Kingdom in light of the Iranian revolution and the ouster of the Shah, as well as the ensuing war between Iran and Iraq, which threatened shipping in the Gulf and tested the limits of Saudi air defense. The Saudis focused efforts and money to build up the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF), selecting the United States as their main supplier.¹¹⁸ During the late 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia increased the size of its air bases and port facilities to aid in U.S. power projection in the Gulf region, creating massive stockpiles of munitions and equipment, and building support facilities that could be used by U.S.

¹¹⁴ Yergin, *The Prize*, 606-17.

¹¹⁵ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 165-67.

¹¹⁶ Nawaf E. Obaid, *The Oil Kingdom at 100: Petroleum Policymaking in Saudi Arabia* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 97-103.

¹¹⁷ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 172-176.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

forces deploying to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia spent \$16 billion on U.S. military construction services during this period, and additional billions for supervised military construction.¹¹⁹ The U.S.–Saudi relationship strengthened and presented a unified effort to confront threats in the region.

When Iraq came under serious military pressure from Iran, beginning in 1983, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia cooperated closely in setting up combined air and naval defenses against Iran.¹²⁰ The two countries conducted combined exercises, and cooperated in establishing the “Fahd Line,” which created an Air Defense Identification Zone and forward air defense system off the Saudi coast.¹²¹ This cooperation helped Saudi Arabia defend its air space and shoot down an Iranian F-4 that breached Saudi defenses on June 5, 1984.¹²² The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have also jointly operated E-3A AWACS surveillance planes in Saudi Arabia ever since.¹²³

U.S. arms sales to the Kingdom dropped significantly in the late 1980s after Washington’s denial of key arms requests, though sales spiked significantly after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, only to fall off again in the mid-1990s as a result of Persian Gulf War debt and decreased oil revenue.¹²⁴ U.S. weapons sales to the Kingdom have exceeded \$100 billion in the last fifty years, with over a quarter of the contracts signed in the 1990s.¹²⁵ These sales figures not only include weapons, but also “associated support equipment, spare parts, support services, and construction.”¹²⁶

One source that inhibited arms sales to the Kingdom was the increasingly powerful pro-Israeli lobby, headed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee

¹¹⁹ Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, 172-176.

¹²⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 110.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 112.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹²⁵ Christopher Blanchard and Alfred Prados, “Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations,” *CRS Report for Congress* (The Library of Congress, July 11, 2006), 7-8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

(AIPAC), which asserted that weapons supplied to Saudi Arabia could eventually be used against Israel.¹²⁷ AIPAC employed a strategy of convincing members of the U.S. Congress to vote against any authorization to sell weapons to the Kingdom. The Saudis, lacking a credible lobby, sometimes circumvented Congress by working directly through the administration. AIPAC was moderately successful in its efforts, however, as the prospective sale of F-15 fighters to the Kingdom was temporarily blocked in 1985.¹²⁸ The Saudis, hence sought other sources for weaponry, including Great Britain.¹²⁹

Additionally, Saudi Arabia was also denied access to *Lance* short-range surface-to-surface missiles, the first in a series of setbacks in prospective sales of missiles of various types.¹³⁰ This was especially disappointing for the Kingdom, as it had become increasingly vulnerable to Iranian missile capabilities.¹³¹ This compelled Saudi Arabia to seek other sources for missiles, which prompted King Fahd to secretly dispatch his U.S. Ambassador to Beijing in July 1985.¹³² The purpose of this visit was to convince the Chinese to sell Saudi Arabia *Dong Feng-3A* ballistic missiles.¹³³ In late 1986 and 1987, the missile deal was finalized between the Chinese and the Saudis, resulting in a multibillion-dollar deal for an estimated fifteen mobile launchers and approximately fifty specially modified missiles designed to accommodate conventional warheads.¹³⁴

American satellite imagery revealed the missile deployment in early 1988.¹³⁵ The Americans were shocked and outraged, and further embarrassed by Bandar's involvement, who was the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. In response to this, the Saudis justified their position by citing the threat Iran posed to Saudi Arabia, and the

¹²⁷ Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom*, 114-115.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Robin Allen, "Saudi Arabia Builds Defence of the Realm," *Financial Times*, November 23, 1988.

¹³⁰ James Mann, "Threat to Mideast Military Balance: U.S. Caught Napping by Sino-Saudi Missile Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1988

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Mann, "Threat to Mideast Military Balance."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

U.S. denial of their original request for missiles and advanced F-15 jet fighters.¹³⁶ While assuring the U.S. that the missiles were conventionally armed, the Saudis rejected all requests for inspections.¹³⁷ The administration expressed its severe disappointment, pointing out to the Saudis that their new anti-Iranian weapons could provoke an unwanted conflict with Israel.¹³⁸

Riyadh was unfazed by the U.S. warning. After the Reagan administration issued a forceful ultimatum to King Fahd, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia was recalled from his post. This unprecedented move, reportedly undertaken at Saudi Ambassador Bandar's urging, smoothed the path for an upcoming visit by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz to promote the Reagan administration's regional peace initiative.¹³⁹ Saudi Ambassador Bandar apparently expressed satisfaction for his part in the Chinese weapons deal, as he blamed AIPAC for their meddling and was able to demonstrate Saudi determination in securing weapons from sources elsewhere.¹⁴⁰

The discord between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was short-lived, however. Within weeks of Shultz's visit, the Saudis signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, effectively forfeiting any Saudi nuclear ambitions and quelling Israeli fear of a possible Saudi nuclear attack. Saudi Arabia also severed diplomatic ties with Iran; the U.S. recognized this positive Saudi gesture and approved planned arms sales.¹⁴¹ The Saudis had learned to overcome their dependency on U.S. weapons sales, just as they had with U.S. oil policy. King Fahd further expressed that his intent was not political when it came time to purchase weapons and would be willing to purchase them from any country, regardless of its politics.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Goshko and Oberdorfer, "Chinese Sell Saudis Missiles Capable of Covering Mideast."

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 169-70.

¹³⁹ Robert G. Kaiser and David Ottaway, "Oil for Security Fueled Close Ties; But Major Differences Led to Tensions," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2002.

¹⁴⁰ Jim Hoagland, "The Turtle Snaps Back," *Washington Post*, April 13, 1988.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Saudis Reaffirm a Right to Vary Arms Dealings," *New York Times*, July 28, 1988.

After Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia signed several major contracts for American weapons systems. And during the build-up of Operations *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm*, Saudi officials allowed more than 500,000 U.S. military personnel into the Kingdom for fear that the Iraqis would also invade Saudi Arabia.¹⁴³ Unprecedented U.S. weapons sales took place in 1993, with the Saudis signing a \$7 billion contract for more than F-15s with advanced capabilities.¹⁴⁴ Residual debt from the Persian Gulf War and declining oil revenues, forced the Saudis to renegotiate payments with the U.S. Government and American defense contractors.¹⁴⁵ Weapons sales decreased to \$4 billion for 1993–1997 and to only \$600 million in 1998–2001.¹⁴⁶

Large weapons sales to the Kingdom have proved profitable to American defense contractors and the U.S. economy overall. Regardless of these expenditures, and Saudi Arabia's quest to seek weapons from whomever was willing to provided them, however, the U.S. remains the sole guarantor of its defense and security.¹⁴⁷

3. Western Forces Return

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Saudi Kingdom was surprised at the seemingly imminent threat that presented itself, especially since Saudi Arabia was wholly unprepared to defend itself against the vastly superior Iraqi military. An attack by an Arab neighbor was unprecedented for the Kingdom, save the occasional Yemeni nuisance, thus causing tremendous consternation for the regime.¹⁴⁸ Though it appeared that the annexation of Saudi Arabia was unlikely, there was uncertainty about whether the Iraqis were planning to seize the valuable oil fields in the eastern al Hasa

¹⁴³ Dave Montgomery, "U.S. Expected to Withdraw nearly all of its Forces from Saudi Arabia after Iraq War," *Knight Ridder*, April 15, 2003.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ John Lancaster and John Mintz, "U.S.-Saudi Agreement Is Reached on \$9.2 Billion Arms Purchase Stretchout," *Washington Post*, February 1, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ Richard F. Grimmett, "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1994-2001," Congressional Research Service, August 6, 2002, 28-9.

