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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SAUDI ARABIA – NEITHER A FRIEND NOR FOE

by

LTC Falkner Heard III
United States Army

LTC Steven Volkman
Project Advisor

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CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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ABSTRACT

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Saudi Arabia and the United States have a tenuous relationship based upon mutual interests for regional stability, oil exports/imports, and continued economic development in the region. Since diplomatic relations were established in 1933, the United States has developed a relationship based primarily over these national interests. On the surface, both nations try to project a cooperative image to the world but, in reality, the United States and Saudi Arabia have significant differences (historical, cultural, diplomatic, religious, etc.) and conflicting national interests that, if not properly understood, could threaten their unique relationship and, ultimately, the stability of the region. Since 9-11 this dissimilarity has stimulated a contentious debate both domestically and internationally, trying to categorize Saudi Arabia as either a friend or foe. This paper will examine the controversy and come to the conclusion that Saudi Arabia is neither a friend nor foe, but rather just a strategic partner.

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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SAUDI ARABIA – NEITHER A FRIEND NOR FOE

The world we live in is significantly more complex than in the past. With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the strategic environment has become more volatile and uncertain. With rogue states in Iran, Iraq, and North Korea becoming centers for international terrorism, combined with an ever increasing hostile Muslim world, we as a nation must have a clear understanding of our relationship with other countries, especially those that are located in strategically sensitive areas of the world.

Possibly the most unsettling and potentially explosive geographical theater is located in the Middle East. With the Israeli/Palestinian conflict tearing the region apart combined with the ever present threat of war with Iraq, these and other confrontational issues have placed the United States at odds with regional Muslim countries, the most important being Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and the United States have, at best, a tenuous relationship based upon mutual interests for regional stability, oil exports/imports, and continued economic development in the region. Since diplomatic relations were established in the early part of the last century, the United States has developed a relationship based primarily over these national interests.¹ On the surface, both nations try to project a warm and accommodating image to the world but, in reality, the United States and Saudi Arabia have significant cultural, diplomatic, religious, and demographic differences that place their respective national interests and philosophical outlooks in conflict with one another.

Since September 11, 2001, the national debate has focused on trying to categorize Saudi Arabia as either a friend or foe. On the surface, this seems to be a logical debate with subject matter experts and media pundits attempting to justify one polarized position over the other. Although entertaining in nature, both points of view are wrong in their intellectual discussion. This paper will examine the friend versus foe debate and show that Saudi Arabia is neither a friend nor foe, but rather just a strategic partner. It is a partnership that is symbiotic in nature requiring both the United States and Saudi Arabia to cooperate on the international stage - whether they like it or not. The journey to understand this unique relationship requires the reader to first have a good grasp of Saudi Arabia, its people, and culture. Only by comprehending the past and present will the national interests that tie and pull at our two countries be brought into focus.

HISTORY OF SAUDI ARABIA

The Arabian Peninsula has been the home to nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes for thousands of years. The people of the region lived along critical trade routes and were

influenced by many diverse civilizations to include Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, Rome, Byzantium, India, China, and Persia to mention just a few.²

The Koran, or book of faith for Islam, was introduced by the Prophet Muhammad in the cities of Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula around 610 A.D. This was the beginning of Islam which spread throughout the region from the Atlantic Ocean to central Asia. For centuries during the Middle Ages the Muslim Arab civilization was the dominant influence in the world providing stability for the region and contributing to the intellectual advancement of mankind. The Arabs of the time made significant contributions to the academic fields of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, literature, physics, chemistry, and many other disciplines.³

This dominance in the region lasted until the 13th century when the Mongols invaded and destroyed much of the Arab's eastern empire.⁴ Their presence started a gradual decline of regional self rule that did not stop until around the 18th century when a local leader named Muhammad bin Saud started to establish his influence in the region.

For the next century and a half, the Saud family's control over parts of Saudi Arabia fluctuated as it fought against Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and local tribes for dominance on the Arabian Peninsula. In 1902, Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, a descendent of Muhammad bin Saud, conducted a daring assault on Fort Musmak and captured the city of Riyadh. This was the beginning of Saudi Arabia as we know it today. Over the next 30 years, Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, also known internationally as Ibn Saud, continued his conquest of the Arabian Peninsula until in 1932, all regions were unified as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.⁵ Considered the father of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud is revered as the Saudi version of George Washington.

RELIGION

Saudi Arabia is considered the birthplace of Islam, one of the most dominant and pervasive religions on the planet. Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad and Medina his burial place, are the two holiest sites in the Muslim world; so holy in fact that the official title of the King of Saudi Arabia is Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. With a following of over one billion people around the world to include two million in the United States alone, Islam is not a religion of convenience but rather a way of life. It is a faith based upon what is termed the Five Pillars of Islam.⁶

