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Blood in the Wells: The Troubled Past and Perilous Future of US-Saudi Relations

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Blood in the Wells: The Troubled Past and Perilous Future of US-Saudi Relations

Abstract

Perhaps no region other than the Near East plays a more important role in the shaping of both the foreign and domestic policies of the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent deployment of hundreds of thousands of US soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the massive budgetary burden placed upon the United States government (and, by extension, its citizens) as a result of the War on Terror, lay heavily upon the consciousness of the media and the concerns of the American people. Much recent focus has also been placed on the impact that the need for secure petroleum sources has had in guiding the ways in which the United States determines economic and diplomatic policy toward the region, specifically Saudi Arabia and Iraq, as well as how that concern has molded the United States' domestic energy and environmental policies. Historically, the dealings of the United States with the Near East have been strenuous to all parties. While the United States has managed to work toward positive relations with some nations, there remains an apparently fundamental barricade to long-standing, peaceful, and prosperous relations with the many diverse nations in what is traditionally known as the Arab Middle East.

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Blood in the Wells: The Troubled Past and Perilous Future of US-Saudi Relations

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Dr. Richard Stahler-Sholk

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Introduction

Perhaps no region other than the Near East plays a more important role in the shaping of both the foreign and domestic policies of the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent deployment of hundreds of thousands of US soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the massive budgetary burden placed upon the United States government (and, by extension, its citizens) as a result of the War on Terror, lay heavily upon the consciousness of the media and the concerns of the American people. Much recent focus has also been placed on the impact that the need for secure petroleum sources has had in guiding the ways in which the United States determines economic and diplomatic policy toward the region, specifically Saudi Arabia and Iraq, as well as how that concern has molded the United States' domestic energy and environmental policies. Historically, the dealings of the United States with the Near East have been strenuous to all parties. While the United States has managed to work toward positive relations with some nations, there remains an apparently fundamental barricade to long-standing, peaceful, and prosperous relations with the many diverse nations in what is traditionally known as the Arab Middle East.

The disparate dominant ideologies of the United States and its Arab counterparts play a significant role in the difficulties that have plagued these relationships. Without question, the support of the United States for the state of Israel is a contentious issue which is not likely to be resolved, as far as the Arab world as a whole is concerned, anytime soon or without torturous difficulty. US support for "liberal institutionalism" and economic and social globalization is largely at odds with the spirit of Arab Nationalism

and staunch independence which has dominated the socio-political landscape of many Arab states in the Near East for the last many decades. At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically, the core American values of individuality, personal success, social liberty, and secularism do not mesh particularly well with the views of some Arab states which hold in high esteem the value of religious devotion and its integration within the governmental structure; nor are they congruent with the apparent tendencies toward social cohesion and group beneficence prevalent among a number of these nations.

A number of basic and perhaps insurmountable differences line the road to sustainable relationships between the United States and many of those states in the Near East with which it currently has tenuous or troublesome relations. The above (very brief) account does not even begin to take into consideration the numerous historical and pragmatic realities which present additional challenges. The key negative consequences resultant from the current state of affairs between the United States and Near East, however, comes not from our enemies (imagined, potential, or very real), but rather our single largest Arab ally within the region: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this essay will be to elucidate the nature of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. I will give an historical account of relations between the US and its Saudi allies, largely focusing on the numerous disagreements and difficulties which have arisen between the two partners. I will then assess the character and extent of the current United States relationship with the Kingdom using facts and figures from independent and governmental organizations and committees, with particular attention to the bartering of American weapons technology and military expertise for inexpensive Saudi petroleum. I

will follow this with an analysis of the status of human rights and representative government in Saudi Arabia, including attempts by domestic groups and individuals to advocate for the establishment of formal rights and constitutional limitations on the power of the Saudi Royal Family and Nejd religious authority. In concluding, I will offer a qualitative judgment of the state of US-Saudi relations, followed by some steps that might serve to improve or otherwise alter that relationship.

Our Troubled Past

Developing a sufficient understanding of the US-Saudi relationship is best undertaken within the frame of the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and that between the two countries. The motivations that guide the actions of both states cannot be ascertained without such analysis, given the seemingly unlikely and arguably untenable nature of such a relationship. Why would a country committed to liberty, democracy, and the non-entanglement of religion and government extend not only support, but promises of defense, to a restrictive Kingdom in which power is wielded entirely by an unelected hereditary monarch and fundamentalist religious order? Analysis shows that the original reasoning behind the formation of the relationship—not only that of the Americans, but also of their Saudi counterparts—is still largely intact. As the needs of each nation have changed over time, new rationales for the relationship and its continuance have emerged. It remains to be seen whether the new difficulties posed within a post-9/11 global environment will be taken in the same strident manner as previous challenges.

The beginnings of the Saudi Empire can be traced back to the 1700s and Muhammad bin Saud, a follower of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, the figure behind Wahabism—a formulation of Islam stressing strong belief in the fundamentality of the Quran as understood by early Muslims, opposition to Muslims who practiced what Wahabists considered polytheism, and a focus on theological and cultural individualism in place of adherence to commonly accepted social norms. (Yergin 1991, 284) Together, the Saudi family and Wahabis took control of the majority of the Arabian Peninsula within a half century, until incurring the wrath of the Ottoman Empire in 1818 when Wahabi expansion threatened the powerful Turks. Decades of work were undone swiftly at the hands of the Ottomans, and Saudi-Wahabi dominance of the Arabian Peninsula was checked, relegating the group to little more than a tribe. While the Saudi Kingdom was shortly re-established in Riyadh, familial infighting doomed this restoration to failure. One grandson of bin Saud, Abdul Rahman, acted as the governor of Riyadh, but strife with the al-Rashid family forced him into exile in Kuwait along with his son, Abdul Aziz. (Yergin 1991, 284)

While in Kuwait, Abdul Rahman attempted to popularize Wahabist Sunni Islam and recreate the Saudi Dynasty. Meanwhile, his son was educated religiously and politically, and given training in the ways of war by Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait. During this lull in Saudi family control of the region, a time of relative stability in what would soon become Saudi Arabia, American missionaries seized the opportunity to spread their religious message and opened up rudimentary medical clinics to serve the needs of tribes, marking the first known involvement of Americans in the area. These

missionaries and others in surrounding territories would end up treating hundreds of thousands of Saudis, playing a notable role in King ibn Saud's eventual affinity for Americans. As war broke out between the al-Rashid family and Kuwait, Abdul Aziz was sent to Riyadh to retake the city for the Saudi family. Although his first attempt to sack the city failed, he managed to sneak into the city during the night of January 15th, 1902, succeeding in killing the Rashid governor on his second endeavor. (Yergin 1991, 284) Several years of military victories established Abdul Aziz—now ibn Saud—as the de facto ruler of central Arabia. At the same time, he procured a large, dedicated army after ascending to the leadership of the Ikhwan religious movement. With the help of these devoted fighters, ibn Saud took control of areas in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, including some areas inhabited by Shi'a tribes, which were allowed to practice their religion with relatively little intolerance or persecution due to ibn Saud's understanding of the political importance of religious acceptance of conquered peoples. Following these victories in the East, ibn Saud added territories in the Northwest in the years after the First World War, effectively securing Saudi dominance within the Arabian Peninsula.

The Arabian Peninsula at the dawn of the 1920s was completely unaffected by the imperialism which had run rampant throughout the remainder of the Near East. As Great Britain put down anti-imperialist revolts in Iraq and Egypt, the Syrian rebellion against French control raged on, and the modern beginnings of torturous conflict were sparked by the proxy-imperialism of the British which called for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine via the Balfour Declaration issued in 1917, the only significant source of conflict within the peninsula was tribal warfare; its only noteworthy revenue-generating

enterprise tourism by Muslim pilgrims completing the *Hajj* by traveling to Mecca and Medina. British discontent with Saudi interference in Kuwait prompted the High Commissioner of Britain to arbitrarily create borders between Kuwait and Ibn Saud's territory, also establishing Saudi-Iraqi borders. (Yergin 1991, 285) Aside from this, however, Ibn Saud was left to his own devices within the region, allowing the leader's tribes and Wahabi supporters to capture the Muslim Holy Land of the Hejaz in 1923, a region which had previously been controlled by the British-backed Hashemites. The new King of the Hejaz was struck down with illness, however, and called upon the aid of Louis Dade, an American missionary in Kuwait, for medical attention. Dade was able to restore King Ibn Saud to health in a week, leaving the King thoroughly indebted to his new American friend.

At the same time, America began to eye the Near East with a thirst for oil, sparked by "accelerated industrialization, the mass production of automobiles, and electrification of households" which "had propelled the demand for petroleum in the United States well beyond its production capacity." (Oren 2007, 410) However, all known potential sources of petroleum were cut off to American exploration: Iran's oil resources were split between Britain and the Soviets, while Palestine, Syria and Iraq were the exclusive extraction zones of Britain and France per the imperialist 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, legitimized by a mandate of the League of Nations. Eager to tap into these vast oil resources, the seven largest US oil companies united with the assistance of the Federal Government to negotiate their way into the rush for raw materials in the Near East, working with Britain and France to create the Iraq Petroleum Company. Through

this agreement, the United States would receive around 24% of all petroleum extracted from within the IPC-controlled areas of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Palestine; in return, it would not explore elsewhere within the region for additional oil.