¹⁴⁷ Norvell De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," *Middle East Quarterly* 6, No. 4 (December 1999).

¹⁴⁸ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 163. This source gives a detailed account of the history of Saudi Arabia from an Arab perspective.

region.¹⁴⁹ Iraqi troops were already nearby in Kuwait and the Saudi's top priority was to push the Iraqi troops back to their original borders. King Fahd, again turned to Saudi Arabia's ally, the United States, for the much needed assistance.¹⁵⁰

The Bush administration concurred with King Fahd that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait posed a direct threat to the security of Saudi Arabia, as well as the overall global economy.¹⁵¹ Expediting the return of American forces to the Kingdom in large numbers was, therefore imperative, albeit a very delicate matter. Within the same week, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney briefed Fahd and his advisers in Riyadh and communicated the U.S. commitment to the Saudi's defense, pledging to withdraw troops once victory was secured.¹⁵²

Orders were subsequently issued to begin the massive deployment of American and coalition forces to the Kingdom. Advance teams were deployed and arrived the very next day.¹⁵³ The goal was to move forces immediately to Saudi Arabia to deter an Iraqi attack on the Kingdom. The plan required rapid movement of combat aircraft, naval forces, and air-deployable light ground forces to the Gulf. It was imperative for the buildup of forces to happen as quickly as possible to produce a credible defense of Saudi Arabia. Sea-deployable heavy ground forces were added as the deployment progressed, which took more time to arrive in theater.¹⁵⁴ Interdiction at sea began immediately, as a result of the United Nations approval of UN Resolution 655, imposing economic sanctions against Iraq.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 164.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 165.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Woodward, *The Commanders*, 270.

¹⁵³ Jeffrey D. McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces: What the Gulf War Portends," *Parameters*, Summer 1999, 2-21. ***This source gives a good, unbiased account of the troop staging in preparation for Operations *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm* in 1990-91, detailing all military units in the theater.**

¹⁵⁴ McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

In order to deter the unpredictable Iraqi forces, UN Coalition forces had to move to Saudi Arabia quickly, prepared to be self sufficient for one month.¹⁵⁶ Expedited intelligence collection was necessary in order to track Iraqi troop movement. The U.S. Air Force had an impressive airlift capacity and was able to transfer troops and equipment to the Kingdom to support forces already in position. “During the first two days, 91 missions were flown to Saudi Arabia, and more than 70 missions were flown each day for the rest of the month.”¹⁵⁷ Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, and dedicated satellites were also employed to provide real-time intelligence to force commanders.¹⁵⁸

Additionally, U.S. Naval forces were redirected and concentrated off the Gulf to bolster the deterrent force.¹⁵⁹ In anticipation of Fahd’s acceptance to receive U.S. forces, President Bush ordered two carrier battle groups to the Gulf, comprising more than 100 fighters to reinforce the ships already on station at the onset of the crisis.¹⁶⁰ Air and ground forces reached Saudi Arabian soil within forty-eight hours of the order.¹⁶¹ Shortly thereafter, advance elements of the Egyptian army landed in Saudi Arabia, along with detachments from Morocco and Syria, comprising the first element of the Arab component.¹⁶² American prepositioned ships, located at Diego Garcia and Guam, were directed to the area and, by August 15, the 7th Marine Brigade already had its equipment on Saudi soil. ¹⁶³

General Schwarzkopf’s goal was to get as many ground troops into the theater as quickly as possible in preparation for a potential Iraqi attack.¹⁶⁴ Supplies would follow soon thereafter, forcing the military units to rely on support from the host nation and the

¹⁵⁶ McCausland, “Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces,” 2-21.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

supply-laden prepositioning ships.¹⁶⁵ This approach was very risky indeed, especially since these initial forces were lightly equipped and could not necessarily defend the Kingdom effectively against the Iraqi heavy divisions that were reinforced with tanks and other armor.¹⁶⁶

The threat of an Iraqi armored invasion of the Kingdom existed until mid-September, when Iraqi ground forces then assumed a more defensive posture.¹⁶⁷ Eventually, these armor units were replaced with infantry troops and the threat ultimately subsided.¹⁶⁸ By September 14, Saddam had deployed to Kuwait ten divisions, more than two thousand tanks and armored personnel carriers and approximately seven hundred artillery pieces.¹⁶⁹ Available reinforcements were also plentiful, with another twelve divisions of reinforcements and reserves assembled throughout Iraq.¹⁷⁰ Military planners were still prepared for an Iraqi attack, albeit in reduced and limited form.

Throughout Operations *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm*, approximately 95 percent of materiel was moved by sea, and the remainder, by air.¹⁷¹ Tactical operations included the movement of equipment and troops within Saudi Arabia, which proved challenging. Though Saudi Arabia had a fairly modernized infrastructure, the absence of an efficient rail system forced the allies to rely on heavy equipment transporters, as well as essentially commandeering the few Saudi freeways that could withstand the transport of heavy loads, particularly in the north.¹⁷² By late September the allies had more than one hundred heavy equipment transporters in theater; and by the end of the conflict, the number had risen to 1,300, most of which were operated by foreign nationals.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁵ McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces," 2-21.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

The efforts to deploy forces to the theater were monumental, with the air movement alone surpassing that of the Berlin Airlift in 1948–49.¹⁷⁴ Within the first month, almost 40,000 soldiers and more than 30,000 tons of supplies were delivered by air.¹⁷⁵ In comparison, during WWII, it took the U.S. more than two months, utilizing maritime sealift to transport approximately 30,000 troops to Europe.¹⁷⁶ The U.S. Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) provided aircraft for the first time in its twenty-eight-year history.¹⁷⁷ The aircraft provided by CRAF were essential and acted as the primary means for movement of personnel into the theater, thereby contributing greatly to the overall airlift efforts.¹⁷⁸

Other Coalition forces were faced with similar logistical challenges. France deployed over 16,000 personnel and approximately 100 tons of freight during the first six months of *Desert Shield*.¹⁷⁹ The French relied heavily on commercial aircraft, which posed its own set of problems.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, after the war, the French decided to set up a fleet with capabilities similar to that of CRAF.¹⁸¹

The British deployed approximately 45,000 personnel, their largest deployment since World War II and surpassing that of the Falklands war.¹⁸² Britain's sealift fleet consisted mostly of foreign-flagged vessels due to the astronomical expense of chartering British-flagged ships, the meager size of Britain's merchant fleet, and the lack of available ships for this endeavor.¹⁸³

Deploying the Coalition to the Gulf was indeed challenging and the build up of naval forces was necessary to enforce the economic sanctions imposed by U.N.

¹⁷⁴ McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces," 2-21

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Resolution 655 against Iraq.¹⁸⁴ Additional challenges existed with the need to monitor not only the Persian Gulf, but also the Red Sea and Arabian Sea, which encompassed 250,000 square miles of salt water.¹⁸⁵ By the end of the crisis, 165 ships from 19 different countries had participated in the operation.¹⁸⁶

On November 8, 1990, President Bush announced an increase in U.S. forces to almost 500,000, including the authorization to activate up to 188,000 reservists.¹⁸⁷ Over 100,000 reservists ultimately served in the war, with 20 percent in theater.¹⁸⁸ The U.S. was the only country that called up reservists in support of the war.¹⁸⁹ The British augmented their deployed forces with personnel from other non-deploying units, while the French insisted on utilizing only professional, volunteer soldiers, avoiding the use of conscripts.¹⁹⁰

Bush's decision to increase the troop strength to 500,000 introduced unprecedented logistical challenges.¹⁹¹ Allied forces in the region already numbered approximately 300,000 by mid-October (220,000 US and European, 40,000 Saudi, and 42,000 non-Saudi Arab).¹⁹² Despite the impressive presence, most of the ground forces in the Kingdom were light forces.¹⁹³ On the other hand, Iraqi forces in Kuwait, were estimated at 400,000 and credible defenses along the border had been established.¹⁹⁴

Superior Western air and naval superiority practically assured a worthy defense of Saudi Arabia, but the force assembled was not sufficient to displace Saddam's forces in

¹⁸⁴ McCausland, "Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces," 2-21.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Kuwait without the risk of heavy Western casualties.¹⁹⁵ Units from Europe would ultimately be employed, despite the absence of a provision in the contingency planning providing for such units.¹⁹⁶ Movement of forces from Europe required close cooperation with German and other allied governments for exclusive use of their transportation nodes.¹⁹⁷