The first pillar is the profession of faith "There is no god but God: Muhammad is the messenger of God". This phrase is similarly reflected in Arabic on the Saudi flag "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet" reinforcing the importance of religion in Saudi society. The second pillar is the requirement to pray five times a day. Muslims from around the

world kneel down and pray toward the holy Ka'abah in Mecca. In Saudi Arabia, like in other Muslim countries, shops, offices, restaurants, public buildings etc. all close during prayer time to allow Muslims to practice their faith. Third is the necessity to give a portion of income or payment to help the Muslim community. Charities play a large role in the Saudi life, a role that is taken very seriously. Fourth is the obligation to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. From sunrise to sunset, Muslims are required to avoid eating and drinking as a sign of religious discipline. Finally, the fifth pillar is the requirement to conduct at least one pilgrimage to Mecca during one's lifetime. Called hajj, millions of Muslims from around the world go to Mecca to practice their faith en masse.⁷

Islam is considered by many religious experts as a compassionate, caring, and giving religion. Traditional in origin, when practiced in Saudi Arabia it fosters a cultural environment that is very conservative in nature.⁸ This is because many in the country follow a very strict version of Islam called Wahhabism. This form of Islam is viewed by the West as being repressive towards women. Women are educated separately from men, are not allowed to interact socially with the opposite sex, and must wear the black abaya from head to toe. Although repressive in nature, this is the way it has been for centuries. Their religion and traditions dominate every aspect of Saudi life from the day they are born until death.

WAHHABI THEOLOGY

The social, economic, political, and cultural environment in Saudi Arabia has been significantly influenced by a religious movement called Wahhabi. Started in the mid 1700s, this movement dominates the way Saudis think, behave, and act both publicly and privately. The movement was started by a religious scholar named Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab who lived in the Saudi region of Najd.⁹

Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab's influence derived from a belief that Muslims of the time were not practicing the true faith of Islam as laid down by the Prophet Muhammad in the Koran. Many Muslims were practicing a version of Islam called Shia which involved the practice of visiting and praying to shrines. The Imams or holy men were revered even after death and Muslims would pray at their graves as a way to ask favors and communicate with God. This greatly disturbed Muhammad ibn Abd Wahhab who started to preach against the popular Shia practice.¹⁰ Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab believed in a very strict and literal interpretation of the Koran that involved "a oneness with God" and clearly spelled out good from bad behavior. As an example, he felt Muslims should punctually pray together five times a day in a very ritualistic manner. Forbidden behavior included drinking of wine or any other intoxicants,

smoking, music, and dancing. The dress for Saudis had to be modest and conservative, especially for women. The emphasis on conformity to many rules and laws as professed by Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab went against the popular form of Shia.¹¹ Realizing that his form of Islam would never prevail without support from regional leaders, he moved to the town of Ad Diriyah located outside of present day Riyadh.¹²

Upon his arrival in Ad Diriyah, he formed a partnership with a tribal leader named Muhammad ibn Saud, the founder of the present day Saudi Royal Family. Together they formed a political and religious alliance that dominates the social and political culture of Saudi Arabia today. The partnership between Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, his followers, and the Al Saud family over the next 250 years brought about a symbiotic union that made political constancy a religious obligation. According to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, all Muslims must make an oath of allegiance to a Muslim leader. In return, the leader must rule in accordance with God's laws as laid down in the Koran; the interpretation of which is based upon Wahhabism.¹³ As Wahhabism spread to different parts of Saudi Arabia, it bound the people together and provided a framework of commonality that transcended parochial loyalties. When King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud unified the country in 1932, he used Wahhabism to unify the nation by saying a devotion to Islam and to himself as the rightful Muslim leader was the correct way forward for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Over the centuries, this strong union between the Al Saud Family and religion gives the present day Royal Family its legitimacy as a ruling power.¹⁴ For in Saudi Arabia, the people, their version of Islam, and the Royal Family are intertwined as a cultural whole. This understanding of Saudi Arabia, its history, religion, and people now sets the stage to understanding the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

UNITED STATES AND SAUDI ARABIA – A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The United States and Saudi Arabia have similar yet different national interests. These differences bind and pull at our two countries both politically and economically. Our national interests of defending the nation; fostering peaceful relations with other countries; personal, economic, and political freedom; and respect for human dignity are the pillars of American society.¹⁵ The United States thrives in a democracy and views itself as the leader of the free world where freedom and human rights are the inalienable right of all people, regardless of nationality. As stated by President George Bush in The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002,

In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity. People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children – male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society – and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.... Freedom is the non – negotiable demand of human dignity: the birthright of every person – in every civilization. Throughout history, freedom has been threatened by war and terror: it has been challenged by the clashing wills of powerful states and the evil designs of tyrants; and it has been tested by widespread poverty and disease. Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all these foes. The United States welcomes our responsibilities to lead in this great mission.¹⁶

Our national interests act as a beacon and guiding light for the strategic direction the United States will take in the future and provides the parameters for her conduct on the international stage. It is the basis from which The National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy are derived. More importantly, United States' interests focus the efforts of national power (political, economic, military, and informational) and show the resolve of the United States to the international community.

Like the United States, Saudi Arabia is also guided by national interests. These national interests determine the direction the country is to take and provide the framework for her international behavior. These national interests are harder to discern, in comparison to the United States, but can be inferred from foreign policy goals and objectives.