The Red Line Agreement of 1928 arbitrarily established the Middle East—the region open for exploration and exploitation by the IPC—as all of the aforementioned areas, as well as Turkey and the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula. Still relatively green to the power he yielded, King ibn Saud rightly feared the long arm of European imperialism, which had wrought havoc upon his northerly neighbors, encroaching upon his burgeoning Kingdom. Shortly after this international gerrymandering by the IPC, the economic depression which had the world in a stranglehold began to be felt in Saudi Arabia, as job losses and pay cuts within the Middle East took a toll on the Kingdom's largest source of economic production: travel to Mecca and Medina. Remembering fondly the American missionaries who had assisted not only his people but himself, the King believed that his best course of action would be to turn over to the United States exclusive rights to mineral exploration as a means of addressing the economic downturn within the Kingdom. Karl Twitchell, a friend of the famed American Anti-Zionist Charles Crane, was chosen to lead this vast undertaking, though his efforts proved fruitless until the discovery of oil on the island of Bahrain in the summer of 1932 by another group. In early 1933 Twitchell would begin negotiations, along with the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCOL), a non-member of the IPC, for exclusive exploration and extraction concessions. King ibn Saud, desperate for the highest possible immediate payoff, opened discussions with the IPC as well. "A bidding war ensued in which the two sides offered

increasingly stratospheric sums, which the Saudis then coyly rejected. The Americans ultimately triumphed, however, thanks to their willingness to pay in gold...” (Oren 2007, 413) In the end, the United States gave in exchange for exploration rights the total of \$15.5 million in today’s dollars, and millions more still in loans to come. (Oren 2007, 414)

This arrangement both solved Saudi Arabia’s significant economic woes and jump-started what would become one of the single most important diplomatic relationships for both the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for decades to come. The payoff was not immediate for Americans, however: it was not until 1937 that substantial oil resources were discovered, but by the end of that year Saudi oil production was skyrocketing. The King, pleased with the discovery, offered to Americans the opportunity to explore the rest of his land—for a price. Yet again, the King induced another bidding war, which the Americans shortly won over Japan and Germany to the tune of nearly one million dollars. In the late 1930s, challenges to American economic dominance in Saudi Arabia arose once again, with Nazi Germany unsuccessfully offering superior sums of money as a means to solicit access to vast Saudi oil fields. The State Department nevertheless refused to make formal the relations of the United States with Saudi Arabia, and turned down ibn Saud’s request for \$10 million in Lend-Lease Aid, need resultant from the Saudi economic downturn during World War II and the fear of Axis attacks on the Kingdom due to its relationship with America. Despite the fact that the United States’ relationship with Saudi Arabia was more significant and more imperative than those with any other Arab state due both to its vast oil reserves and

importance to the global Muslim community, the Roosevelt administration saw no legitimate point in supplying aid to “a backward, corrupt and non-democratic society like Saudi Arabia.” (Oren 2007, 418)

The American President would largely change his tune as the war lurched onward and the need for oil became a pressing issue in an economy already completely mobilized for the war effort. Attempts to lobby Iran for oil exploration were spurned by the relevant parties (the English, the Soviets, and nationalist Iranians), leaving only Saudi Arabia to quench the thirst of the colossal American war machine moving into the mid-1940s. With the importance of oil skyrocketing, ARAMCO (the Arab American Oil Company, formerly SOCOL) was given government permission to build new oil pipelines. The United States’ relationship with Saudi Arabia was fully legitimized when William Eddy became the first Ambassador to the Kingdom of ibn Saud. On February 16th 1943, Franklin Delano Roosevelt reversed his position, stated just four years earlier, that the government of Saudi Arabia was both unfit and undeserving of Lend-Lease Aid. The primary motivation for this reversal came on the advice of Undersecretary of the Navy William Bullitt, who brought to the attention of FDR that Britain had designs on Saudi oil resources. Believing Saudi Arabia unable to defend itself and fearing the potential loss of an American monopoly on the peninsula, Roosevelt placed the full force of western military technology behind the kingdom. “The defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States,” Roosevelt publicly stated, signifying the increasing strategic and economic importance of the ties between the two very different countries. Roosevelt would further bolster his government’s relationship with that of ibn Saud

almost exactly two years later in what would prove to be one of the most significant episodes in the history of American diplomacy.

The 1945 meeting between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and King ibn Saud was sparked by the increasing attention being paid to pro-Zionist movements in America, most notably the public declaration of support for the state of Israel by both Republican and Democratic parties. “Of all the American interests endangered by the Palestinian dispute, none was more imperiled than oil and no Arab figure more incensed by America’s Zionist drift than King ibn Saud...” (Oren 2007, 468) Roosevelt had personally seen to the creation of the War Refugee Board, which aimed to plan for Jewish repatriation to Palestine following World War II. As the establishment of the Jewish state in Israel was gaining momentum and support from the West, the Royal Family and Wahabi religious order outwardly expressed their dissatisfaction in a 1943 letter to Roosevelt, warning of “harsh backlash against American interests throughout the Middle East if, ‘God forbid...the Allies should, at the end of their struggle, crown their victory by evicting the Arabs from their home.’” (Oren 2007, 469) The outrage of King ibn-Saud, which Roosevelt believed could have significant trade repercussions (especially pertinent given the mobilized nature of the United States in the mid-1940s), compelled the American President to unprecedented measures of diplomacy in early 1945.

As the prelude to a tour-de-force of Near East politicking, Roosevelt met with long-time King Farouk of Egypt to discuss tourism and cotton production, and entertained the presence of immensely powerful Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, promising US support for Ethiopian independence in the face of Fascist Italy’s plans for domination. On

February 14th, King ibn-Saud and sixty of his closest men boarded the *USS Quincy* docked in the Great Bitter Lake. Despite Roosevelt's efforts to focus the discussion on US support for modernization within Saudi Arabia and the Near East as a whole, King ibn Saud was concerned singularly with the Palestinian issue. Despite the murder of millions of Jews across Europe and the unimaginable suffering of many more, King ibn Saud rejected outright any argument for repatriation to Israel. Saudi Arabia's King was committed to the position that if anyone should fit the bill of the Jewish refugee question, it ought to be "the criminal, not the innocent bystander." (Oren 2007, 471) What claim did the millions of Jewish refugees have to a region they had not occupied in any significant capacity in decades and which was now rightfully occupied by a substantial Arab population? If anywhere, the Jewish population displaced by the Third Reich ought to be awarded "the choicest German houses," ibn Saud reasoned. (Oren 2007, 471)

Convinced that no progress could be made on the issue, Roosevelt abandoned his attempts to argue for a Jewish state in Israel. Seemingly reversing his previously Zionist position entirely, FDR assured King ibn Saud that the United States would not assist Israel at the expense of the Arabs in Palestine, and reiterated his support for the defense of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, evinced by Saudi inclusion in America's Lend-Lease program two years prior. Beyond this, President Roosevelt promised the King that the United States would ardently defend and encourage the freedom and independence of other states within the Near East. Satisfied with the outcome of the discussions, King ibn Saud would count Roosevelt (who died two months later) as a friend, and America as a stauncher ally than ever before. Zionists the world over were outraged at the apparent

kowtowing of Roosevelt to the interests of ibn Saud; Arabs rejoiced at what many viewed as a key victory in the fight for Palestine. In retrospect, the eventful meeting between Roosevelt and ibn Saud has been viewed as “a landmark in America’s ascent to Middle Eastern hegemony” in which “the leader of the world’s most powerful democratic nation had in fact bowed to the dictates of an Arabian chieftain.” (Oren 2007, 473)

Cold War, Close Ties

The end of World War II and beginning of the Cold War era would prove to be a tumultuous era in the history of US-Saudi affairs. In 1945, Saudi Arabia agreed to allow the United States to maintain an airbase in the eastern city of Dhahran. This base would allow the United States to protect its economic interests in Saudi Arabia and was of great geostrategic importance given the ease of access to the Near East. The presence of a ready American military force was also of benefit to Saudi Arabia, a nation still fearing imperialist aims. Rather than France or Britain, however, ibn Saud—and by extension the United States—now had the Soviets to fear. The state of Israel in particular was viewed by ibn Saud as “a bridgehead into the Near East of communist ideas and influence.” (Lippman 2009, 213)

Saudi opposition to communism was not based solely on its (perceived or actual) connection to Zionism, nor the threat it might pose to the Kingdom’s economic interests within the region and around the world, but rather the challenge it posed to state sovereignty and the decidedly godless nature of its ideology. “The Kingdom always looked upon the principles and the ideas of communism as being anathema to human

thought and well being. There was a total rejection of Marxist ideas by the Kingdom...” (Bronson 2006, 136) In 1950, President Truman recognized the strategic and economic importance of a Saudi state free from socialist doctrine, and bolstered defense of the Kingdom, arguing that it was “important to the preservation of the peace and security of the Near East area, and to the security of the United States.” (Lippman, 277)

The early 1960s presented the opportunity for the United States to put force behind its statements when Nasser’s Egypt, angered at Saudi opposition to the Nasser-supported republican coup in Yemen, threatened Saudi Arabia with military action, going as far as to bomb a handful of Saudi cities and make weapon drops to areas potentially supportive of the Nasserist cause. Prince Faisal (who at the time performed many duties of the King in place of his irresponsible and untrustworthy brother, King Saud) believed that Nasser “had one sole aim, namely, to crush the authority of the Saudi Arabian Government.” (Bronson 2006, 85) Kennedy pushed Faisal toward domestic reform, arguing that internal reform which would benefit Saudi citizens was the best method of preventing the spread of Nasserism within the Kingdom. Kennedy believed he had succeeded when Faisal produced the ten-point “Basic Law for the Government,” but the institutional reforms it stipulated were largely without teeth and, aside from the abolition of slavery, failed to have any significant impact on the lives of citizens. When Egypt’s bombs hit Saudi soil in 1962, President Kennedy assured Faisal that he was working with the United Nations to arrange for a ceasefire. However, Faisal doubted the president’s commitment to the Saudi regime, discerning a pro-Nasser tilt in his negotiations, and Kennedy approved the deployment of fighter jets to demonstrate US support for Saudi

Arabia. In doing so, President Kennedy forfeited any possible leverage for reform within the Kingdom. (Bronson 2006, 88) Much like FDR in his landmark meeting with King ibn Saud, Kennedy collapsed on longstanding US aims, believing the relationship with Saudi Arabia too important to the maintenance of US hegemony within the Near East to risk its compromise.