On November 28, the United Nations passed Resolution 678, authorizing members to use “all means necessary” to force the withdrawal of Iraqi forces—if Iraq did not voluntarily leave Kuwait by 15 January.”¹⁹⁸ UN 678 read, in part, as follows:

The resolution is an update of Security Council resolution 660 and ultimately gives authorization for invasion...Authorizes Member States ... to use all necessary means to bring Iraq into compliance with previous Security Council resolutions if it did not do so by 15 January 1991.¹⁹⁹

UN Resolution 678 provided the Coalition forces with the authority to employ transportation nodes wherever necessary. Additionally, the Resolution imposed an implicit deadline for reinforcements to be in Saudi Arabia, prepared to launch an offensive, which came to be known as Operation *Desert Storm*.²⁰⁰

Saudi Arabia’s involvement was also commendable, as it commanded both Arab task forces, specifically the Joint Forces Command (East) and Joint Forces Command (North).²⁰¹ Saudi forces were organized under the command of Lt. General Prince Khalid Bin Sultan al-Sa’ud.²⁰² The Arab task forces reported to Prince Khalid through a Joint Forces Command in the Saudi Ministry of Defense, and were divided into a Joint Forces Command (North), a Joint Forces Command (East), and a Joint Forward Forces

¹⁹⁵ McCausland, “Governments, Societies, and Armed Forces,” 2-21.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ “United Nations Resolution 678,” <http://www.fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sres0678.htm> [Last Accessed September 18, 2008].

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

Command Ar'Ar (the command of the Arab defensive forces responsible for screening the border area).²⁰³ The Ar'Ar command was subordinated to the Joint Forces Command (North). The Ar'Ar command included two Saudi National Guard battalions, a Saudi Army airborne battalion, and a Pakistani armored brigade with about 5,500 men, over 100 tanks, and about 90 other additional armored Saudi Arabia and Alliances in the Gulf.²⁰⁴

Though the triumphant war to defend the Arabian Peninsula and liberate Kuwait marked a high point for the U.S.–Saudi Alliance, the Gulf War had created a challenge to the legitimacy of the ruling family. After inordinate expenditures on defense preparedness, which had resulted in a drain on their economy, the Saudi military still had remained incapable of standing up to Saddam's forces.²⁰⁵ King Fahd had denounced the Iraqi invasion and stated that the U.S. military presence was necessary, though only temporary.²⁰⁶ Fahd had appealed to other Arab countries for support, but the necessary force to establish a credible deterrent against Saddam's forces, validated the Kingdom's dependency on the United States.²⁰⁷

Prior to *Desert Shield*, General Schwarzkopf and his staff agonized over the effect that an overwhelming influx of foreigners would have on social, cultural and religious life of Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁸ Schwarzkopf recounted that, "their [Saudi's] most pressing concern was neither the threat from Saddam nor the enormous joint military enterprise on which we were embarked. What loomed largest for them was the cultural crisis triggered by this sudden flood of Americans into their kingdom."²⁰⁹

²⁰³ "United Nations Resolution 678."

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 166.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Rethnavibushana, "Human Rights Double Standards in U.S. Policy Toward Saudi Arabia," (PressEsc.com, June 16, 2007); <http://pressesc.com/01181971170> Saudi Arabia human rights double standards [Last accessed September 13, 2008].

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Intensive public debate over the massive arrival of military forces indeed ensued in the Kingdom.²¹⁰ The fall of 1990 was filled with heated discussions that, in the past, had been confined to private domains.²¹¹ The debate revolved around several issues, with some related to the Gulf War and others, challenging the political system and the legitimacy of the regime.²¹² Particular turbulence stemmed from the fact that American troops were on Saudi soil and the realization of the reliance of the Kingdom on the U.S. for its security.²¹³ As predicted by General Schwarzkopf, Saudi citizens were overwhelmed with the magnitude of U.S. troop presence and felt a deep sense of humiliation that was attributed to Saudi government mismanagement of its economy and military.²¹⁴ Furthermore, though the American presence was deemed a necessary evil, many regarded this presence as a mockery of Islamic principles.²¹⁵

The group most opposed to the legitimacy of the regime was composed of the rank and file religious scholars.²¹⁶ Sermons at the mosques highlighted the weakness of the regime evidenced by its reliance on “infidels” to defend the holy land of Islam.²¹⁷ This scrutiny also challenged whether it was acceptable to invite non-Muslims to kill other Muslims.²¹⁸

In September 1990, the dean of the Islamic College at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, Dr. Safar al-Hawali, released a tape highly critical of the regime questioning whether the al Sa’ud were worthy of calling themselves a legitimate Islamic government.²¹⁹ Al-Hawali further concluded that the true enemy of Islam was not the Iraqis, but rather, the West.²²⁰

²¹⁰ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 166.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 164.

²¹³ Ibid., 165.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 166.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 165.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 166.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Al-Halawi subsequently distributed pamphlets calling attention to the increased dependency of the Saudi Arabian government and overall society, on the West.²²¹ He chided the Gulf War as an opportunity for foreign, non-Muslim domination and intervention of the Islamic world and, though not a supporter of the Iraqi aggression, al-Halawi opposed the regime, making reference to the U.S. as “an evil greater than Saddam.”²²²

Other scholars joined Dr. al-Halawi and came into the fray, denouncing the West and its intervention during the crisis, further sharpening their rhetoric against the Saudi government.²²³ The ruling family was continually chastised for destroying Muslim unity by relying on the West.²²⁴ The Gulf War provided a venue for the opinionated scholars, as there were an estimated 1,500 foreign correspondents in the Kingdom covering the war. Other repressed groups, such as “Women Desirous of Reform,” also joined in to voice their discontent.²²⁵ The perceived Western encroachment was seen as further deterioration of Muslim society.²²⁶

The danger from Iraq persisted, nevertheless, as Saddam still possessed a powerful army, and despite U.S. Secretary of Defense Cheney’s pledge to withdraw forces after the war, Western forces remained in the Kingdom. Furthermore, there was a high level of Saudi discontent with this Western presence and no formal agreement regarding their status.²²⁷ Not only did the Western forces remain, fueling the Saudis’ growing discomfort, but their presence became informally established under the guise of the “dual containment” of Iran and Iraq.²²⁸ The terms of the enforcement of the “no-fly zone” over southern Iraq by British and American warplanes was also a matter of particular sensitivity.

²²¹ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 165.

²²² *Ibid.*, 166.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 168.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

The priority assigned to Saudi–American relations declined substantially with the 1993 inauguration of President Bill Clinton. In Middle Eastern affairs, Clinton was mostly preoccupied with Arab–Israeli peacemaking. His administration’s overriding policy interest was the health of the domestic economy and for Saudi Arabia, this meant a focus on trade issues, such as the purchase of civilian airliners and later, oil prices. Bandar’s standing in Washington declined accordingly.²²⁹ His special value to American officials also appeared to decline after the incapacitation of his patron, King Fahd, who suffered from poor health.²³⁰

Because the focus of the Clinton Administration had shifted to domestic politics and the quest to facilitate improved negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, there was a reduced attentiveness to the Saudis. The U.S. was seemingly insensitive to the continual presence of U.S. and British troops on Saudi soil, which manifested itself into increased terrorist attacks directed at Westerners. Terrorist bombings at a Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) training site in Riyadh killed seven people in November 1995, including five U.S. military personnel. The Khobar Towers housing facility in Dhahran was also bombed in June 1996, resulting in the deaths of 19 U.S. airmen. This prompted Western military forces to consolidate its personnel at the Prince Sultan Air Base, near Riyadh for improved security.²³¹

Following the Riyadh and Dhahran attacks, Saudi law enforcement involvement to apprehend the perpetrators was not sufficiently proactive, causing its condemnation in Washington.²³² Likewise, Saudi Arabia did not appear supportive of fervent U.S. efforts to stem the tide of increasing terrorism in the Middle East. In 1996, after the Americans persuaded the Sudanese government to expel Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden, Saudi Arabia refused his extradition.²³³ As the mastermind of al-Qa’ida, bin Laden had

²²⁹ Douglas Jehl, “The Wisdom of a Saudi King: Choosing an Heir to the Realm of Abdel Aziz,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1999.