Saudi Arabia's national focus is internal security; maintaining its position as the dominant country in the region; defending Muslim interests and holy sites; promoting unity among regional Muslim countries; and fostering good relations with oil consuming nations.¹⁷

Saudi Arabia became a signatory of the United Nations in 1945 and, since then, has become a major player on the global stage. The country is a member of a number of key international organizations including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and many regional Islamic financial organizations. A key member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Saudi Arabia's main economic interest is the stabilization of the oil industry both regionally and globally. As one of the foremost producers and exporters of oil in the world, Saudi Arabia understands its survival as a viable economic regional power is dependent upon fostering and maintaining excellent relations with key oil consuming counties; the most important being the United States.¹⁸

To maintain its influence as a key territorial power, Saudi Arabia plays a major role in projecting itself as an Islamic leader whose focus is to foster solidarity among regional Muslim countries. It does this by playing a key role in mediating local conflict in the region, most importantly, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Saudi Arabia seeks a peaceful solution to the Israeli/Arab discord and, for decades, has worked with other Islamic countries as a member of the Arab League to rectify this explosive issue.¹⁹

Of all its national interests, possibly none is more important to Saudi Arabia than security of the nation. Possessing two separate militaries, the Ministry of Defense and Aviation and the Saudi Arabian National Guard, these organizations are commanded by brothers of the King with the sole purpose of protecting the country and monarchy from any foreign or domestic threat. By placing the security of the country in the hands of key members of the Royal Family, this system fosters loyalty to the King while simultaneously maintaining the status quo. Viewed internally by many Saudis as 'keepers of the faith', protecting the two holiest sites in the Islamic world, Mecca and Medina, is also paramount. Helping support the military in securing the Kingdom are the police forces. These internal forces fall under the control of the Minister of Interior, once again, headed by a member of the Royal Family. Maintaining control of the country and keeping the monarchy in power is almost a paranoid obsession: an obsession that, at times, violates what the United States considers basic human rights and inalienable freedoms. These Saudi national interests, when compared to those of the United States, create a relationship that is both congruent and incongruent at the same time.

Oil and regional security concerns are two factors that bind the United States and Saudi Arabia together. The Saudi economy is dominated by the oil industry which accounts for 35-40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and 90-95% of export earnings.²⁰ Of that, Saudi Arabia provides approximately 20% of United States' imported crude oil and 10% of its consumption. In return, the United States is Saudi Arabia's biggest trading partner.²¹ This trade relationship and the continued flow of oil from Saudi Arabia is a key concern of the United States. Any significant disruption of oil from the region would have a major negative impact upon the economies of the United States and Saudi Arabia, the effects of which were felt during the oil embargo of the early 70s and the security of which has been paramount ever since.

Although the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have no official defense pact, our commitment to Saudi Arabia has been made clear by a number of informal agreements and remarks made by several American Administrations going back many decades.²² Originally concerned with the Soviet influence in the region, this dissipated with the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and was replaced by the aggressive behavior of Iraq and continued

uncertainty of Iran. Even though Saudi Arabia has improved its military posture since the Gulf War, it is still significantly smaller than the militaries of Iran and Iraq (see Table 1 below)²³

COUNTRY	FORCE SIZE	MAIN BATTLE TANKS	COMBAT AIRCRAFT	SURF. SURF. MISSILES ^a	CHEM WARF. CAPABILITY.	NUCL CAPABILITY ^b
IRAN	513,000	1,135	291	S	X	D
IRAQ ^c	429,000	2,200	316	S	X	D
SAUDI ARABIA ^d	183,500	910	417	I	-	-
YEMEN ^e	66,300	840	49	S	-	-
U.A.E.	65,000	331	101	-	-	-
OMAN	43,500	117	40	-	-	-
KUWAIT	15,300	310	82	-	-	-
BAHRAIN	11,000	106	34	-	-	-
QATAR	12,330	44	18	-	-	-

TABLE 1. SELECTED MIDDLE EAST ARMED FORCES

^a S = short range (70-1,000 km); M = medium range (1,001 – 3,000 km); I = intermediate range (3,001 – 5,000 km).

^b D = reportedly under development (now or in the past).

^c Figures represent estimates of Iraqi forces and equipment after Operation Desert Storm. Some older tanks are believed unserviceable. The aircraft total does not include approximately 112 combat aircraft impounded in Iran.

^d Force total includes active members of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (estimated at 57,000). Tank total does not include an estimated 145 French – manufactured AMX-30 tanks in storage.

^e Force total includes conscripts (estimated at 25,000). Tank total does not include 150 obsolescent Soviet – manufactured T-34 tanks.

SOURCE: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2000-2001* as found in *CRS Issue Brief for Congress, January 25, 2002*.

This imbalance in military strength in the region and concern for regional stability on the Arabian Peninsula has forged a military partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia based upon common security interests in the theater. Although oil and security may bind the two countries together, there are national interests that pull the two nations apart.