As tensions increased between Egypt, Syria and Israel in 1966, Saudi Arabia assisted Syria and Jordan in their anti-Nasser rhetoric, alleging that Egypt had left its Arab brothers in Syria for dead by failing to provide defense against Israeli attacks on Syrian territory. Tensions within the Arab world increased sharply, particularly over a perceived lack of Egyptian support for Palestine. Meanwhile, Faisal was criticized for his own lack of support for Palestine, prompting the King to mobilize Saudi forces in southern Jordan as a show of solidarity. One day after the outbreak of the Six Day War, Nasser made false accusations that the United States had provided support for Israel via air cover, prompting Algeria, Kuwait and Iraq to end oil exports to the US and United Kingdom. Saudi Arabia followed suit the next day, with riots and attacks on American oil workers and diplomatic presences by citizens throughout the east of the Kingdom. Though American and British diplomats denied the rumors fervently, their claims were met with guarded skepticism at best and outright disbelief at worst. One British correspondent's experience sums up the status of the rumor within the Kingdom:

“President Abdel Nasser's allegation...is firmly believed by almost the whole Arab population here who listen to the radio or read the press... Our broadcast denials are little heard and just not believed... I consider

that this allegation has seriously damaged our reputation in the Arab world more than anything else and has caused a wave of suspicion or feeling against us which will persist in some underlying form for the foreseeable future...” (Podeh 2004)

The immediate cost of Nasser’s accusation—the 1967 Arab Oil Embargo by Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Libya, United Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia—stands as the first major explicit use of petroleum resources as a political bargaining chip by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Although the affected countries were able to successfully circumvent the short-lived embargo via alterations to trade agreements and the use of surplus domestic oil resources, OPEC members now had a fully realized method of international political ransom. Petroleum politics in particular are extremely effective due to the inelastic nature of oil to the major economies of the world. With the onset of the Yom Kippur War in October of 1973, history would repeat itself, and the oil-producing Arab states would use the power of the petroleum embargo to its full extent.

Perhaps more importantly, however, the defeat of the united Arab forces at the hands of the Israelis proved to be a landmark occurrence in the history of the region as a whole. With Nasser and the other Arab Unionists overpowered, the spirit of Arab Nationalism quickly declined. As a result, “power began migrating across the Red Sea from Egypt to Saudi Arabia” as the spirit of religious fundamentalism gained ground throughout the Arab world as an alternative to failed secular movements. (Bronson 2006, 103) With Cold War tensions still playing out in the Middle East, Washington would

make use of this strong religious spirit as a means to counteract the ‘godlessness’ of communism. Under Nixon, the aims of the United States in the Near East largely served the purpose of deterring the spread of communism throughout the region. Nixon charted an even handed course for the Near East, balancing prior staunch US support for Israel with a more equitable approach to its Arab neighbors, but put the fight against communism above all: “‘even handedness’ is the right policy—but above all our interest is—what gives the Soviet[s] the most trouble—don’t let Arab-Israeli conflict obscure that interest.” (Bronson 2006, 110)

As American interest in the Arab-Israeli peace process waned, unrest grew within Palestine and amongst Palestinian refugees throughout the Near East. The early-70s marked a lull in US-Near East affairs, with “virtually no Middle East Policy other than supporting the status quo.” (Bronson 2006, 115) Meanwhile, Palestinian malcontents within Saudi Arabia targeted bombs at the Saudi oil infrastructure, and Saudi Oil Minister Shiekh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the architect of plans to relegate OPEC operations increasingly into the public sector, warned that Saudi petroleum policy might require substantial alterations if the United States did not push for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied during the Yom Kippur war. As opposition to Saudi ties to the United States mounted with continued benign American support for Israel, Faisal came to fear that his base of support would be irreparably eroded by another outbreak of Arab-Israeli fighting. The king’s threats of embargo were nonetheless dismissed by the American foreign policy elite.

On October 6th, 1973 Syria and Egypt—backed by the Soviets and with help from Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—launched an aggressive attack against US-supported Israel. The goal of the United States was not to guarantee complete Israeli victory; in fact, Henry Kissinger sought the sort of outcome which would maintain Israeli independence yet allow for an Arab-Israeli peace process, and which would display to those Arab states potentially sympathetic to the Soviet cause the unmatched benefits of partnership with the United States. Faisal was impressed with the level of American support for the Israelis, remarking that “this is why we need to maintain close relations with the U.S.” (Bronson 2006, 118) Despite the impressive impact made by this demonstration of the United States’ ability to back its allies, Israel was still the enemy of the Arabs in the eyes of the monarchy, and America’s deeds would not go without punishment.

Gulf state delegates met in Kuwait a week after the outbreak of the 1973 war, agreeing to a seventy percent increase in oil prices; the next day, a meeting was held amongst Arab oil ministers to discuss punitive measures against supporters of Israel. Yamani and the other representatives agreed to cut production by five percent for every month that the United States and others supported Israel, with Saudi Arabia adding another five percent reduction per month to those states supporting Israel. When President Nixon agreed to re-supply Israel with \$2.2 billion in weaponry, Faisal ordered a full Saudi embargo. In order to gain compliance from ARAMCO, the king threatened complete nationalization. The immediate affect of the embargo (and more importantly, the production cuts) was a stranglehold on US military operations abroad. This, however,

could have left Saudi Arabia vulnerable to Soviet attacks, thus forcing Faisal's hand in allowing secret oil shipments to American warships. "The Saudi leadership [again] considered its geostrategic competition with the Soviets and its relationship with the United States more important than the Arab-Israeli one..." (Bronson 2006, 120)

The 1973 war came to an end on October 25th, but the OPEC embargo held strong so long as the United States made no commitment to an Arab-Israeli peace process. As oil prices in the United States were up seventy percent over the course of the embargo, Henry Kissinger's famed Shuttle Diplomacy made gains via ceasefires between Syrian-Egyptian forces and Israel. Progress with Saudi Arabia, however, was slow. Meanwhile, the economies of Western Europe and the United States came to a screeching halt, with consumer and industry alike crippled by inability to quench the need for oil. Growing frustrated with the situation, Kissinger publicly declared that "if pressures continue unreasonably and indefinitely...the U.S. will have to consider what countermeasures it might have to take." (Bronson 2006, 121) Yamani warned that any aggressive moves by the United States would result in Arab sabotage of oil fields, and the Shah of Iran worked toward a substantial price increase, now known as the Christmas Eve Massacre, which resulted in a doubling of oil prices.

Two substantial price increases in a two month period, on top of the already painful production cuts, left Western Europe and the United States in a perilous position in relation to its Soviet antagonists. "Soviet leaders were reveling in the 'crisis of capitalism' that the oil embargo was causing." (Bronson 2006, 122) Again fearing the geostrategic consequences of a weakened international anti-communist presence, King

Faisal led the charge to ease the affect of the embargo on the United States by substantially increasing production. Joined by the rest of OPEC, Saudi Arabia effectively ended the damaging 1973 embargo, though its official end did not come until March of the next year. As it had done early on in the embargo, Saudi Arabia served its own international self-interest (and those of the United States) at the cost of its local responsibilities to Palestine. Inasmuch as Americans felt anger toward Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members for months of debilitating economic hardship, many throughout the Arab world regarded the Saudi monarchy as turncoats, serving the interest of the United States to the detriment of the larger Arab cause.

Almost as though the 1973 embargo had never happened, US-Saudi affairs quickly normalized. Taking in hundreds of millions of dollars per day, Saudi Arabia was awash in petrodollars with quadrupled oil prices. The brand new Ford administration made it a central foreign policy aim to draw Saudi investment, so as to prevent or minimize Saudi funding of states with policies more in line with Arab interests (and often counter to American goals). Furthermore, Kissinger reasoned that if Saudi Arabia had a significant stake in the economic survival of the United States, it would be less willing to use petroleum as a weapon against its own interests. At the same time, newfound Saudi wealth was sure to attract unwanted international dangers, and it was to the benefit of the Kingdom to seek even greater defense assistance.

An ambitious economic cooperation agreement with the United States was undertaken by Prince Fahd, allowing Saudi Arabia's five-year economic, technology, defense and industry development plan to increase more than tenfold over the previous

five-year plan, totaling \$480 million. Saudi Arabia agreed to an American weapons purchase plan which saw its foreign military costs soar from \$305 million to well over \$5 billion in a two year period. With the Vietnam War coming to an end, the military-industrial complex needed fresh markets into which it could export its arms, and Saudi Arabia eagerly gobbled up everything from advanced naval equipment to American corporate military training for the Royal Family's private National Guard. (For detailed accounts of the extent and nature of the military-industrial complex, though not particularly as it relates to Saudi Arabia, see Chalmers Johnson's *The Sorrows of Empire* and Nick Turse's *The Complex*.) Increasingly, the Saudi and American economies were becoming tightly fused, with Saudi economic and technological advancement coming at unprecedented rates, much to the dismay of the largely traditional, conservative population. This only worsened when, in March of 1975, King Faisal was assassinated by his nephew for the 1965 murder of his brother at the hands of police during protests over the introduction of television and radio. While King Khaled ascended to the Saudi throne, Prince Fahd in fact fulfilled a larger political role, and was more acquiescent to American wishes and increased modernization than the balanced Faisal. (Bronson 2006, 138)

The Saudi administration continued its support for Palestine, pro-Islamic causes, and most importantly, the fight against regional communism, bolstered by its billions in surplus capital and often independent of American efforts (though certainly with its blessing). Post-Watergate distrust of the federal government left the Executive Branch tied with the passing of the restrictive Clark Amendment, and Kissinger was forced to achieve US foreign policy goals through alternative means. Through the recently

undertaken economic sharing plan, which provided blanket funding free from significant Congressional regulation, Saudi Arabia was able to again serve its own geostrategic interests while accomplishing those of the United States by funding and providing support for anti-Soviet aggression in Sudan, Zaire, Chad, Yemen, Ethiopia and Somalia. (Again, see Chalmers Johnson's *The Sorrows of Empire* and *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*.) At the same time, signaling an important future trend for the Kingdom, the Royal Family funneled money to the PLO (considered a terrorist organization by the United States), the African Islamic Center in Sudan (which trained youth in fundamentalist Wahabi interpretations of Islam), and the Faisal Islamic Bank (freely providing funds to Islamist groups of varying degrees of radicalism).