²³⁰ Maureen Dowd, “This Dynasty Stuff,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2002.

²³¹ Steven Lee Myers, “At a Saudi Base, U.S. Digs In, Gingerly, for a Longer Stay,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1997.

²³² Lawrence Wright, “The Counter-Terrorist,” *The New Yorker*, January 14, 2002.

²³³ *Ibid.*

declared war on both the Saudi royal family and the United States on the grounds that the foreign, non-Muslim military presence desecrated holy Islamic soil.²³⁴ Because of Saudi Arabia's refusal to apprehend bin Laden, he traveled freely to Afghanistan, where the United States and Saudi Arabia had supported the Muslim guerilla fighters there in their quest to oust the Soviet occupiers.

After the Soviets left Afghanistan in defeat, the Saudis continued to support the theocratic Taliban government, which governed Afghanistan after 1996.²³⁵ Saudi sponsorship of the Taliban continued, though bin Laden, who had been divested of Saudi citizenship, accepted their hospitality.²³⁶ The al-Qa'ida bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, prompted the Saudis to work jointly with the U.S. to secure the capture of bin Laden.²³⁷ The U.S. attempted to kill bin Laden in retaliation for the bombing through the use of ship-launched cruise missiles, though they were unsuccessful and he remains at large to date.²³⁸

In hindsight, the mistrust and lack of coordination between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was costly. Viewed differently, the tensions arising from the indefinite U.S. and British military presence in Saudi Arabia, and the seeming inability of Washington and Riyadh to join forces against bin Laden, provided the source for both bin Laden's anti-Saudi, and anti-American agenda.

4. More Dilemmas

The Clinton administration's efforts to keep the peace talks going between the Israelis and the Palestinians was deemed as a noble and sincere attempt to resolve, or at least, make progress towards an overall solution.²³⁹ The U.S.–Saudi Alliance suffered

²³⁴ Wright, "The Counter-Terrorist."

²³⁵ Gellman, "U.S. Was Foiled Multiple Times in Efforts To Capture Bin Laden or Have Him Killed."

²³⁶ Seymour Hersh, "King's Ransom," *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2001.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, "A Once-Stormy Terror Alliance Was Solidified by Cruise Missiles," *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2002.

²³⁹ Rachel Donadio, "GOP Woos Arabs, Hawks as Middle East Crisis Puts Democrats on Defensive," *Forward*, October 20, 2000.

new tensions however, with the breakdown of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process and the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000.²⁴⁰

When George W. Bush assumed the presidency in 2001, he sought to improve ties between the two nations, despite the substantial deterioration of the alliance due to the fighting between Israelis and Palestinians, and the increased anti-American sentiment in the Middle East. Bush, seeking to follow in his father’s footsteps attempted to rebuild the relationship.

The Bush family and the Saudi royals had a formidable friendship, mainly due to the former President, George H. W. Bush and his commitment to defend Saudi Arabia, as demonstrated in 1990. This familial connection seemed to offer hope to Riyadh for a renewal of the relationship between the two countries. Likewise encouraging was George W. Bush’s background in the oil industry and recognition of the importance of U.S.–Saudi relations.

The first Bush administration had protested Israel’s expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and was instrumental in bringing the Israeli government to the peace table at Madrid.²⁴¹ President George W. Bush also recruited two senior officials from his father’s administration, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Colin Powell for his own cabinet, putting the Saudis at ease, given their previous, favorable relationship.²⁴²

Bush after all, had emerged as the “Arab” candidate, while his Democratic opponent, Al Gore, chose Senator Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, as his running mate.²⁴³ Presidential candidate, Governor Bush had appealed directly to Arab–American

²⁴⁰ Donadio, “GOP Woos Arabs.”

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ George Edmonson, “One Nation Evenly Divisible; The Razor-Thin Election Day Margin Still Reveals Some Huge Gaps,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 14, 2000.

voters during the second televised Presidential debate, and won a majority of their votes.²⁴⁴ The optimism and euphoria dissipated, however once George W. Bush assumed office.

Despite the optimism surrounding the Bush presidency, tensions mounted between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, in part due to the continuing informal arrangements governing the U.S. and British military presence in Saudi Arabia. Problems between the U.S. and Saudi were exacerbated in February 2001, when the allies launched an air raid from Prince Sultan Air Base against targets in Baghdad.²⁴⁵ The failure of the Allies to notify the Saudis before the air raid caused major consternation.²⁴⁶ As a consequence, the Saudis imposed operational restrictions on allied warplanes operating out of Prince Sultan Airbase, forbidding them to conduct further offensive operations against Iraq.²⁴⁷

The Saudi Interior Minister Prince again emphasized the Saudi government's desire to assert its exclusive sovereignty in matters related to hosting foreign forces, disallowing the extradition of suspects held in the Khobar Towers bombing case, stating, "no other entity has the right to try or investigate any crimes occurring on Saudi lands."²⁴⁸ This assertion further added to U.S. Saudi tensions.

Public attention was diverted from the tensions between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, by the Palestinian intifada. By disrupting the Middle East peace process, the Palestinian intifada brought to a conclusion the adversely affected, American post-Cold War experiment, which had sought to balance relations with both Jewish and Arab allies.²⁴⁹ Changing demographics, coupled with Arabic-language satellite television news, and the introduction of the internet to the Kingdom, mobilized the repressed,

²⁴⁴ Rachel Donadio, "GOP Woos Arabs."

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Thomas E. Ricks, "American, British Jets Hit 5 Antiaircraft Sites in Iraq; Baghdad Area Bombed in Biggest Airstrike in 2 Years," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2001.

²⁴⁷ Jane Perlez, "Bush Senior, on His Son's Behalf, Reassures Saudi Leader," *New York Times*, July 15, 2001.

²⁴⁸ Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations," 4.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

thereby putting more pressure on the Saudi leadership.²⁵⁰ The Kingdom's youth, learning of Israeli military actions against the Palestinians, directed their rage at the U.S., widely perceiving Americans as staunch Israeli allies, and harboring resentment over al Sa'ud's ties with the United States.²⁵¹

The U.S. was conflicted with the pressure asserted by Israel to defend its citizens against terrorist attacks, and the Saudi insistence that they intervene forcefully against Israel's violent incursions into the territories.²⁵² The conflict of interests adversely affected Saudi's public opinion of America.²⁵³ In the meantime, the Saudis pledged \$225 million dollars in aid to the Palestinian Authority in 2001.²⁵⁴

Unable to balance this situation, the Bush administration shifted from one stance to another, seeking to appease both Saudi Arabia and Israel. President Bush would consistently shun Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, while frequently inviting Israeli Prime Minister Sharon for consultations at the White House.²⁵⁵ Crown Prince Abdullah retaliated by refusing continual invitations to Washington, though he communicated via correspondence, continuing to insist that Bush restrain Israel.²⁵⁶

Abdullah eventually turned to brinkmanship and, from behind closed doors, dispatched Bandar to threaten a break in the formerly close relationship with the U.S.²⁵⁷ Abdullah indicated that he had no intention of allowing himself to become "the next Shah of Iran."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁰ Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia."

²⁵¹ Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia*, 31-76.

²⁵² Susan Sachs, "Saudi Heir Urges Reform, and Turn From U.S." *New York Times*, December 4, 2000.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Blanchard and Prados, "Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations," 6.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Janine Zacharia, "The Road to Mecca – via Washington," *Jerusalem Post*, June 22, 2001.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Robert G. Kaiser and David Ottaway, "Saudi Leader's Anger Revealed Shaky Ties," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2002.