The United States was founded on the principles of liberty and freedom. These articles of faith bind all Americans together and are subsequently used as a measuring stick to judge other countries and their people. In Saudi Arabia, these axioms are not present.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is governed by a monarchy whose citizens have no legal way to change their political system. They are without the right to elected representation and there are no political parties. Currently ruled by King Fahd bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud, the government has affirmed the holy Koran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad to be the basis of the Kingdom's Constitution. Church and state are literally one. Possessing a population of approximately 22 million, of which nearly one quarter are foreigners, the country's

human rights record is rather poor.²⁴ This lack of emphasis on basic human rights is a contravention to some of the most fundamental of America's national interests – personal, economic, and political freedom. According to the U.S. Department of State's report on human rights,

Security forces continued to abuse detainees and prisoners, arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, and hold them in incommunicado detention. In addition there were allegations that security forces committed torture.... Prolonged detention without charges is a problem. Security forces committed such abuse, in contradiction to the law, but with the acquiescence of the Government. The Mutawwa'in [religious police responsible for enforcing Islamic law in public] continue to intimidate, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners. Most trials are closed, and defendants usually appear before judges without legal counsel. The Government infringes on citizen's privacy rights. The Government prohibits or restricts freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, religion [except for Islam], and movement.... Other continuing problems included discrimination and violence against women, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and strict limitations on workers rights.²⁵

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's political, legal, and social fabric is totally based upon its interpretation of the Koran. It uses this interpretation to defend its human rights record and reject normally accepted international definitions.²⁶ These converging and diverging national interests between the United States and Saudi Arabia causes conflict, not only at the highest levels of both governments, but also within American and Saudi society. Since 9-11, this friction has manifested itself in a national debate attempting to classify Saudi Arabia as either a friend or foe; a debate now worthy of academic exploration.

SAUDI ARABIA – FRIEND

The United States and Saudi Arabia have been long standing friends for many years. Going back to 1945 when President Franklin Roosevelt met King Abdul Aziz on board the U.S.S. Quincy, the two countries have forged a relationship based upon economic security and defense.²⁷ This relationship has prospered due to the commitments made by many presidential administrations over the past several decades. Following the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, President Bush (41) stated "The sovereign independence of Saudi Arabia is of vital interest to the United States."²⁸ A decade earlier in 1981, President Reagan commented "There is no way that we could stand by [and see Saudi Arabia] taken over by anyone that would shut off that oil."²⁹ As recently as April of 2002 when President Bush (43) met with Crown Prince Abdullah, the de-facto leader of Saudi Arabia, he stated,

The Crown Prince and I had a very cordial meeting that confirmed the strong relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States of America. Our

partnership is important to both our nations. And it is important to the cause and stability in the Middle East and the world.... I also appreciated the Crown Prince's assurance that Saudi Arabia condemns terror.... And we're constantly working with him and his government on intelligence-sharing and cutting off money. And we're reminding him on occasion where we find money flows, and the government has been acting, and I appreciate that very much.³⁰

This relationship continues to prosper because both countries are committed to peace and stability in the region as well as playing a viable role on the international stage.

Saudi Arabia played a key role in supporting the Madrid and Oslo peace processes, both designed to find an amicable solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This desire for peace in the region continues today with the Crown Prince putting forward a peace proposal that would formally recognize Israel and give Palestine their own state.³¹ This proposal is so significant that it has essentially changed the way Muslim countries view Israel and the conflict in general.

Saudi Arabia contributed substantial financial support in the fight against communism, not only in the Middle East but around the world. It also stood against Iran and their Islamic revolution in the late 1970s and insured other regional Muslim nations did not fall to similar radical fundamentalism, all hostile to American interests.³² During the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia was the key coalition partner that not only fought against Saddam Hussein but hosted all coalition forces. Today Saudi Arabia is host to approximately 5000 United States military personnel enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq or helping improve the fighting capability of the Saudi Arabian military.³³ Additionally, thousands of American expatriates work in the Kingdom helping pull the country into the 21st century.

As previously mentioned, Saudi Arabia continues to be an excellent consumer of American goods and has made significant contributions to the United States as immigrants and investors.³⁴ Although the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is a lightning rod issue that causes friction between the United States and Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom has not used oil as a weapon for over two decades. In fact, Saudi Arabia has made considerable efforts and kept OPEC in check to stabilize the price of oil globally.³⁵

Finally, Saudi Arabia is a key coalition partner in the fight against terrorism. Soon after 9-11, the Saudi Foreign Minister directed members of the Saudi Ministry of Finance and Central Bank to meet and coordinate efforts with the United States Treasury to prevent the flow of money to terrorist organizations; especially those funds coming from its charitable organizations. United States Treasury teams, in turn, made many trips to Saudi Arabia to help track down and cut the flow of money to organizations suspected of supporting terrorism. This joint effort resulted in the closure of many organizations with links to international terrorism.³⁶

Additionally, the Kingdom has audited all charitable groups for possible linkage to terrorism; developed new guidelines and financial control procedures to prevent terrorist organizations from using charities; blocked suspicious terrorist resources of over \$70 million; took immediate action to freeze 150 bank accounts suspected of being associated with terrorism; and helped identify and shut down the network used by Osama bin Laden to transfer money around the world. The two countries also established a counter-terrorism committee who meet frequently and share intelligence and law enforcement information.³⁷ This international cooperation with the United States and other countries has met with great success. Saudi Arabia “has questioned over 2,800 suspected [terrorist] personnel.... successfully negotiated with Iran for the extradition of 16 possible Al Qaeda fighters.... and has asked Interpol to arrest 750 people” who are suspected of contributing to terrorism.³⁸ As their Foreign Minister said on 26 April 2002,