The Royal Family and The Mobilizing of Faith

The year 1979 would prove to be one of the most important in the history of the contemporary Near East, particularly for Saudi Arabia. As protests in Iran rapidly destroyed the political fabric of that nation, fear of a similar fate arose amongst the Royal Family. The return of exiled Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran came with the risk that Iran could replace the Kingdom as the most prominent Islamic state; beyond this, the swiftness with which the religiously fervent Khomeini had replaced a stable monarchy caused the Royal Family to dread a similar fate. These fears were only strengthened with the taking of the American embassy in November 1979 and with attempts to spread the Islamic Revolution outside of Iranian borders. The significant Shi'a population in the east of Saudi Arabia was targeted with Iranian radio propaganda, playing to views of the

Royal Family as puppets to American interests: “the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia wears Muslim clothing, but inwardly represents the U.S. body, mind and terrorism.” (Bronson 2006, 147)

November 20th, 1979 marked one of the most significant episodes in Saudi domestic history. Believing their mission to be directed by god, preacher Juhayman al-Utaybi and hundreds of followers seized the Grand Mosque of Mecca, calling for the ending of exports to the United States, the expulsion of foreigners from Saudi territory, “the abolition of radio, television, professional soccer, and employment of women outside the home... [urging] the downfall of the Royal Family, decrying its corruption and close relationship with infidel powers.” (Bronson 2006, 147) The crisis ended on December 4th, but its impact on the Kingdom has never been undone. The Grand Mosque Seizure, in addition to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, struck the fear of a radical religious uprising deep into the hearts of the Royal Family. In an attempt to defend against this very real possibility, Prince Fahd would engage in large scale proselytizing, building the image (and reality) of Saudi Arabia as the end-all be-all authority on Islamic purism. “So threatened was the House of Saud by Iran’s religious turn and the domestic critique that it was not religious enough that the Saudi leadership sought to outbid domestic and neighboring extremists.” (Bronson 2006, 148)

This appeal to religious spirit would play a key role in Saudi success in its next foreign entanglement: deflecting Soviet advances in nearby Afghanistan. The December 27th invasion marked another significant threat to the Kingdom, as long-time Soviet desires for a freshwater port could push the near 100,000 troops south through Iran to the

Persian Gulf. The responses of both the United States and Saudi Arabia were meek to begin, supplying propaganda and non-military resources to tribes opposing the invasion. Shortly thereafter, however, Saudi Arabia urged the United States to take a more proactive role, agreeing to match fully any capital commitments to the insurgency. A \$100 million covert system of arms transfer was devised, in which the US supplied Soviet-made arms from around the world to Pakistan as a 'defensive measure' against Soviet border aggression; these arms would find their way into Afghanistan and into the hands of Saudi-backed mujahideen fighters. Aid was more than quadrupled in 1983 to \$461 million, and by 1985 was taking up more than half of total CIA expenditures. (Bronson 2006, 171)

While the fighting in Afghanistan was completely unorganized early on, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan worked together to divide forces into three moderate groups and four Islamic fundamentalist fighting forces. The most religiously extreme of these forces, those led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, received the overwhelming majority of Saudi financing. This was for two reasons: the religious message utilized by Sayyaf and Hekmatyar was the most effective in rousing mujahideen troops to battle, and the groups (Sayyaf's in particular) actively spread the message of Saudi Wahabism amongst native Afghans. Sayyaf, in fact, had been the founder of the Ittihad-i-Islam party, a Saudi domestic organization dedicated to spreading militant Islam abroad. This second aspect of Hekmatyar and Sayyaf's mission was essential to combating the influence of Iran in Afghanistan, thus maintaining the religious supremacy of Saudi Arabia. Hekmatyar would later be the target of American forces in Afghanistan post-

9/11, where he worked with warlords to attack US troops. (Bronson 2006, 173) Sayyaf would eventually be joined by an eager and highly motivated Osama bin Laden.

While a great deal of funding was committed to the anti-Soviet effort in Afghanistan by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, “it was largely Arab money that saved the system.” (Bronson 2006, 174) Within Saudi Arabia (and to a lesser extent in the Arab world as a whole), countless ‘charitable organizations’ and business groups were funneling private funding to the most extreme of the mujahideen forces. “Saying, in particular, had many personal religious or academic contacts in Saudi Arabia, so his coffers were usually kept well filled. This meant the moderates became proportionately less efficient...” (Bronson 2006, 174) One group in particular which provided significant economic support was the World Muslim League, created by Abdel Aziz bin Baz, the supreme religious leader within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Prince Salman assisted in recruitment efforts for Sayyaf’s forces through mosques and community organizations espousing an especially militant form of Wahabism. Given the role of state religion in Saudi Arabia and the direct involvement of a member of the Royal Family, the line between private charity and state action was crossed. Under Osama bin Laden, these funds would be used to support the fledgling al-Qaeda.

As the fight escalated, the United States agreed to provide mujahideen forces with advanced and incredibly destructive technology, most notably Stinger surface-to-air missiles—weaponry which was outside the grasp of Saudi Arabia itself. This decision, along with the growing religious intensity of mujahideen fighters, turned the tide of battle in the favor of the Afghan insurgents and their jihadist peers, and in early 1988 the war

came to an end with Soviet retreat. This appeared to be a monumental success for the US-Saudi-Pakistan coalition, and in the short-term, it certainly was. The United States and Saudi Arabia had partnered together to defeat the greatest threat posed by the Soviet menace against the Kingdom, whether that threat was concrete and actual, simply a threat to Saudi/US hegemony, or merely perceived. In doing so, however, a system of recruitment and funding was established and left unaccounted for long after Afghanistan posed any threat to Saudi Arabia. As the Kingdom sought to gain the upper hand on Iran, its leaders supported the saturation of Saudi society with extreme Wahabi doctrine and encouraged its youth to continue the spread of Wahabism into Afghanistan. Meanwhile, mujahideen returning to Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden among them, came to view Saudi society as devoid of the very religious spirit and conviction they had fought to develop in Afghanistan. (See: 9/11 Commission Report 2004, 48-70) In the years to come, Saudi Arabia would reach unprecedented levels of radicalization.

The state of the Saudi economy following the costly mission in Afghanistan, made only worse by Saudi foreign involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen and even Nicaragua, fueled popular discontent with the Royal Family. A ten dollar drop in per-barrel oil prices left Saudi Arabia unable to maintain its prior level of payment for US military technology, and the US-Saudi relationship took yet another blow when it was revealed that the Kingdom had recently purchased nuclear-capable missiles from China. (Bronson 2006, 188) This ran counter not only to the Saudi commitment to fighting communism abroad, but challenged the special nature of its relationship with America. These considerations had little time to weigh on the minds of either party, as Iraqi

posturing against Kuwait finally came to fruition, and Saddam Hussein invaded his tiny neighbor on August 2nd, 1990 in response to Kuwait's alleged overproduction of oil. The potential for Iraqi advance into Saudi territory was very real, and fortification of Iraqi troops along Saudi Arabia's northeast border was enough to convince both President Bush and King Fahd that a united offensive was necessary.

American officials, led by then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, soon met with the Royal Family to devise a plan of attack. Essential to the plan was the stationing of approximately a quarter of a million American troops on Saudi territory. King Fahd eagerly agreed, believing that such a large force would certainly prevent any Iraqi attempts at Saudi territory; however, there was considerable disagreement among the rest of the Royal Family. Crown Prince Abdullah pointed out that all prior decisions dealing with the stationing of foreign troops on Saudi soil had required approval by the ulema, but Fahd nonetheless agreed to the American plan. (Bronson 2006, 195) In doing so, Fahd further increased the tensions between the Saudi religious community and the Royal Family, yet again placing greater importance on concerns at hand than on potential future consequences.

While the presence of US forces within Saudi Arabia succeeded in halting any Iraqi advances into the Kingdom and was essential to undoing the invasion of Kuwait, around 500,000 American troops would end up in Saudi territory at the height of the conflict. This substantial presence, unsanctioned by any sort of Saudi religious authority, only fueled the flames of radicalism born out of the late-1970s and 1980s. The after-the-fact issuance of a fatwa by the Grand Mufti, something which would usually be seen as

legitimizing the decision, in fact only served to factionalize the religious community of the Kingdom. Instead of quelling radical discontent, this apparent bowing of the highest religious authority in the land to the Royal Family created an outpour of disapproval from a number of burgeoning young radical clerics, who used the fatwa to “discredit not only the Royal Family but the political-religious condominium that forms the basis of the regime’s legitimacy.” (Bronson 2006, 195)

Different Directions

The end of the first Iraq War left significantly less tying the United States and Saudi Arabia together. With the Soviet menace and many other perceived major threats to the Kingdom removed, little commonality of interest remained between the two states; in its place existed longstanding (and now largely vestigial) weapons deals and the debt of funding Desert Storm, together almost completely depleting Saudi financial resources. Widespread anger over these debts incurred on behalf of the United States and the failure to oust Saddam Hussein from Iraq only served to foster discontent sparked by the apparent puppeteering of the Kingdom. “There is a massive, socially rooted resentment against the monarchy and...the sponsor...the United States. And it takes the form of Islamic fundamentalism as the only ideological channel that is open to these people...” (Chomsky 2006, 37) Osama bin Laden, who had offered use of his mujahideen fighters in the Iraq War but was rejected by the Royal Family, was now among the most vocal critics of both King Fahd and the Saudi religious authority. His growing support was seen

as the most significant threat to Saudi stability by the Royal Family, leading to his 1991 exile to Sudan.