Bush finally drafted a communiqué to the Abdullah pledging his commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state. According to one account, Abdullah shared Bush's letter and the text of his own original complaint with fellow Arab leaders, including Yasser Arafat, whom he summoned to Riyadh.²⁵⁹ The Saudis responded to Bush, attaching a letter from Arafat pledging to fulfill Bush's requirements for restarting the peace talks, and returned their ambassador to Washington.²⁶⁰

Progress that had been made to date was violently disrupted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which created a new set of circumstances for the tumultuous U.S.–Saudi partnership. Israel and the Palestinians nevertheless stayed on course with the Saudi agenda. Moreover, Israel and Palestine achieved even greater importance to the U.S., as its inability to facilitate a peaceful resolution was viewed as an impediment to Arab support for conducting its war in Afghanistan and Iraq. 9/11 also caused Americans to empathize with Israelis, as they, too had been attacked by Arabs.²⁶¹ On the Bush administration's revised agenda, the Global War on Terrorism achieved a higher level of precedence, surpassing conflict resolution in the Middle East.²⁶²

5. The Saudis Attempt Peace

In March 2002, Abdullah offered his own peace proposal at an Arab League summit in an attempt to resolve the Palestinian issue, devoid of U.S. efforts.²⁶³ The peace proposal was similar to a suggestion offered by a journalist of the *New York Times*. The columnist, Thomas Friedman had proposed that the entire Arab League offer Israel “full peace” and security guarantees in exchange for a withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 lines.²⁶⁴ Abdullah also acquiesced and finally accepted an invitation to the United States,

²⁵⁹ Kaiser and Ottaway, “Saudi Leader's Anger Revealed Shaky Ties.”

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Elaine Sciolino and Patrick E. Tyler, “Saudi Charges Bush with Failure to Broker Mideast Peace,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2001.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Michael R. Gordon, “Bush Plans Talks with Saudi Prince on Mideast Plan,” *New York Times*, March 18, 2002.

²⁶⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, “Dear Arab League,” *New York Times*, February 6, 2002.

offered by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney while visiting the Gulf region that March.²⁶⁵ Cheney had been trying to muster support for the impending war in Iraq and offered his encouragement on the Israeli–Palestinian front.²⁶⁶

Abdullah refrained from revealing too much of the plan before the Beirut Summit, only stating, “Arabs would be offering Israel additional incentives to make peace with its neighbors.”²⁶⁷ The consensus Arab League plan that emerged from Beirut featured a demand for Israel’s affirmation of the “achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian Refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194,” which was interpreted by the Arabs as providing for a right of return.²⁶⁸ Palestinian Authority representatives quickly highlighted that this language approximated the Palestinian position at Camp David in July 2000.²⁶⁹

As the Beirut Summit was commencing, terrorist bombings in Israel threatened to derail these efforts.²⁷⁰ The Israeli response to the terrorist bombing included a major offensive against Palestinian bases in cities of the West Bank, which prompted public outcry throughout the Arab world.²⁷¹ Though the summit proceeded, Prince Abdullah no longer offered the proposal and instead denounced Israeli violence in the territories. The U.S. had also received assurances that Arafat would not be harmed and conveyed this to Abdullah.²⁷² Though the Israelis provided safety for Arafat, they essentially ignored Bush’s demand for an immediate withdrawal from the territories.²⁷³

The Beirut Summit, though noble in its intent, proved to be highly embarrassing for the Saudi government and continued violent Israeli incursions into Palestinian cities only galvanized

²⁶⁵ Gordon, “Bush Plans Talks with Saudi Prince on Mideast Plan.”

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Nawaf Obaid, “The Israeli Flag in Riyadh?” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2002.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ *Agence France Presse*, “Arab initiative is ‘indivisible’: Saud al-Faisal,” March 28, 2002.

²⁷⁰ Bandar bin Sultan, “Why Israel Must Stop the Terror,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2002.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Neil MacFarquhar, “As Arabs Seethe, Saudi Says Uprising Will Go On,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2002.

Arabs throughout the world to protest the inaction of their governments and solidify their hatred of Israel. A spate of suicide attacks against Israeli citizens continued, and, despite U.S. efforts to implore the Saudi government to pressure Arafat to cease support of these “martyrdom operations,” it was clear that continued U.S. support of Israel had caused a rift with the Saudis, making any Arab concession difficult to secure.²⁷⁴

Despite the chain of events, Abdullah proceeded with a scheduled visit to President Bush’s Texas ranch. It was rumored, through the media, that the division between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was irreparable, and that the potential for use of the Saudi “oil weapon” was likely.²⁷⁵ Abdullah dispelled these rumors, though he acknowledged that their two countries were at a crossroads, with the relationship severely damaged.²⁷⁶ The Saudis then presented the Americans with a proposal outlining a plan for an Israeli–Palestinian ceasefire and a follow-on agreement, utilizing the guidelines of the Beirut Declaration.²⁷⁷

Prior to Abdullah’s departure, the Americans persuaded the Israelis to allow Yasser Arafat to leave his encircled compound in Ramallah, affording the Crown Prince to claim success.²⁷⁸ Despite this face-saving opportunity, another wave of suicide bombings occurred in June and President Bush responded by offering American support for a Palestinian state, while demanding the ouster of Arafat.²⁷⁹ Though the Saudi royals were supportive of this gesture, they insisted that Arafat had been elected, based on the will of his people.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ Bin Sultan, “Why Israel Must Stop the Terror.”

²⁷⁵ Patrick E. Tyler, “Saudi to Warn Bush of Rupture Over Israel Policy,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2002.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ James Bennett with Elisabeth Bumiller, “Israelis Approve Plan to End Siege and Free Arafat,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2002.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, “Saudis Support Bush's Policy but Say It Lacks Vital Details,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2002.

6. Saudi–U.S. Relations in the Wake of 9/11

The terrorist attacks on the United States, which occurred on September 11, 2001, were boldly executed by a group of nineteen Arabs loyal to Osama bin Laden, of which fifteen were Saudis.²⁸¹ The terrorist attack greatly affected regional politics and dealt a stunning blow to the U.S.–Saudi Alliance. The immediate reaction of large segments of the Saudi and other Arab publics consisted of spontaneous celebrations.²⁸² The Saudis stabilized oil prices, and then severed official relations with the Taliban, as the United States prepared to prosecute its war in Afghanistan.²⁸³

Resentment for what had happened throughout that year impeded Saudi support for U.S. efforts against the Taliban and al-Qa’ida. Anticipating public outcry for the U.S. efforts to kill a somewhat folkloric figure, namely Osama bin Laden and to oust the Taliban, who were considered a favorable theocratic government by the Arabs, media coverage of the American war effort was minimally exposed.²⁸⁴ Saudi officials refused to allow the Kingdom as a launching pad for attacks against other Arab countries and that “permission to do so would not be considered.”²⁸⁵ U.S. officials were careful to praise the Saudis for their continued cooperation, reiterating that American military commanders would respect Saudi desires.²⁸⁶

Balancing Saudi and U.S. goals proved tricky and ultimately unsuccessful. In September, Air Force Lieutenant General Charles Wald arrived to the Kingdom to assume his role as head of air operations at the recently completed Combined Air

²⁸¹ David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, “After Sept. 11, Severe Tests Loom for Relationship,” *Washington Post*, February 12, 2002.

²⁸² Cameron S. Brown, “The Shot Seen Around the World: The Middle East Reacts to September 11th,” *MERIA Journal* 5, No. 4, December 2001.

²⁸³ Ottaway and Kaiser, “After Sept. 11, Severe Tests Loom for Relationship.”

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Ottaway and Kaiser, “After Sept. 11, Severe Tests Loom for Relationship.”

²⁸⁶ Tom Bowman, “Transportation, staging areas for troops at issue,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 24, 2001.

Operations Center (CAOC) at Prince Sultan Air Base.²⁸⁷ The Saudi royals had not yet offered their approval for any air operations, unless the U.S. was prepared to comply with their restrictions.²⁸⁸ Securing Saudi cooperation against al-Qa'ida financial support and other efforts also proved difficult, as several media reports corroborated this.²⁸⁹

In the meantime, a level of anger not seen since the Oil Embargo of 1973–74, consumed many Americans. Pervasive cynicism permeated media and political circles, as the Saudis were perceived as not being sufficiently proactive in curtailing terrorist activity. Furthermore, anti-American rhetoric was on the rise in Saudi Arabia and suspicions arose that the Saudis were encouraging this rhetoric to displace the hostility their subjects harbored towards their own government.²⁹⁰ Other topics brought about in the media included the antiquity of Saudi society and their regimented belief system, especially their maltreatment of women.²⁹¹ Americans were also reminded of their archenemy's origins when they learned that members of the bin Laden family residing in the United States had been airlifted home *en masse* at the request of the Saudi government.²⁹²

Likewise, Saudi anger was equally fervent, as there were many U.S. policies vehemently opposed by the general Arab public. Aside from the obvious opposition to Israeli actions against the Palestinians, they were also protesting U.S. military action in Afghanistan, which had resulted in the capture of Arabs, subsequently jailed in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.²⁹³ Saudis also boycotted American products, reduced tourist

²⁸⁷ Eric Schmitt and Michael R. Gordon, "Top Air Chief Sent," *New York Times*, September 21, 2002.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Neil MacFarquhar, "Saudis Reject U.S. Accusation They Balked on Terror Money," *New York Times*, October 14, 2001.