After the 11th of September, we doubled our efforts, we worked in every way that we can, according to the means that we can, to exchange information, pursue those who are involved in terror, squeeze the resources that come to them. We have done everything that we can, to the satisfaction, may I say, of the United States government.³⁹

Saudi Arabia's efforts in the fight against terrorism have not gone unnoticed. As Philip Reeker, Deputy Spokesperson, Department of State said on 15 August 2002,

I think we've been quite clear about the support Saudi Arabia has given to us in terms of being a strong friend and ally in the war against terrorism, that we've been fully and very satisfied with the support we've gotten from Saudi Arabia in the many aspects of this war against terrorism – the financial aspects, the intelligence and information sharing, the law enforcement actions in doing that.⁴⁰

United States and Saudi relations go back nearly six decades. Over these years the relationship has been like a roller coaster as it confronted many economic, political, and cultural challenges. These challenges were met head on and subsequently matured the informal alliance. However, the events of 9-11 changed everything. Since 11 September 2001, this relationship has stimulated the national conscience causing Americans to reevaluate its ties to Saudi Arabia. This reevaluation has manifested itself in anger and a view that Saudi Arabia is an enemy that threatens the national security interests of the United States.

SAUDI ARABIA – FOE

The suicide hijacking of four commercial airplanes and subsequent loss of life have caused many Americans and congressional leaders to start viewing Saudi Arabia as a deceitful and subversive enemy who projected itself as a friend when, in reality, it was nothing more than

a wolf in sheep's clothing. They are perceived as an enemy who helped perpetrate the worst attack against the United States since Pearl Harbor. It is a known fact that 15 of the 19 terrorists were from Saudi Arabia and a large percentage of those confined at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba are also Saudis. Compounding this revelation is Saudi Arabia's inability to acknowledge and take responsibility for its part in the attacks.⁴¹ Quick to deny any involvement in the assaults by rationalizing away the event, Saudi Arabia's veil of secrecy has been lifted and its status as a legitimate nation state compromised.

As previously mentioned, Saudi Arabia practices a very fundamental version of Islam called Wahhabism. Considered by many in the West, especially those in the media, to be an extremely intolerant ideology, it spews hate towards non-Muslims and views them as infidels. This hate is communicated throughout the country in a number of ways, most notably through the school system.⁴²

Religious education is mandatory in all public schools and plays a large role in the life of a Saudi student. Rote memorization of the Koran and complete submission to its teachings account for nearly 40% of the daily blocks of instruction. Wahhabism, and its extreme views of intolerance are drilled into the minds of Saudis day in and day out because there is no separation of church and state. The youth of Saudi Arabia and their views toward the international community are shaped by these teachings; teachings that spout hate towards those who are different. This hate manifests itself in a culture that loathes Jews, Americans, and Westerners in general. With such animosity present in the country, it becomes a magnet for terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda to recruit its members.⁴³

Contributing to this contempt of the United States, Israel, and the West is the Saudi media. State run and controlled, the media bombards its audience with negative and hateful messages directed against the United States and her allies. Rarely will one see a positive clip on the United States in the newspaper or on television. Instead, the media projects images of Palestinian women and children being killed by Israelis using American made tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets. This hate that Saudis have toward the United States and other Western powers is directly tied to their detestation of Israel. An alliance with Israel is viewed by many in Saudi society as an alliance against Saudi Arabia and other Muslim nations. This constant bombardment of negative images of the United States is also verbalized by the imams in the mosques and discussed around the country in the various markets or souqs where the common Saudi goes to shop and socialize. Ironically, the Saudi government has the power to censure these negative images of the United States but refuses to do so largely because of its historical

ties to the religious ideology of Wahhabism. In turn, the Royal Family's inaction fosters a cycle of hatred and intolerance. Their support in the war against terrorism is also questionable.

Osama bin Laden, the most famous terrorist in the world today and mastermind of 9-11, is from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Although his citizenship was stripped in the 1990s, he is an inspirational leader to thousands of young disenfranchised Saudis. There is evidence that as many as 95% of Saudi nationals between the ages of 25 to 41 are sympathetic to Osama bin Laden and to his fight against the United States and other Western powers.⁴⁴ Indications are that Saudi money, much of it coming from its charities, has also been used to fund terrorist organizations as well as to spread the intolerant form of Wahhabism and anti-American rhetoric around the world.⁴⁵ This problem of charitable organizations funding terrorism was highlighted when evidence surfaced that Princess Haifa Al-Faisal, the wife of the present Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States, may have unintentionally given money to associates of the 9-11 hijackers.⁴⁶ Compounding this fiscal irresponsibility was a telethon given earlier in 2002 which raised over 100 million dollars for Palestinian martyrs and their families; yet nothing of this nature was done for the victims of 9-11 even though three-quarters of the suicide hijackers were Saudi.⁴⁷ Although it is not unusual for rich Saudis to contribute to charities, a key Pillar of Islam, the fact that some of it ends up in the hands of those who would harm Americans is embarrassing to Saudi Arabia and makes the government extremely defensive. More importantly, it creates the perception that Saudi Arabia is really a threat to the security of the United States.