Bin Laden's exile did little to quiet growing opposition, and in fact likely contributed to the popular belief that the Royal Family and ulema had no interest in preserving the traditions of Wahabism. A 1991 public declaration by religious authorities critical of the status quo called for "cleansing the state apparatus of corrupt individuals, a foreign policy that avoided any alliances that might violate Islamic law, and improving the country's institutions of religion and religious dissemination...they argued for the religious establishment to assume a supervisory role to the government..." (Bronson 2006, 212) This message was strengthened a year later with even greater support, demanding that the Royal Family "[outlaw] the teaching of Western law, [create] a half-million man army aimed at fighting Jews and helping Muslims, and [end] foreign aid to 'atheistic' regimes such as Iraq..., Jordan, and Egypt." (Bronson 2006, 213) The formation of the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights in 1993 (discussed in some detail later in this essay) acted as an organizational legitimization of anti-House of Saud sentiment, which continued to grow throughout the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s, this discontent came to a head, in part due to the availability of uncensored media via the internet and satellite television, resulting in terrorist attacks against US and Saudi governmental interests within the Kingdom. Domestic crisis gripped Saudi Arabia, and was only worsened when King Fahd suffered a severe stroke in 1995, leaving Crown Prince Abdullah as the de facto—though very limited—ruler. While Abdullah was less willing to blindly serve American interests and certainly more

cognizant of the growing tensions amongst the population, little could be done to stem the tide of rebellion. The first major incident of violence came in 1995, when five Americans were killed in an attack on a Saudi National Guard training institute. A year later, a truck packed with explosives ignited outside of the Khobar Towers military housing complex, killing nineteen American soldiers and injuring 372. These incidents were played down by the Royal Family, who went as far as to welcome twenty thousand more American troops into the Kingdom when Saddam Hussein again postured aggressively against Kuwait in 1994. (Bronson 2006, 218) These troop levels rose at a steep rate into the new millennium.

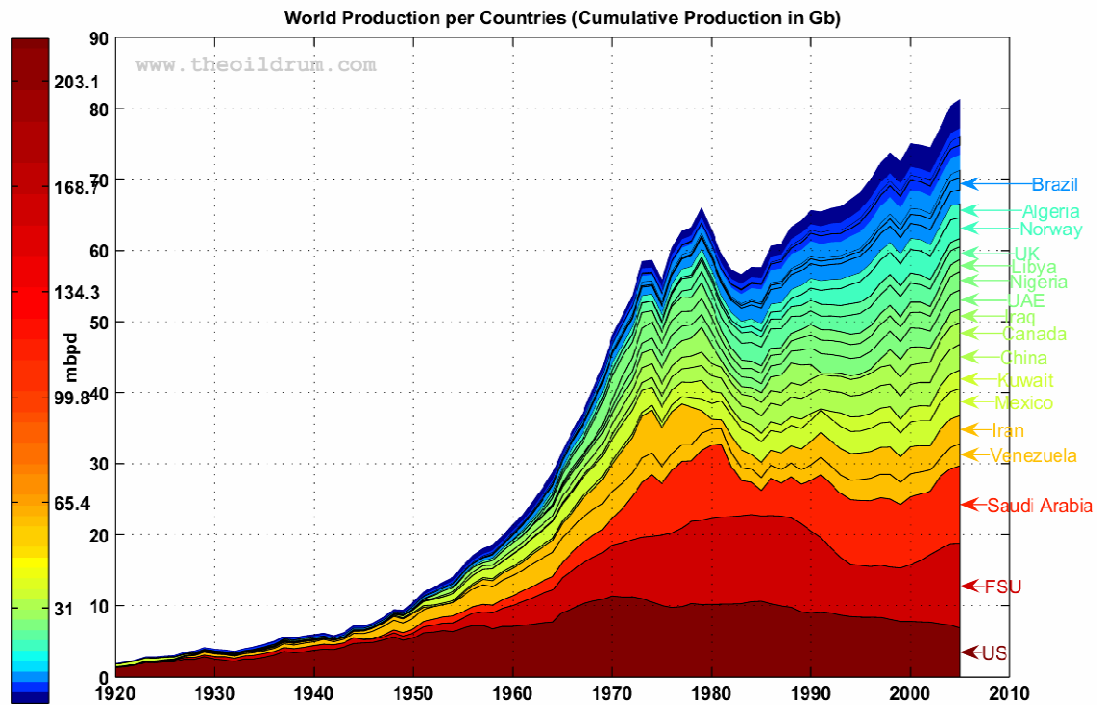
Eventually, the Royal Family and others within the Saudi government realized the size of the threat posed by dissidents, and decided to withdraw support for the United States' ongoing and unpopular strikes against Iraq, and to disallow the stationing of US troops within Saudi territory in 2003. (Military to Leave, 2003) The anarchic situation in Afghanistan further fueled fundamentalism within the Kingdom, as more and more mujahideen began to return to Saudi Arabia and a handful of Arab states and non-state actors fought proxy battles for influence within Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden yet again became a major figure in the fight for Afghanistan, arriving there in 1996 after his exile to Sudan. Attracting mujahideen remaining from the Soviet-Afghanistan affair and volunteers dissatisfied with the efforts of established governments and charity groups, bin Laden was able to turn the failed state of Afghanistan into a terrorist recruitment center, using aforementioned funding from Abdel Aziz bin Baz and Prince Salman to build up al-Qaeda Two years after arriving in Afghanistan, he enunciated his purpose in the World

Islamic Front's "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," adopting the tone of a fatwa and calling the killing of Americans and American allies, civilian or military, a "duty" handed down by Allah. Later that year, the al-Qaeda bombings of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania brought significant attention to bin Laden, killing over 200 (yet only twelve Americans) and injuring thousands. These attacks exemplified the willingness of al-Qaeda to engage in acts which, though aimed at Americans, had significant 'collateral damage' affecting local populations.

By the new millennium, US-Saudi relations were so dismal as to be almost nonexistent. The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process was, at that time, the only significant aspect of American involvement in the Near East, and Saudi Arabia was kept on the outside looking in on this issue as well. "As Robert A. Malley, the special assistant to the president for Arab-Israeli affairs at the NSC, recalled, 'We undervalued how important it was to get Saudi Arabia on Arafat's side.'" (Bronson 2006, 230) Beyond this, the growth of radicalism in Saudi Arabia went unnoticed by the United States. With the al-Aqsa Intifada—the renewal of Palestinian-Israeli violence in September 2000—anti-Western sentiment was at its height, especially within the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia, and the Near East in general, had been reduced to an afterthought in the decade following Desert Storm. The events of September 11th, 2001 brought the grim reality of this decade of negligence to the forefront of the American conscience, and again made Saudi Arabia a central component of American policy toward the Near East, though in a markedly different manner.

Entangled in the Web of the Saudi Oil-igarchy

A quarter of the world's proven oil reserves can be found within the boundaries of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and it is the largest worldwide exporter of petroleum. (US Congress, Senate 2005) Much of that oil—nineteen percent of crude and three percent of refined oil—is exported to its largest client, the United States. Today, petroleum is the lifeblood of American living and the economy of the United States, just as it is for much of the Western World. Statistically, oil supplies over forty percent of total United States energy demands, as well as nearly all fuel used in American automobiles. Despite the United States' wealth of natural resources, its oil supplies are insignificant, especially in light of its unrivaled energy needs. "Almost two-thirds of proven world oil reserves are in the Middle East. In contrast, the United States has less than three percent of the world's proven oil reserves." (US Congress, Senate 2005) Imported petroleum accounts for nearly sixty percent of American oil needs, and this number has been rising for many decades. Combined with America's lack of sufficient domestic oil supply—one which is likely to decline in the next decades—the United States is forced into dependence on foreign petroleum. "Today, the United States accounts for about a quarter of total world oil consumption...forecast of U.S. oil for the next 10–20 years shows trends of flat to declining domestic supply and increasing oil product demand. This will result in an increasing dependence on imports." (US Congress, Senate 2005)



World production of Crude oil plus NGL (CO+NGL). Color function of the cumulative production in Gb. (Foucher 2006)

In 2006, the United States imported approximately 5,003,082,000 barrels of crude oil. Of that amount, 2,013,603,000—just over forty percent—came from OPEC participants, of which the vast majority of members, including Saudi Arabia, are located in the Middle East. Approximately 534,143,000 barrels per year, or twenty-seven percent of American imported OPEC petroleum, comes from Saudi Arabia alone. (Energy Information Administration 2007) On average, the United States imports 1,419,000 barrels of Saudi Arabian crude oil per day. This comes out to eleven percent of total petroleum imported by the United States, though in the past the percentage has been significantly higher. (Energy Information Administration 2007) In the end, these figures make Saudi Arabia the third largest exporter of crude oil to America, behind only Canada and Mexico, both close neighbors and similarly-minded allies of the United States.

Another condition that benefits Saudi oil producers and, by extension, American importers, is that “In addition to having the heaviest concentration of oil reserves in the world, Middle Eastern producers also have the lowest production costs.” (US Congress, Senate 2005) Furthermore, ARAMCO earns around one dollar less on barrels exported to the United States, translating to a subsidy to the United States of \$620 million every year. (Morse 2002)

According to the US State Department, Saudi Arabia’s main foreign policy objectives are “to maintain its security and its paramount position on the Arabian Peninsula, defend general Arab and Islamic interests, promote solidarity among Islamic governments, and maintain cooperative relations with other oil-producing and major oil-consuming countries.” (US State Department Background Note 2007) The United States aids Saudi Arabia heavily in its attempts to keep its territories safe from attack, most notably by providing bases, training, funding and weaponry to the King. In the mid-1940s, a United States military training facility was established in the Saudi city of Dhahran, which was eventually used for the training and support of the Saudi armed forces. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has allowed United States troops to be stationed at the base, a strategic location given its short distance to Iraq, during American conflicts with the country in 1990 and for a short time in 2003. In addition to the construction of this base and supply of combat training, the United States has provided advanced military technology to the Kingdom at reduced cost, including various military aircraft (F-15 fighter jets, AWACS surveillance systems, Blackhawk helicopters), Patriot and Hawk

missiles, Bradley infantry vehicles and Abrams tanks, and various other warfare equipment. (US State Department Background Note 2007)

Arms sales to foreign nations are incredibly lucrative for the American corporations that supply the weapons, according to the MERIP Middle East Report. “Selling arms to the Third World is good business for US corporations... Arms sales abroad make up about five percent of total US export earnings.” (By the Sword 1987, 3) American funding for the implementation and use of these technologies, as well as blanket funding for the general defense of Saudi Arabia from 1950 to 2006, totals nearly \$69 billion, according to the US Department of Defense Security Cooperation Agency. (Foreign Military Sales 2006, 11) These figures make Saudi Arabia the largest grantee of American defense funding, as well as the largest purchaser of American weaponry and military technology. The policies which allow these arms trades to continue serve primarily to empower and perpetuate the American military-industrial complex to the benefit of a handful of large corporations and to the cost of US taxpayers. All told, American military funding to Saudi Arabia during the period of 1950 to 2006 was approximately \$40 billion greater than funding to the next two highest-ranking recipients – Israel and Egypt.