²⁹⁰ Hugh Pope, "War of Words Between U.S., Saudi Media Heightens Tensions In The Crucial Alliance," *Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2001.

²⁹¹ Colbert I. King, "Saudi Arabia's Apartheid," *Washington Post*, December 22, 2001.

²⁹² Patrick Tyler, "Fearing Harm, Bin Laden Kin Fled From U.S.," *New York Times*, September 30, 2001.

²⁹³ John Mintz, "Most Detainees Are Saudis, Prince Says; Return to Kingdom Is Sought; Bush Pledges Case-by-Case Decisions," *Washington Post*, January 29, 2002.

travel to the United States and divested billions of dollars.²⁹⁴ Bombing attacks in the Kingdom continued, killing more American and British expatriates.²⁹⁵

American officials sought to publically reiterate the sincerity of Saudi cooperation, while assuaging Saudi leaders that the views expressed in the U.S. news media did not represent the position of the U.S. Government.²⁹⁶ Saudi officials dismissed these editorialized criticisms as a Jewish ploy to discredit Arabs, as they perceived that Jews controlled the media.²⁹⁷

Tensions reached a new plane after President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, where he identified countries that comprised the "axis of evil," including Iran and Iraq.²⁹⁸ Reports surfaced that U.S. forces might be ejected from Saudi Arabia because of their unwillingness to support U.S. war efforts against another Arab country. There were also reports that Qatar was ready to receive U.S. forces at their newly constructed CAOC at the Al Udeid Air Base.²⁹⁹ A media leak further reported that Saudi Arabia would not be the base of operations.³⁰⁰ Following another leak, which revealed that a consultant had delivered a briefing to a Pentagon advisory panel describing the Saudi Arabia as an enemy of the United States, Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, once again explicitly ruled out the use of Saudi bases against Iraq.³⁰¹

²⁹⁴ Scott Peterson, "Saudis channel anger into charity," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 30, 2002.

²⁹⁵ Howard Schneider, "Bombing in Saudi City Kills American; Monarchy Braces for Eruption of Popular Dissent Against U.S.," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2001.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Elaine Sciolino, "Taking a Rare Peek Inside the Royal House of Saud," *New York Times*, January 28, 2002.

²⁹⁸ *The White House*, "Bush Delivers State of the Union Address," 2002; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> [Last Accessed September 16, 2008].

²⁹⁹ David B. Ottaway and Robert G. Kaiser, "Saudis May Seek U.S. Exit; Military Presence Seen as Political Liability in Arab World," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2002.

³⁰⁰ Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Plan for Iraq Is Said To Include Attack on 3 Sides," *New York Times*, July 5, 2002.

³⁰¹ Thomas E. Ricks, "Briefing Depicted Saudis as Enemies; Ultimatum Urged to Pentagon Board," *Washington Post*, August 6, 2002.

7. Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Departure of U.S. Military Forces

After Coalition victory in 1991, a few thousand U.S. troops had indeed stayed on to enforce the United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, which justified the no-fly zones over Iraq in Operation *Southern Watch*.³⁰² The UN resolution read in part,

The resolution condemns the repression of the Iraqi civilian population, including a clause to protect Kurdish refugees on the Turkish border. The no-fly zone in northern Iraq was not explicit in the resolution, but it was regarded that in order to protect both ground troops entering the area and airdrops of aid to the Kurdish population, a no-fly zone over the area was implied in northern Iraq. The resolution insists that Iraq allow international humanitarian organizations immediate access to all people in need of assistance and make available all necessary facilities for their operations. The resolution requests the Secretary-General pursue his humanitarian efforts in Iraq and report on the troubles of the Iraqi civilian population, in particular the Kurdish population and the suffering from repression inflicted by the Iraqi authorities.³⁰³

Throughout Operation *Southern Watch*, the Saudis did not object to small-scale U.S. responses to Iraqi aircraft or air defense units challenging allied aircraft conducting these over flights. Saudi authorities, however, continued to be opposed to large-scale allied military action against Iraqi targets.³⁰⁴

Saudi Arabia had already declared its opposition to a U.S. attack on another Arab country, and on March 19, 2003, at the start of Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, King Fahd further reiterated that Saudi Arabia “will not participate in any way in the war.” Several news reports indicated however, that Saudi Arabia informally agreed to provide logistical support to U.S.-led forces, and granted permission to conduct refueling, reconnaissance,

³⁰² Don Van Natta, Jr., “Last American Combat Troops Quit Saudi Arabia,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2003.

³⁰³ *Council on Foreign Relations*, “UN Security Council Resolution 688, Iraq,” April 5, 1991; <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11206/> [Last Accessed September 23, 2008].

³⁰⁴ Alfred B. Prados, “Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, The Library of Congress, February 24, 2006; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IB93113.pdf> [Last Accessed September 20, 2008].

surveillance, and transport missions from bases in Saudi Arabia.³⁰⁵ This informal support also included landing and over flight clearances as well as the use of a U.S.-built facility in Saudi Arabia, known as the Combat Air Operations Center (CAOC) to coordinate military operations in the region.³⁰⁶

Similarly, on March 8, 2003, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abd al Aziz announced that his government was allowing U.S. troops to use two airports in northern Saudi Arabia for “help in a technical matter.”³⁰⁷ Subsequent press releases indicated that the Kingdom had a wider role in the war than had been previously publicized.³⁰⁸ Additionally, the Saudi royal family further supported U.S. efforts by permitting the staging of special forces personnel from inside Saudi Arabia and allowing “some 250-300 transport and surveillance planes to fly missions from Saudi Arabia; and, providing tens of millions of dollars in discounted oil, gas, and fuel for U.S. forces.”³⁰⁹

In September 2003, despite these informal arrangements for the logistical support and use of Saudi facilities, the United States ended its thirteen-year residual military presence in Saudi Arabia, apparently succumbing to a well-known demand of Osama bin Laden and hard-line Islamic groups across the Middle East, though U.S. and Saudi officials were quick to say “the pullout was not due to this.”³¹⁰ But bin Laden had publicly decried the U.S. presence as early as 1994 and, in 1996, he disseminated a public condemnation entitled “Declaration of Jihad,” stating,

the greatest disaster to befall the Muslims since the death of the Prophet Muhammad, is the occupation of Saudi Arabia, which is the cornerstone of the Islamic world, place of revelation, source of prophetic mission, and

³⁰⁵ Prados, “Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations.”

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ John R. Bradley, “US Troops Quit Saudi Arabia,” *Daily Telegraph, UK*, August 28, 2003.

home of the Noble Ka'ba where Muslims direct their prayers. Despite this, it is occupied by the armies of Christians, the Americans and their allies.³¹¹

It was clear that mounting pressure due to the complications caused by internal dissent within the Kingdom, as well as the greater Muslim world, had simply pressured the ruling family into this decision. Furthermore, U.S. political and military pressure influenced this decision, too as the Saudis were constraining Western forces and their ability to prosecute the wars effectively in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

This military presence had once peaked at more than 500,000 American troops, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990.³¹² By the time U.S. forces departed Prince Sultan Air Base at Al Kharj in 2003, their numbers amounted to approximately 5,000 personnel, with over 200 planes.³¹³ The only U.S. military personnel remaining in the Kingdom were the 400 or so troops at various facilities throughout Saudi Arabia, comprising the USMTM, with the mission, “to provide maximum assistance in the development of the Armed Forces of Saudi Arabia into an effective combat force capable of defending the Kingdom against potential enemies.”³¹⁴ The USMTM has maintained that role since 1953.³¹⁵ Additionally, the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (USASAC) continued to administer PM-SANG, which seeks to “develop, within the Saudi Arabian National Guard the capability to unilaterally initiate, sustain and operate modern military organizations and systems.”³¹⁶

According to USASAC modernization, support under a PM-SANG mission is, “open-ended and includes training, supply, maintenance, operations, medical, construction, equipment fielding, equipment post-fielding support and a host of other

³¹¹ Bradley Bowman, “After Iraq: Future U.S. Military Posture in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Globalsecurity.org, “United States Military Training Mission (USMTM),” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/usmtm.htm> [Last accessed September 26, 2008].