Saudi Arabia's behavior is clearly inconsistent with the national interests of the United States and international norms in general. They were one of only three nations in the world that recognized the Taliban regime and helped support it financially. This support continued even though it was widely known that the Taliban harbored the most notorious terrorist organization in the world, Al Qaeda. The hate and intolerance that festered in Afghanistan had its roots in the radical form of Islam called Wahhabism, the major export ideology of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁸ The argument that Saudi Arabia is a foe was clearly put forward by R. James Woolsey, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency to a sub committee of the Committee On International Relations House of Representative,

The Saudis impeded the investigations into the Riyadh and Khobar Towers bombings that killed 23 Americans in 1995 and 1996. The Saudis refuse to participate in an FAA – run airplane manifest agreement that lets U.S. officials know who is arriving in the U.S. from abroad. The Saudis refused to take bin Laden into custody in 1996 when the Sudanese offered to deliver him there. They also refused to let the U.S. take Hezbollah's Imad Mughniyah (responsible for the bombing of our Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 and the murder of a U.S.

Navy diver in 1985) into custody when he had planned to stop over in Jeddah in 1995. Time and space does not permit chronicling the extensive and hideous lies about the United States and American Jews that are spread by the Saudi Ministry of Religious Affairs and government controlled media.⁴⁹

The intellectual debate trying to categorize Saudi Arabia as either a friend or foe has captivated the attention of the American people as subject matter experts and media pundits try to convince the audience of their bipolar positions. This argument, although entertaining, misses the fact that Saudi Arabia is neither a friend nor foe, but just a strategic partner.

SAUDI ARABIA – A STRATEGIC PARTNER

The events of September 11th have catapulted the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia into the limelight. Many Americans around the country, to include influential members of Congress, feel betrayed by the fact that 15 of the 19 terrorists were Saudis and angered by the lackadaisical, if not indifferent, attitude displayed toward the tragedy. These feelings are readily understandable considering the extreme loss of life and the psychological impact the attacks had on the American psyche. Compounding these strong emotions was the perception that Saudis were very similar to Americans. It was understood that they spoke a different language and dressed differently but it was assumed they were friends who shared the same morals, values, beliefs, and viewed the world in a similar fashion. This false assumption was ingrained in American society because of the long standing ties the two countries maintained over the years. For decades, Americans have known that millions of barrels of oil are imported from Saudi Arabia. Although the oil embargo of the early 1970s significantly strained relations between the two countries, this event has become nothing more than an insignificant footnote in American history. With the great success the United States had in the Gulf War and having an ever so limited understanding of the role Saudi Arabia played in the conflict, Americans assumed they were a close friend, similar to the type of relationship the United States has with Great Britain or Canada – this is not the case.⁵⁰

The United States' position toward Saudi Arabia should not be couched in terms of friend or foe, but rather as a strategic partner who shares a finite number of common national interests.⁵¹ America's bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia should be viewed as professional in nature - not personal. Key areas of mutual concern include arms transfer, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, trade, unencumbered air/sea lines of communication in the region, and Arab/Israeli concerns in general.⁵² Although these are key issues that affect the national interests of both countries, the primary strategic bond that forces the United States and Saudi Arabia to engage each other is the issue of oil for security. The free flow of oil from the Arabian Gulf and stability

in the region are the driving forces that cause the two countries to interact with each other on the international stage. If it were not for this strategic concern, the association between the United States and Saudi Arabia would be relatively insignificant.

The United States and Saudi Arabia did not fight side by side during Desert Storm because the two countries were friends, they fought because both had mutual national interests in preventing Saddam Hussein from gaining additional oil fields and, subsequently, greater control over the region. This common strategic national interest has been in place since World War II and was clearly articulated in the 1980 Carter Doctrine; a doctrine that unmistakably stated that the United States will not allow a hostile country to take over the largest oil reserves in the world.⁵³ Our military to military contact with Saudi Arabia epitomizes this strategic relationship and reinforces the notion that the United States and Saudi Arabia are strategic partners, partners that have to tolerate the pros and cons of the relationship for the benefit of both countries.