“If ‘totalitarianism’ has any meaning—that’s totalitarianism there”

While this might seem like a symbiotic relationship—Americans receiving oil at lower prices and access to highly geopolitically important military stations in the center of a hotbed of American military involvement; Saudi Arabia being given access advanced

American military technology and know-how to secure its wellbeing and economic dominance in a region where stability is uncommon—this arrangement comes with a number of problematic consequences for the United States. The repercussions of this trade-off range from American economic dependency on foreign petroleum, to the compromise of stated and implicit American values and political aims, to threats to the very life and liberty of American citizens both at home and abroad. Separately, each of these issues poses major difficulties to the United States' relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; taken as a whole, they represent a legitimate and serious threat to the upholding of American ideals and the security and wellbeing of the nation and its international interests.

To understand the nature and degree of totalitarianism within the Kingdom, the sources of the political-religious-legal system present within Saudi Arabia must first be considered. The entirety of the legal system within the Kingdom is based upon Shari'a Law. Two texts—the Hikmah and the Shari'a—are the primary sources of Islamic teachings in general. The Hikmah is primarily a guide for personal relationships and individual conduct, though it does contain a small amount of instruction on jurisprudence and social laws. The Shari'a, made up of the Quran, the Sunna, the Fiqh, ijma, and qiyas, is the cardinal source of Islamic law, and structures all economic, social, and political interactions. The Quran, transcribed by the inner-circle of the Prophet Mohammad's friends and associates, is the primary religious text of the Muslim religion, made up of divine revelations of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim canon recognized throughout history combined with guidance on the level of individuals, groups, and governments. The

Sunna, though it is widely disagreed upon amongst the various schools of interpretation, is generally thought of as a code of teachings by Mohammad. This guide serves as the primary basis for Islamic legal custom, or Shari'a. The rulings of all the prophets of Islam, collectively known as the Fiqh, are also an integral part of the Shari'a. Additionally, the ijma (historical consensus of Islamic judges) and qiyas (legal analogy) make up a portion of the Islamic legal tradition.

The implementation of Shari'a law in Saudi Arabia is pervasive, influencing not only social customs, but governing all forms of interaction between individuals and groups, as well as the appropriate sorts of punishments for various crimes. Where the Shari'a is silent, it is up to judges appointed according to the customs of the Shari'a—known as ulema within Saudi Arabia—to best discern the finding or punishment appropriate for a particular transgression. The necessary and sufficient types of evidence for finding a person guilty of a crime are also contained in the Shari'a, and along with the means of punishment and sorts of behaviors deemed punishable by legal action, differ greatly from traditional Western legal codes, and have often been perceived as freedom-limiting, tyrannical, cruel and barbaric by other cultures. The reality of Shari'a law within Saudi Arabia is that of a self-perpetuating, theocratic and unquestionable regime (the ulema), embodied with the means and willingness to enforce its decrees with coercion and violence.

Some recent examples of actions undertaken or otherwise sanctioned by the ulema serve to exemplify why such controversy has arisen. Perhaps most notorious is the 2007 sentencing of a minority Shi'a female gang-rape victim to six months in prison and

200 lashes for her violation of the sexual segregation laws of the Shari'a by sharing a motorcar, prior to her attack, with a man to whom she was not related. The strengthened punishment came following an attempt by her lawyer—since suspended from legal practice and subject to disciplinary action—to appeal the case because it was incongruent with Islamic law. “The judicial bodies should have dealt with this girl as the victim rather than the culprit,” argued her lawyer. (Rape Sentence Unjust 2007) Seven of the fourteen perpetrators of the gang rape were sentenced to prison, with terms ranging from less than a year to around five years—terms which were doubled following the altering of the victim's sentence. A Saudi official, when questioned about the treatment of the woman, stated that the sentence increase was a form of punishment for attempting to question and aggravate the judiciary through manipulation of the media. (Rape Sentence Unjust 2007) The US Department of State has refused to condemn the ruling, stating that it is an expressly Saudi issue and not the business of America. (Shakir 2007)

Women, however, are not the only minorities within Saudi Arabia who have faced inequality and persecution. While many of the constitutions of Islamic states claim to protect those living in the country from religious discrimination while also allowing the use of the Shari'a in the application of law, Saudi Arabia makes no such claim. (An-Ni'am 1987) To this end, it prohibits the public practice of any religion other than Islam. According to the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor's *International Religious Freedom Report 2004*, “Islam is the official religion [of Saudi Arabia], and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims... Freedom of religion does not exist.” Political and economic sanctions are levied against the minority Shi'a population within the

kingdom, and penalties for non-Muslim public religious practice include “arrest, lashing, deportation, and torture.” (US State Department Country Report 2004) Additionally, Muslims in Saudi Arabia are prevented, by penalty of death, from converting to any other religion. As noted in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, on October 31st, 2004, a male Saudi citizen was arrested and jailed for allegedly converting to Christianity, and no information on the arrested individual or his trial has been made public as of yet.

Although private practice of non-Muslim religions is legally allowed in Saudi Arabia, the *Country Report* notes that in practice this is often not the case: “During the year [2004], there were scattered raids, arrests, and detentions of Christians throughout the country.” The vast majority of these incidents were at the hands of the Mutawwa'in (the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice), or Saudi religious police. Furthermore, state-sponsored hate speech occurs in mosques across Saudi Arabia, with government-paid religious service leaders using strongly anti-Semitic rhetoric during public religious gatherings. (US State Department Country Report 2004) Similar messages have been found throughout the mandatory schoolbooks written or chosen specifically by the Saudi government. The message that “Jews were banned from entering the country” was posted on the official tourism website of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, though it was removed on March 1st, 2004 following international pressure. (US State Department Country Report 2004)

In courtroom proceedings, non-Muslims also fare much worse than their Islamic counterparts. Saudi interpretation of Shari'a law allows judges to completely discount the

testimony of any individuals who are not practicing Muslims, thus putting non-Muslims who come to the defense of fellow non-Muslims at a strong disadvantage. Clearly, this hinders severely any hopes for justice in cases with non-Muslim defendants. Additionally, because the vast majority of courtroom procedures in Saudi Arabia are closed from the public, little of what goes on in legal proceedings is accurately known. All of this discrimination before the law is further enabled by the mandatory carrying of identification cards which identify the holder as either 'Muslim' or 'Non-Muslim.' It goes without saying that non-Muslims are prevented from holding any sort of political or governmental office in Saudi Arabia, thus rendering the prospects for consideration of the interests of non-Muslims within the Kingdom quite grim.

On the international level, Saudi Arabia has been completely unwilling to accept any form of international human rights law, viewing such agreements as challenges to the supremacy of the teachings of Islam. An original member of the United Nations, Saudi Arabia was among those few UN member nations to abstain on the vote to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The question of human rights scantily existed in Saudi Arabia before the 1970s, when a series of meetings was held between government officials and high-ranking religious authorities to address the issue. The result of these meetings was a reiteration of the primacy of Shari'a in determining the laws and mores of proper Islamic nations. (Koraytem 2001) It was not until 1981 that Saudi Arabia made any sort of official statement on human rights when it accepted the terms of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights (commonly known as the Human Rights Declaration in Islam).

The Human Rights Declaration in Islam states that those living in Islamic states have “freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with the Islamic Shari’a” and that “all men are equal in terms of basic human dignity and basic obligations and responsibilities, without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, language, belief, sex, religion, political affiliation, social status or other considerations.” (Cairo Declaration 1990) Obviously, both of these premises have been ignored or outright flouted within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. What has certainly been taken to heart by the Saudi government from the Cairo Declaration is the reiteration of the unquestionable status of Shari’a code as paramount in all matters, particularly the sanctity of life, punishment for crimes, and the prohibition of citizens to exert “any form of pressure on a man to force him to change his religion to another religion or to atheism.” (Cairo Declaration 1990)

While the declaration states that “no restrictions stemming from race, color or nationality shall prevent [individuals] from exercising [the right of marriage],” a prescriptive doctrine regarding marriage between members of different religions is notably unaccounted for. As such, Saudi Arabia has restricted women from the ability to engage in marriage with non-Muslims and non-citizens, though Muslim men can initiate marriages with Christians and Jews. (US State Department Country Report 2004) The Cairo Declaration also states that “woman is equal to man in human dignity, and has her own rights to enjoy...and...her own civil entity,” though this statement is obviously in need of qualification *ad infinitum* for the Saudi concept of women’s dignity to be rectified with that of the Cairo Declaration. Furthermore, the statement that “all

individuals are equal before the law, without distinction between the ruler and the ruled” is included in the declaration, though, as previously noted, the testimony of non-Muslims can be thrown out or otherwise discounted by Saudi judges. Plainly, there is a great deal of deviation from even those tenets of the Human Rights Declaration in Islam agreed to by the Saudi government. The entire document, in its application by Saudi Arabia, is best summed up by its penultimate clause: “All the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Shari'a.”