³¹⁵ CRS Report for Congress, “Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations,” May 22, 2008; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf> [Last accessed September 22, 2008].

³¹⁶ CRS Report for Congress, “Saudi Arabia: Background.”

related activities.”³¹⁷ This program was chartered by, and operates according to, the terms of the 1973 memorandum of understanding.³¹⁸ The Vinnell Corporation, a subsidiary of the Northrup Grumman Corporation, is the primary U.S. contractor charged with training SANG units.³¹⁹ In 2004, terrorists shot and killed an American Vinnell employee based in Riyadh.³²⁰

In anticipation of the redeployment in 2003, the U.S. sought a new location for its forces. Qatar had already built Al Udeid Air Base in 1996 at the cost of more than \$1 billion.³²¹ Qatar did not have an air force at the time, but wanted to encourage the United States military to base its aircraft there.³²² The U.S. Air Force also built a backup air command center at Al Udeid, which could be used to run an air campaign if the Saudis did not let the Americans direct combat operations from the Prince Sultan base.³²³ The Qatari government pledged to allow a wider range of military operations than was permitted by the U.S. agreement with the Saudi Arabia.³²⁴ Hence, it was decided that the new Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) would be moved from Saudi Arabia to Al Udeid, which could accommodate 10,000 troops and more than 120 planes.³²⁵ The forward USCENTCOM headquarters was also to be located in Doha, Qatar.³²⁶

³¹⁷ CRS Report for Congress, “Saudi Arabia: Background.”

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, *Globalsecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/udeid.htm> [last accessed August 4, 2008].

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Michael Gorden and Eric Schmitt, “US Will Move Air Operations to Qatar Base,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2003.

³²⁴ Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, *Globalsecurity.org*.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ “Official Home Page,” United States Central Command, <http://www.centcom.mil/en/countries/aor/qatar/> [last accessed August 8, 2008].

8. Saudi Arabia and Terrorism

As with Sunni Muslim-led regimes in the Gulf region, Saudi leaders and its citizens were alarmed about the growth of Iranian influence in the region and the influence of the empowerment of Iraq's Shiite majority population on Sunni-Shiite politics outside of Iraq. The escalation of sectarian violence in Iraq since early 2006, which, in part was due to more assertive Iranian foreign policies, proved challenging to domestic support for the Saudi government's policy of restraint from intervention in Iraq.

Influential figures and religious scholars in Saudi Arabia were now calling for their government and fellow citizens to provide direct political and security assistance to Iraq's Sunni Arab community, and to confront what they perceived as Iranian-led Shiite ascendance in the region.³²⁷ One prominent example of this trend appeared in a dramatically worded editorial published in the *Washington Post* on November 29, 2006.³²⁸ Nawaf Obaid, a well-known Saudi security analyst and consultant to the Saudi government, stated that it was justified to support the Sunni minority in Iraq.³²⁹ The editorial created an instant debate about Saudi Arabia's intentions toward Iraq, in spite of an attached disclaimer indicating that its conclusions did not represent Saudi policy.

Obaid stated in relevant part,

To turn a blind eye to the massacre of Iraqi Sunnis would be to abandon the principles upon which the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] was founded. It would undermine Saudi Arabia's credibility in the Sunni world and would be a capitulation to Iran's militarist actions in the region. To be sure, Saudi engagement in Iraq carries great risks — it could spark a regional war. So be it. The consequences of inaction are far worse.³³⁰

Thus, suspicions became rampant about Saudi support for Sunnis in Iraq. In 2006, as the fighting in Iraq assumed a more inter-sectarian tone involving Sunni against Shi'a, Saudi concerns were heightened as they felt a compelling allegiance to their Sunni

³²⁷ Nawaf Obeid, "Stepping Into Iraq: Saudi Arabia Will Protect Sunnis If U.S. Leaves," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2006.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ Obeid, "Stepping Into Iraq."

brethren. Religious scholars in the Kingdom called for global Sunni support of the minority Sunnis in Iraq claiming that the West was in collusion with the Iranians to quell Sunni influence in the region.³³¹ Saudi Salafi activists also issued edicts, or *fatwas* declaring that the Shi'a were non-Muslims, which only served to heighten regional tensions.³³²

The events of 9/11 also changed the way Saudi Arabia was viewed, due to their perceived involvement in supporting terrorist organizations. Fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were Saudi citizens, which caused grave concern for the U.S. Government, prompting a higher level of scrutiny of Saudi involvement.³³³ Thereafter, the U.S. Government insisted that the Saudi Government take a more active role in counter-terrorism.³³⁴

In addition to the perceived failure of Saudi Arabia to identify the terrorists, it was also important to highlight other issues of terrorism that might cause the U.S. Government to question the terrorist's alliance with Saudi Arabia. Events leading up to the U.S. Government's concerns persisted, despite the Saudi's claim to renounce terrorism.

Various press reports indicated that private Saudi citizens were giving millions of dollars to Sunni insurgents in Iraq, ultimately funding arms purchases, although Saudi government officials denied such reports.³³⁵ When interviewed by journalists, several truck drivers described how they would transport boxes of cash, from Saudi Arabia into Iraq, to support the insurgents.³³⁶

³³¹ F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia: Iraq, Iran, the Regional Power Balance, and the Sectarian Question," *Strategic Insights* VI, Issue 2, March 2007.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ *Associated Press*, "Saudi Citizens Funding Iraq Insurgents," December 8, 2006.

³³⁶ Ibid.

Senior Iraqi officials further indicated that most of the Saudi money had come from private donations, called *zaqat*, collected for Islamic causes and charities³³⁷. This was considered a reliable source of funding, as *Zaqat* is considered one of the five Islamic principles that followers are required to abide by.³³⁸

This Islamic pillar is outlined in the Qur'an, as follows:

The obligatory nature of *Zaqat* is firmly established in the Qur'an, the Sunnah (or hadith), and the consensus of the companions and the Muslim scholars. Allah states in Surah at-Taubah verses 34-35: "34: O ye who believe! there are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in Falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (them) from the way of Allah. And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah. Announce unto them a most grievous penalty. 35: On the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs.— This is the (treasure) which ye buried for yourselves: taste ye, then, the (treasures) ye buried!" (The Holy Qur'an 9:34-35).³³⁹

Though Saudis knew the purpose behind *Zaqat*, many gave blindly to Muslim clerics, who in turn, funneled these donations to Iraq.³⁴⁰ Large donations were also collected from Muslims during their pilgrimage to Mecca, though the end user was typically not revealed.³⁴¹

In one case, over \$20 million in Saudi money was transferred to an Iraqi Sunni cleric who used the money to purchase weapons from the black market, including anti-aircraft missiles from Romania. A high-ranking Saudi general denied the money transfer and stated, "There isn't any organized terror finance, and we do not permit any such unorganized acts."³⁴²

³³⁷ *Associated Press*, "Saudi Citizens Funding Iraq Insurgents," December 8, 2006.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ "Zakat," *Islamcity.com*, <http://www.islamcity.com/mosque/Zakat/> [Last Accessed September 22, 2008].

³⁴⁰ Salah Naswary, "Saudis Reportedly Funding Iraqi Sunnis," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2006.

³⁴¹ *Associated Press*, "Saudi Citizens Funding Iraq Insurgents."