MILITARY TO MILITARY CONTACT – A REFLECTION OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The present military to military policy with foreign countries is best spelled out in the September 30, 2001, Quadrennial Defense Review. It states,

The need to strengthen alliances and partnerships has specific military implications. It requires that U.S. forces train and operate with allies and friends in peacetime as they would in war. This includes enhancing interoperability and peacetime preparations for coalition operations, as well as increasing allied participation in activities such as joint and combined training and experimentation.⁵⁴

Upon examination, this policy in many ways is a double edged sword when interacting with Saudi Arabia. It supports the strategic relationship by: demonstrating American commitment to Saudi Arabia, improving interoperability with Saudi forces, and deterring aggression in the region.⁵⁵ Although the term “engagement” is not used by the present Administration, its meaning is at the heart of any military to military program. Our cooperative military coordination in Saudi Arabia promotes communication between the two countries and directly supports political, economic, and informational efforts aimed at strengthening ties with the host country.⁵⁶ Military to military relations have enhanced Saudi Arabia’s military program through training exercises and direct involvement of American military advisors. The policy enables the Saudi government to develop a more professional military able to play a larger role in self-defense thereby enhancing stability in the region – a key national interest of both countries.⁵⁷

Through programs such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Saudi Arabia is able to professionally develop their soldiers by sending them to military schools in the United States while simultaneously enabling the government to purchase military hardware.⁵⁸ As stated in the Fiscal Year 2003, Congressional Budget Justification FOREIGN OPERATIONS,

Providing military instruction at a reasonable cost reinforces the U.S. – Saudi bilateral training programs managed by the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) and the United States Military Training Mission (USMTM) programs and also ensures continued close U.S. – Saudi military interaction. Saudi attendance at Professional Military Education (PME) courses helps foster one-to-one relationships that pay invaluable rewards later in the form of interoperability, coordination, and mutual understanding. Also, maintenance, logistics, and specialist training will enhance the Saudi military's value as a training and coalition partner.⁵⁹

American military to military contact enables Saudi soldiers to possess the tactical skills required to be interoperable with United States forces and provides them the technical skills necessary to maintain FMS equipment. Finally, military to military interaction provides Saudi soldiers greater exposure to U.S. values and ideas, thereby fostering a better understanding of democracy, human rights, and the American way of life.⁶⁰ The primary organizations tasked with executing the aforementioned ends and ways are USMTM and the Office of the Program Manager-Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG).

The USMTM element in Saudi Arabia was established in 1953 with the mission to advise the Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA) while OPM-SANG was established in 1973 to advise the SANG [an active duty full time fighting force].^{61,62} Although USMTM falls under the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and OPM-SANG under Army Material Command (AMC), both have the strategic mission to improve the Saudi Arabian military by providing dedicated military advisors. As stated above, USMTM and OPM-SANG have made many positive contributions in support of Saudi Arabia but their presence has also been a destabilizing influence in the region i.e. a double edged sword.

Since the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the United States' presence in Saudi Arabia has received critical and sometimes unwanted attention not only domestically but also internationally among its Middle East neighbors. The close military cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia has, to some degree, spurred regional arms races, undermined internal stability due to high level military expenditures, and increased opposition to United States soldiers in the country.⁶³

Previous arms sales to Saudi Arabia, to include a package of nearly \$2.7B announced by the Department of Defense in September 2000 [light armor vehicles, anti-tank weapons, F-15 fighter maintenance/simulators etc.],⁶⁴ has significantly increased the level of military technology in the Middle East and made regional countries, to include Israel, enhance their defense posture. Denying some regional countries of equipment while selling it to others [Egypt not getting the Apache Longbow but Saudi Arabia possibly getting the technology] only fosters regional tension and hostility. This is especially noticeable when hostile regional countries such as Iraq and Iran look to other arms exporters to maintain some degree of technological balance.⁶⁵ This problem is only compounded by the large sums of money Saudi Arabia expends on maintaining its military.

Low oil prices in the 1990s, a \$60B bill from the Desert Storm, and military expenditures that amount to 18% of the gross national product (GNP) [United States spends approximately 4.6% of GNP] have caused large budget deficits in Saudi Arabia. To make up for this deficit, Saudi Arabia has cut back on popular public subsidies such as water, electricity, and gas. These cutbacks have caused dissension within Saudi society and weakened the Royal Family's hold on the country. Further public cutbacks could cause civil disorder.⁶⁶

Finally, it is also quite evident that there is opposition to American forces in Saudi Arabia. The Gulf War brought in over 500K Western soldiers, the vast majority of which were American. This large influx of Western/non-Muslim soldiers was viewed by many in Saudi society as an affront to Arabian and Saudi culture. This hostility did not dissipate with their redeployment and was made readily apparent when in 1995 OPM-SANG was bombed killing eight military and civilian personnel. Nineteen airmen were killed the following year at Khobar Towers.⁶⁷

The success of American military to military contact with Saudi Arabia epitomizes and reinforces the premise that the two countries are just strategic partners. In spite of numerous problems and differences, many destabilizing to both countries, the relationship continues because of common national interests. It is acceptable for strategic partners to disagree both publicly and privately. Subject matter experts and media pundits who say the relationship needs to change in order categorize it as either friendly or hostile ignore the military organizations that have been established to properly mirror the complex nature of the relationship. As stated by the Middle East analyst James A. Russell,

Fundamentally altering the U.S. – Saudi bilateral relationship would have serious consequences for Saudi security and peace in the Middle East. It could potentially render the U.S. – trained and equipped Saudi military unable to defend the Kingdom and would deny the United States the opportunity to continue working with the dominant regional power to achieve collective defense

and regional military integration. Any serious suggestions that the 50-year partnership needs to be fundamentally altered should carefully consider these costs.⁶⁸

The strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia is built upon common national interests that have been better understood by senior military officers and diplomats than by the citizenry of either country. Although it would be unwise to significantly alter the relationship, there is always room for improvement and an opportunity to pursue viable courses of action.

FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION

The United States and Saudi Arabia have a unique relationship when compared to other countries in the world. There are political, military, economic, and informational elements of power that both countries use to further their domestic and international agendas. For the United States to improve this strategic partnership requires the government to pursue and synchronize courses of action in each of the four elements of national power.

POLITICAL:

- Recognize that Saudi Arabia is just a strategic partner with limited number of common national interests and even fewer cultural interests. The bonding political consideration should continue to be oil for security.
- Encourage Saudi Arabia to reevaluate its school curriculums to ensure hate and intolerance toward non-Muslims is not taught.⁶⁹
- Encourage Saudi Arabia to pressure the imams to practice a more tolerant form of Islam not rooted in Wahhabism.
- Work with Middle East leaders to find a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Put pressure on Muslim countries to officially recognize Israel as an independent state and its right to exist. Put pressure on Israel to establish talks with the Palestinian Authority and to understand the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza is unacceptable. Finding a solution to the conflict and giving Palestine its own state will significantly reduce the hate directed towards the United States due to its alliance with Israel.
- Support Crown Prince Abdullah's peace proposal and encourage other regional Muslim countries to take a larger role in the process.

MILITARY:

- Continue to foster closer relations with other Arabian countries with the goal of increasing military presence in the region while simultaneously limiting American dependence on Saudi basing policies.
- Increase the number of American military advisors to Saudi Arabia. Military to military contact compliments the economic, diplomatic, and informational elements of national power and strengthens American commitment and ties to Saudi Arabia. To lessen or eliminate this program will only sever lines of communication, cause misunderstanding, and foster distrust – ironically key goals of Osama bin Laden.
- Organize the global war on terrorism by geographical areas. Make key regional countries responsible for fighting the war in their region with theater efforts being synchronized and coordinated by the United States. Responsible regional countries could be the United States for the Americas, Egypt for Africa, Saudi Arabia for the Middle East, Japan for Asia etc. By placing regional powers in charge, the United States enhances the synergistic effects of the effort while simultaneously adding to its legitimacy.

ECONOMIC:

- Reduce American dependence on Saudi oil imports by encouraging exploration and development of alternative sources of oil in regions such as Russia and the Caspian Sea.⁷⁰
- Dedicate greater resources to the research and development of alternative fuels.
- Continue to emphasize economic reform and accountability to stop the flow of money to terrorist groups. Work with the Saudi Ministry of Finance and National Economy to develop better internal procedures to track and take action on suspected charities and potential money laundering operations.⁷¹

INFORMATIONAL:

- Encourage Saudi Arabia to allow a free press to exist in the country. By doing so alternative views can compete with Wahhabi ideology to give Saudis a more objective view of both domestic and international issues.
- Encourage Saudi Arabia to be more positive when reporting on events involving the United States. Emphasize the importance and advantages of being fair and objective.

- Develop a comprehensive public affairs campaign plan that educates the Muslim world on what America stands for and the efforts she is making in the Middle East. Establish more TV and radio stations in the region to compete with state controlled media outlets as well as Al Jazeera, the controversial Muslim TV station in Qatar.
- Develop a comprehensive public affairs campaign plan that educates Americans on the positive contributions Muslims have made to the world with emphasis on enlightening the citizenry that the true form of Islam is a tolerant and compassionate religion, not one of hate and violence.
- Encourage Saudi Arabia to play a larger role in the war on terrorism by being more vocal in speaking out against terrorism and emphasizing the point that killing innocent individuals, regardless of faith, is against Islam (when Saudi Arabia speaks, the Muslim world listens).

CONCLUSION:

The historical, cultural, religious, and diplomatic differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia will always prevent the two countries from ever having friendly ties like the United States has with other Western powers. These differences have been known for decades by senior leaders in both governments, but were only brought to the attention of the average American as a result of September 11, 2001. Since the tragedy, academics and the media have tried to categorize Saudi Arabia as either a friend or foe when, in actuality, they are nothing more than a strategic partner. This strategic relationship has existed for over 50 year and is based upon a limited number of national interests that bond the two countries together – the most important being oil for security. Our military to military contact reflects and reinforces this premise. With limited interests in common, each nation understands the importance of maintaining the strategic partnership; failure to do so would have a devastating impact on the economies of both countries, not to mention the world. The United States and Saudi Arabia clearly understand this, although they may never be true friends, the relationship between the two countries cannot afford to be adversarial or confrontational. With Saudi Arabia possessing the majority of the world's known oil reserves and needing protection from regional military powers, the ties that bind the United States and Saudi Arabia are symbiotic in nature. One provides protection while the other ensures the free flow of oil – at best a marriage of convenience. In summary, Saudi Arabia is neither a friend nor foe but rather just a strategic partner; a partnership that requires the two countries to interact on the international stage - whether they like it or not.

WORD COUNT=8,428

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