Since the 1981 acceptance of the Cairo Declaration, there has been pressure from intellectuals within Saudi Arabia and analysts internationally for a proper enumeration of rights, specifically for women and religious minorities. One notable instance in February of 1991 involved the publishing of a letter to King Fahd signed by 43 prominent businessmen and intellectuals which petitioned for the formation of governmental councils to diminish corruption amongst the Mutawwa'in. This pressure, headed up by international businessmen vital to Saudi monetary interests, persuaded King Fahd to decree the “Basic Law” of Saudi Arabia. This Basic Law, similar somewhat to a constitution, outlined the creation of the Majlis, a legislative body made up of sixty members, all of which are appointed by the king. Unsurprisingly, the members of this legislature primarily represent the views of the Saudi ruling family, though some ‘Westernized’ individuals whose anti-extremist ideologies are not a threat to the administration have been appointed to calm the flow of social unrest throughout the kingdom. (Gresh 1995, 4)

The question of whether this establishment of a semi-formal constitution represents any sort of progress for non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia is dubious at best, as the opening chapters of the Basic Law again reiterate the primacy of Shari'a in determining the law of the land, and the absolute power of the monarchy. Article 26 states that "The State shall protect human rights in accordance with Islamic Shari'a," though this is an extremely vague iteration of a human rights guarantee, and the legal rights of non-Muslims and foreigners in the kingdom are conspicuously absent throughout the entire Basic Law. Gilbert Achcar quite succinctly sums up the status of political freedoms in Saudi Arabia to this day: "If 'totalitarianism' has any meaning, that's totalitarianism there. Any attempt at organizing anything challenging the powers that be is repressed in the most terrible way." (Chomsky 2006, 38)

The Consequences of Maintaining US-Saudi Hegemony

The bartering of oil for security between Saudi Arabia and the United States has led to negative ideological consequences in that such activity compromises what are considered to be core American values, as well as the stated agendas of a number of Presidents and other important policymakers. As the preceding pages illustrate, Saudi Arabia has a long history of human rights abuses, and is among the least democratic of all industrialized nations. The questionable status of human rights in the Kingdom is one that is publicly and forthrightly acknowledged by the US government in a number of documents (see: 2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2007 Background Note – Saudi Arabia), as well as legislative and presidential discourses and public

statements throughout recent decades. In general, the Department of State has expressed concern about “abuse of prisoners and incommunicado detention; prohibitions or severe restrictions on the freedoms of speech, press, peaceful assembly and association, and religion; denial of the right of citizens to change their government; systematic discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities; and suppression of workers' rights.” (US State Department Background Note 2007)

Support for governments which contain or condone these characteristics or fail to actively pursue their cessation is directly in opposition to the stated goals of nearly every United States president since diplomatic ties were extended to Saudi Arabia in 1933. This is most notably the explicit attitude of former president George W. Bush, as outlined in his National Security Strategy of the United States of America following 9/11: “America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property.” (Bush 2002, 3) Additionally, the first official Bush administration address on reform in Middle East nations decrees that the United States aims “to help...countries become more stable, more prosperous, more peaceful, and more adaptable...[and to] be more actively engaged in supporting democratic trends in the Muslim world than ever before.” (Haass 2003) Such blatant hypocrisy not only casts doubt on the earnestness of the rhetoric of the American government, but compromises the legitimacy of US aims internationally, weakening so-called 'soft power' essential to international relations.

In *Perilous Power*, Noam Chomsky and Gilbert Achcar attempt to trace back the contemporary phenomenon of Islamist non-state terrorism, and ultimately arrive at the conclusion that much of the modern hatred of the West amongst such groups is the result of US interference in the establishment of secular nationalism. In particular, support for Islamic fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia as a counterweight to the spread of communism and intrastate nationalist movements (principally via the mujahideen in Afghanistan) is cited as the main source of bitterness among the Arab world toward the United States. Why would the US squash the rise of democracy within the Near East? Achcar posits that “if you implement democracy there, the ‘bad guys’ would win...in some countries, democracy leads to the victory of forces hostile to the West.” (Chomsky 2006, 42) Chomsky echoes Achcar’s sentiment, stating that the forces of power within the United States “support democracy if and only if it conforms to U.S. economic and strategic objectives.” (Chomsky 2006, 43) The parliamentary elections of Egypt in 2005 (which came about at the behest of the United States) are cited as a prime example of this: “Mubarak...saw to it that the Muslim Brotherhood—a fundamentalist group—emerged clearly as the major power to gain from this carefully controlled opening... His message...was: If you push for democracy, you’ll get these guys in power. So, leave me alone!” (Chomsky 2006, 45-6)

While ideology is without question the chief fuel for radical anti-Western terrorism throughout the Near East and elsewhere, conflict on such a scale simply cannot occur without massive amounts of expendable capital amongst terrorist groups. Analysis of the allocation of American grants to Saudi Arabia shows that some of the funding was

being funneled into terrorist organizations which were responsible for attacks on Americans at home and abroad: “Intense financial scrutiny also revealed a disturbing pattern of Saudi capital underwriting schools and mosques throughout the region...that inculcated hate and intolerance and provided foot soldiers to al-Qaeda” (Bronson 2006, 236) A study on the sources of terrorism financing following the 9/11 terrorist attacks found that a number of charities and wealthy oil industry individuals in Saudi Arabia were large sources of funding for al-Qaeda operations. (Bronson 2006, 237)

A tense diplomatic situation resulted from these discoveries, with the Saudi government eventually making concessions to the United States in the way of intensifying counterterrorism efforts, closing down the official charity of the Saudi Royal Family, and working closely with American official Fran Townsend and Saudi counterterrorism expert Muhammad bin Naif to oversee counterterrorism operations in the Kingdom. (Bronson 2006, 243–44) “We have...worked with the Saudis to clarify the flow of funds and to rectify past inefficiencies that made it possible for funds to flow relatively easily to terrorist sources.” (US Congress, Senate 2005) While these measures show some progress, many feel these steps are insufficient, and former State Department official and UN al-Qaeda monitoring group member Victor Comras points to the fact that millionaire terror financier Yassin Qadi “continues to direct his international business empire from Switzerland and Saudi Arabia” and notes that while many organizations funding terrorism have had their operations halted within Saudi Arabia, they continue to operate outside of its borders without any Saudi attempt to end their operations. (Comras 2005) Dr. Gal Luft, co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security,

summarized America's resultant position best: "[W]e are locked in an odd situation in which we are fighting a war on terrorism and we are paying for both sides of the war."
(US Congress, Senate 2005)

Our Perilous Future

A number of improvements to the US-Saudi relationship have occurred in the nine years since the 9/11 attacks. Initial relations were icy, with the Royal Family unwilling to own up to the fact that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi citizens, publicly stating that the attacks were likely the result of Zionism. Moreover, the Royal Family and other high-ranking religious and political officials ardently denied supporting terrorism despite the findings of American financial analysts to the contrary. However, the attacks and resultant environment have allowed the United States to reengage with Saudi Arabia and cooperate on issues relevant to the security and economic interests of both nations. Eight years after the attacks, the two nations are able to deal with each other in a much more frank manner, the realities of Saudi terrorist funding and American indifference to the rise of Islamic extremism laid bare for all to see by the 9/11 Commission and other literature on the subject. (9/11 Commission Report 2004)

In particular, recognition within the United States that a strong focus on reform is an essential component of any continued US-Saudi relationship is a significant step in the right direction. Extremism in Saudi Arabia is and was largely the result of government nurturing of religious interests over those of pragmatists as a means to guarantee the perpetuation of the Royal Family's power and the larger success of Wahabism and

puritanical Islam abroad. Clearly, this plan has backfired in a major way in terms of the first goal, culminating in a series of domestic terrorist attacks beginning in 2003 which have targeted the Royal Family, the Saudi National Guard, moderate religious institutions, and the Saudi oil infrastructure. As a result, the Royal Family has been significantly more willing to ‘play ball’ when it comes to counter-terrorism efforts, and the United States has had some leeway in pushing for domestic reform toward that end.

In particular, the US has pushed for, and in many cases received, liberalization within the education system, the Saudi religious establishment, and terrorist funding schemes. Schoolbooks with anti-American and anti-Semitic messages, formerly handpicked by the Royal Family, have been replaced with more neutral choices. While these reforms have been mild, they represent a willingness on behalf of the Royal Family to compromise unrelenting sovereignty in regard to domestic issues as a means to secure stability which will allow them to remain in power.

Before the question of how the United States’ relationship with Saudi Arabia ought to be altered can even be considered, it is necessary first to address whether there is willingness on the part of American policymakers to undertake that challenge. I wrote to Dr. Chomsky regarding this particular issue, and his response spelled a bleak future for those fighting for greater freedoms within Saudi Arabia, at least as far as the help of the United States is concerned. He characterized the discussion as “a hypothetical situation which is very remote from current reality...,” stating that “if the US were interested in reform in SA—it isn’t—there are some things it could do, but not very much... Honesty [about political aims] would eliminate a weapon that has been deployed with grim

consequences.” This forecast is in line with much of what Dr. Chomsky posits about the relationship between the US and the Near East in general—the constant “playing off” of one state against another as a means to prevent any sort of nationalist or unified religious source of power in the region, thus allowing US domination of economic and geopolitical interests.

If the United States were to attempt to push for reform in Saudi Arabia through traditional methods, it would face a substantially more difficult battle than it would against most other states. This challenge stems from the amount of power Saudi Arabia wields within the global economy due to its position as the largest oil exporter within OPEC. For the United States to attempt a trade embargo or something along those lines would be wholly ineffective, as East Asia alone accounts for around 50% of Saudi oil exports and that region and others could certainly accept more substantial petroleum shipments. (Energy Information Administration—Saudi Arabia) As such, any attempt at embargo or other traditional means of economic pressure would require multilateral cooperation—quite unlikely given European willingness to deal with the Kingdom and the occasional instability of Russian oil flow. Furthermore, the high level of entanglement between the US industrial-military complex and Saudi defense spending renders any such attempt almost nonsensical.