³⁴² *Ibid.*

In an effort to join in the fight against terrorism, the Saudi's curtailed illicit Saudi charity donations by imposing strict regulations on donations and having the charity organizations consolidate their funds in a single bank account licensed by the government and from which cash withdrawals were banned.³⁴³ Non-resident individuals or corporations could no longer open bank accounts without the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency's ("SAMA") approval.³⁴⁴ Ultimately, financing from Saudi charities resulted in a decrease in funding to the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

³⁴³ "A Report on Initiatives and Actions Taken by Saudi Arabia to Combat terrorist Financing and Money Laundering," Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, April 2004.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

III. CONCLUSION

At its inception, like most marital relationships, the partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia was easily defined and the rationale was clear. After World War II, the Saudi Kingdom's vast oil reserves and willingness to use its production capacity to ensure moderate and stable world oil prices, were deemed by Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration ("FDR") to be vital to American national security.³⁴⁵ In return for these strategic assets, the United States pledged to protect the Kingdom's oil supplies and obstruct those who would seek to control them, primarily the Soviet Union.³⁴⁶ Thus, when FDR met with King Abdul-Aziz bin Sa'ud ("Ibn Sa'ud) in 1945, a marriage of convenience was born.³⁴⁷ The original reasons for this marriage have long since faded away, which begs the question, "Is it time for a divorce or can this relationship be sustained?"

Throughout this tumultuous relationship, U.S.–Saudi ties have been continually challenged. Saudi Arabia struggles with societal pressures on its ruling family, prompting a revalidation of its legitimacy, and forcing the Saudi government to loosen the reigns on its historically repressed subjects in order to appease their desires for reform. Moreover, these reforms are further complicated by the internal strife between elements of Saudi society, with some drawing closer to Wahhabism, while others seek a more moderate form of Islam that enhances personal freedom and modernity. Consequently, as the Saudis struggle to distance themselves from a perceived "Western crusade," precipitating the reinforcement of Islamic values worldwide, the U.S.–Saudi relationship continues to suffer.

Nevertheless, the U.S. still views the strategic partnership as vital, as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has the largest oil reserves in the world, as well as being the leading oil

³⁴⁵ *Frontline*, "Saudi Arabia: A Chronology of the Country's History and Key Events in the U.S.-Saudi Relationship," PBS.org; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/Saudi/etc/cron.html> [Last accessed September 14, 2008].

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ CRS Report for Congress, "Saudi Arabia: Background."

exporter, having a significant impact on the global economy.³⁴⁸ Likewise, Saudi Arabia relies on close ties with the U.S. for its security and defense, due to the Kingdom's inability to defend itself, especially against formidable foes.

Saudi Arabia also desires to keep sea lanes and lines of communication open to insure the stable export of its oil. With the U.S. Navy, capable of providing maritime security for 2.5 million square miles of water, which includes the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean, the Saudi regime feels confident about its trade security.³⁴⁹

Saudis, however, are especially fearful of an Iranian attack, as its oil fields would be a valuable target. Iranian aggression could potentially incite Shi'a revolt within the Kingdom and throughout the region, as there are large concentrations of Shi'a in the Gulf, especially in Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and in the Kingdom proper.³⁵⁰ As champions of the Sunni Muslim World, the Saudi regime feels a moral obligation to contain Shi'a expansionism and support Sunni causes the world over. The Kingdom will, therefore continue to rely on the U.S. military for training, weaponry and protection, especially for its internal security.

An ongoing issue that challenges the U.S.–Saudi partnership is the Kingdom's internal struggle between Saudi reformers and Wahhab traditionalists, each battling to implement the correct flavor of Islam in the Kingdom and abroad. Saudi conservatives oppose what they perceive as sacrilegious social influences stemming from the United States and the West, as they have feared all along. American military power in the Persian/Arabian Gulf region and the perceived U.S. failure to facilitate a resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict continues to propagate Arab resentment in the Middle East, and has also spurred increased anti-Americanism and terrorism.

³⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "Background Note-Saudi Arabia," February 2008; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm> [Last accessed September 13, 2008].

³⁴⁹ "Area of Operations," USNAVCENT, <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/mission/index.html> [Last Accessed April 1, 2008].

³⁵⁰ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 230-242.

Many in the United States believe that Saudi Arabia sponsors terrorist movements throughout the world. This is believed, in part due to the rampant anti-Arabism and a naïve misconception that “all Muslims are terrorists.” The events of 9/11 only brought this xenophobic sentiment to the forefront, in both the United States and the Middle East. Hatred has been directed at Saudi Arabia because fifteen of the nineteen hijackers in the 9/11 tragedy were of Saudi descent, which spawned the perception that Saudi Arabia promotes this type of extreme fanaticism.

Anti-Saudi sentiment has also been exacerbated by conspiracy-theory-type films, such as filmmaker Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which sought to provide Americans a simple explanation for the events of 9/11. Additionally, numerous publications, such as *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold its Soul for Saudi Crude*, *Forbidden Truth: U.S. – Taliban Secret Oil Diplomacy, Saudi Arabia and the Failed Search for Bin Laden*, and *House of Bush, House of Sa’ud: the Secret Relationship Between the Worlds Two Most Powerful Dynasties*, have collectively added to the increased hatred Americans feel for the Saudis.³⁵¹

Americans have also reacted very negatively to televised slayings of kidnapped Westerners, perceived as having been inspired by Arab governments in a campaign to rid the world of “infidels” seeking to poison Islamic society with their modernity. This perception existed long before 9/11, and the increased ferocity of this angry discourse continues to erode the fragile ties Americans have with the Saudis.³⁵²

Anti-Americanism in the Kingdom is strong and may stem, in part from the pressure of American influences; the consequences of Saudi dependence on American military strength — which to Saudis perceive as detrimental to Arab and Muslim unity; Saudi frustrations with the American reaction to the second *intifada*; and erosion of peaceful efforts between Palestinians and Israelis. Sympathies or favorable views of

³⁵¹ HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal, “The United States and Saudi Arabia: A Relationship Threatened by Misconceptions,” *Address by Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Council of Foreign Relations* (New York, New York, April 27, 2004).

³⁵² Chris L. Coryn, with James M. Beale and Krista M. Myers, “Response to September 11: Anxiety, Patriotism and Prejudice in the Aftermath of Terror,” <http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/cris9.12.html> [Last Accessed September 2, 2008].

Islamism also create strong anti-Americanism. Salafists, who resist the Saudi government questioning the legitimacy of the royal family, are especially critical of the United States.

Recent American aggression, such as the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the ongoing campaign in Iraq are all considered to be an extension of a colonialist power that has existed for hundreds of years in the region. Salafists, including the famed Islamic scholar, Dr. Safar al-Hawali, produced a document in an attempt to convey a better understanding of Islam, entitled, “How We Can Coexist,”³⁵³ in response to a letter from American intellectuals, entitled, “What We’re Fighting For,” which outlines American values and the justification for the U.S. war on terror.³⁵⁴ The Salifist view is that the U.S. is fighting a war on Muslims under the guise of the “war on terror,” and that the U.S. has too many double standards when it comes to enforcing human rights. Israel’s abuse of Palestinians and its non-compliance to U.N. resolutions is cited throughout this publication as a case in point.³⁵⁵

Beyond Iraq, disappointment with the Israeli-Palestinian situation and America’s role in that crisis is not necessarily the source of Islamist extremism, though it remains an element in extremist anti-American discourse. It is a thorn in the side of many Arab liberal reformers because Saudis perceive the situation as a contradiction to the U.S. policy of “forwarding freedom” and the historic American championing of representation and justice under the law. Saudis, like other Arabs were amazed that Crown Prince Abdullah’s initiative in Beirut in 2002 on this matter was not met with a very public enthusiastic response in the United States. An effort to bridge the cultural divide therefore has to be the underlying emphasis of dialogue between the U.S. and Saudi governments, for ignoring this will only continue to perpetuate tensions.

Given the ongoing issues, it is unlikely that the United States and Saudi Arabia will return to the relatively stable and cooperative, but sometimes tumultuous relationship

³⁵³ “How Can We Coexist,” *Americanvalues.org*;
http://www.americanvalues.org/html/what_we_re_fighting_for.html [Last Accessed September 22, 2008].

³⁵⁴ “What We’re Fighting For,” *Americanvalues.org*;
http://www.americanvalues.org/html/what_we_re_fighting_for.html [Last Accessed September 22, 2008].

³⁵⁵ “How Can We Coexist,” *Americanvalues.org*.

of the past. Though relationship has obviously suffered setbacks and challenges to its existence, particularly given the circumstances in the last ten years or so, the overwhelming need to maintain the strategic partnership that has long been its foundation, continues to override the distractions of lesser significance, regardless of how important others may deem them to be. A divorce between these two nations, therefore, is not imminent, though the partnership has been strained and may never fully recover from all that has challenged it.

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