Not all views of the future of US-Saudi relations are so grim, however. Shari'a scholar Abdullahi An-Na'im believes that religious reformation within the Kingdom is the key to improving the liberty of those living under the Shari'a. Of course, the real-world implementation of Shari'a law is impacted not only by the religious texts upon

which it had its original basis, but the sociological and historical development of the law in various Muslim nations. In this case, the *experience* of Islam must be stressed as an important contributing factor to the development of Shari'a Law. As Abdullahi An-Na'im points out in his consideration of religious minorities under the Shari'a, "The experience of the Muslims, like that of any other people, was shaped by the operative economic, social, and political forces at any given point of Muslim history. These same forces, however, were influenced by, and in turn influenced, Muslim religious law, the Shari'a." (An-Na'im 1987) Such analysis shows that the Quran, written in two distinct periods (610 to 622 and 622 to 632), shows great differences in content and demeanor congruent with the ongoing changes in Muslim society at the time, reflecting the needs of Mohammad in establishing Medina as an Islamic state. An-Na'im takes this argument further, stating that "Shari'a is in fact no more than the understanding of the early Muslims of the sources of Islam. That understanding, as will be shown below, must have been, and was in fact, influenced by the early Muslims' experience and perception of their world." (An-Na'im 1987) Summarily, An-Na'im contends that "the Shari'a...was developed by Muslim jurists in the second and third century of Islam...[the] raw material out of which Shari'a was constructed was not, therefore, the pure Qur'an and Sunnah." (An-Na'im, 1987)

Where the Shari'a is silent, it is up to judges appointed according to the customs of the Shari'a to best discern the finding or punishment appropriate for a particular transgression. From this practice comes much of the behavior deemed 'inhumane' and 'abusive' by opponents of the system. Given the unwillingness of the Royal Family to

give under either international or domestic pressure to reconsider the strictness of Shari'a as it has been understood thus far, it may seem quite unlikely that change in this arena will come about any time in the near future. The post-9/11 socio-political landscape within Saudi Arabia, however, is seeming more and more like a fertile environment for reform to take root. The drastically altered domestic security environment within the Kingdom has forced the Royal Family to come to terms with the reality of extremist threats to its rule.

This state of affairs leaves the Royal Family with two options: escalating limitations on freedom of association and public expression, or limited liberalization. Given that most of the criticism and action against the Royal Family occurs anonymously or outside of the public realm, the former avenue presents no real likelihood of lessening the impact of extremist groups, and will more likely be viewed as an attempt by the Royal Family to thwart questioning of its legitimacy, thus increasing unrest within the Kingdom. Recent events within Saudi Arabia seem to hint that King Abdullah is embarking on a mission of reform in his waning years of rule.

Serving as an example of the movement toward moderation is the meeting of King Abdullah with reform petitioners in 2003. The petition called for "a constitutional system of government with an elected legislature, an empowered and separate judiciary and an acknowledgment...of a variety of different rights—free speech, freedom to form associations as well as a commitment to address an expanded role for women in Saudi society." (Russell 2003) The petitioners stated that the Royal Family must "admit that being late in adopting radical reforms and ignoring popular participation in decision-

making have been the main reasons that helped the fact that our country reached this dangerous turn," and stressed that such a state of affairs left Saudi Arabia "unable to dialogue with others because of its inherent structure" and did not "reflect the greatness of Islam nor [its] enlightened trends, which is what helped create the terrorist and judgmental mind that our country is still plagued with." (Russell 2003) The willingness of the King to meet with rights petitioners in the midst of an internal security crisis shows hope for a future commitment to reform and recognition that continued clampdowns on citizen involvement in the political process will only create more unrest.

Of course, the measures of reform called for within the petition cannot simply be decreed by the King. To achieve reform in any meaningful sense, King Abdullah will have to contend with three principal forces: the rest of the Royal Family, the Saudi religious establishment, and his citizenry. Prospects for dealing with the Royal Family are mixed, though they have certainly improved since Abdullah's proper ascent to the throne in 2005. Some within the Royal Family, such as Minister of the Interior Prince Naif, are strongly opposed to substantial reform; others, including Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal, view progress as "inevitable" and believe that "the ruling family should try to preserve its position by managing and controlling the reform process." (Russell 2003) Nevertheless, an underlying consideration within all inter-Royal Family affairs is the process of succession to the throne, and some in close position to become King might not support reform as it would likely lessen their ability to wield power.

The fiercest opposition to reform is without question the Saudi religious establishment (the Nejd). Given the importance of religion within the Kingdom, the Nejd,

which controls activities within all mosques and schools, is incredibly powerful. Furthermore, the Nejd plays a large institutional role in Saudi politics, as it is solely entrusted with all legal questions. Especially with the increasing influence of radical young clerics over the past few decades, the Nejd has grown increasingly disconnected from the Royal Family in its ideology and aims. Reform, especially the possibility of a formal Saudi constitution, would almost certainly limit the role of the Nejd in education and the legal world, thus lessening its power and influence within the Kingdom. (Russell 2003) Any attempt at reform must be incredibly careful in dealing with this important element of Saudi society; to trample on its power and go forward without considerable Nejd involvement would surely lead to considerable backlash, not only from radicals like Sheikh Safr al-Hawali, but moderates as well.

The final major roadblock to reform within the Kingdom is the people of Saudi Arabia. Largely uninvolved in Saudi politics, it remains to be seen exactly what a liberalized Kingdom which considers the wishes and desires of its citizens would look like. While prior episodes of public engagement with the Saudi government have largely been negative, it may very well be that those taking part in such protests represent a vocal radical minority, with most of Saudi society significantly more moderate in its views. This unknown factor also plays a role in the extent to which the United States (and others) should push for reform. While a democratic Saudi Arabia (if it ever will exist) is certainly a long way off, it could pose a greater threat to both domestic and international peace than the current system and resultant political climate. The acerbic ideals and

declarations of radical clerics may, in fact, be an indicator of larger public sentiment rather than representing the most extreme and loudest segments of Saudi society.

Nevertheless, such a concern should not figure largely in the US choice to actively support reform within Saudi Arabia. Although American policymakers have all-too-often ignored the long-term repercussions of their choices, the potential that citizens would ever have enough power within the Saudi system to substantially affect the internal or international security of the Kingdom is almost nonexistent. Beyond this, there is little likelihood that a significant portion of Saudis identify with the likes of Hawali, or that if they do, such ideology would be actuated within a democratized Saudi Arabia. What is a more likely result of reform and liberalization is a decline of radicalism within the Kingdom. Giving the people of Saudi Arabia a say in the actions of its government will lend some sense of popular legitimacy to the Royal Family and its choices. With popular backing of or at least involvement in the decisions of the Saudi government, radicals may be less willing to engage in terrorism aimed at the 'puppet regime' of the Kingdom.

Given the realization of the Royal Family's prior claims of reform, any hope for the emergence of a noticeably different Saudi Arabia should be quite guarded. The status of women within Saudi Arabia remains deplorable, those who publicly criticize the government are still sometimes jailed, and freedom of the press is extremely limited. This is not to say that King Abdullah has made no reforms within the Kingdom, nor that he will fail to bring about more. In terms of his willingness to work with the United States, former CIA director Michael Hayden was "struck, maybe even surprised...by the degree

of emotion in [King Abdullah]'s voice when he is talking about Al Qaeda and how un-Islamic Al Qaeda really is." (Dickey 2009) In terms of civil liberties, speech is freer than ever (though still monitored and limited in some unacceptable manners), and Abdullah has allowed women within his government—particularly Princess Adelah, a “public face” of the Royal Family—to play a larger role than ever before. (Dickey 2009) One diplomat working closely with the King earnestly believes that Abdullah would like to bring Saudi Arabia much further along in its liberalization, stating, "The king's heart is in the right place, but he's up against an intransigent bureaucracy." (Dickey 2009)

Although there is risk that the United States' efforts to support reform within the Kingdom will amount to nothing, the US ought to focus more on the positive changes being undertaken by King Abdullah and not the history of oppression and restriction within the Kingdom which continues in many forms today. Reform in Saudi Arabia will be incremental and slow, perhaps even glacial in its pace. This, however, should not be accepted as an excuse by American foreign policymakers for a complete lack of change within the Kingdom. Under the direction of President Obama, who is quite popular in the Muslim world, there can be greater hope for productive US involvement with the Near East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. The Israeli-Palestinian situation remains one of the most important international considerations within the Kingdom, and Obama has promised a more substantial US role in peacekeeping and negotiations, which will surely go far in pleasing the Royal Family and citizenry of Saudi Arabia. Obama has gone as far as publicly expressing support for the Arab Plan for Peace in Palestine put forth by King Abdullah in 2002. (BBC Obama Mid-East Agenda 2009)

In his June 2009 speech at Cairo University, President Obama stated his commitment to reform in the Near East, noting that “Many Gulf States have enjoyed great wealth as a consequence of oil.... [but] in too many Muslim communities there remains underinvestment in [education and innovation]. I am emphasizing such investments within my country. And while America in the past has focused on oil and gas in this part of the world, we now seek a broader engagement.” (Obama Egypt Speech 2009) Specific measures to support education and communication include the development of exchange and overseas internship programs, and expanded availability of telecommunications technologies in the Near East. An entrepreneurship summit and expansion of US-Near East business partnerships were also outlined by Obama as means to provide greater commonality between Americans and the Near East. It is through these united efforts for tangible progress, in addition to cooperation on political and institutional reform with foreign heads of state such as King Abdullah, that the ties binding the United States and Saudi Arabia will hopefully be repaired and strengthened—a goal which, if realized, will surely go far in improving the historically tumultuous relations of the United States and the Near East.

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