

**U.S.-SAUDI RELATIONS: A BLOODY PAST AND A DANGEROUS FUTURE****Dr. Abdul Quayum**

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**Abstract:** The Near East area is of utmost significance in influencing the foreign and domestic policy of the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the deployment of a large number of US soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq. This, along with the significant financial burden imposed on the United States government and its citizens due to the War on Terror, greatly influenced the media and raised concerns among the American people. There has been significant attention given to the influence of the United States' requirement for secure petroleum sources on its economic and diplomatic policies towards Saudi Arabia and Iraq. This concern has also shaped the country's domestic energy and environmental policies. Throughout history, the United States' interactions with the Near East have been challenging for all involved parties. Although the United States has made progress in establishing favorable connections with some countries, there seems to be a significant obstacle to the development of enduring, peaceful, and successful relationships with the many and varied states in the region often referred to as the Arab Middle East.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Near East area has a significant influence on the foreign and domestic affairs of the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the deployment of a large number of US soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq. This, along with the significant financial burden placed on the United States government and its citizens due to the War on Terror, greatly influenced the media and raised concerns among the American people. There has been significant attention given to the influence of the demand for secure petroleum sources on the United States' economic and diplomatic policies towards Saudi Arabia and Iraq, as well as its domestic energy and environmental policies. Throughout history, the interactions between the United States and the Near East have been challenging for all involved parties. Although the United States has made progress in establishing favorable relationships with some countries, there seems to be a significant obstacle to the development of enduring, peaceful, and successful relationships with the many and varied states in the region often referred to as the Arab Middle East[1][2].

The divergent prevailing philosophies of the United States and its Arab equivalents have had a substantial impact on the challenges that have affected these partnerships. Undoubtedly, the United States' backing of Israel is a highly debated matter that is unlikely to be settled in the foreseeable future, especially from the perspective of the Arab world, and will need significant effort and struggle. The US endorsement of "liberal institutionalism" and economic and social globalization contradicts the principles of Arab Nationalism and strong independence that have prevailed in the socio-political environment of several Arab governments in the Near East for several decades. Simultaneously, the fundamental American principles of self-reliance, personal achievement, freedom of choice, and separation of religion and state do not align well with the beliefs of certain Arab countries that highly value religious piety and its incorporation into the government system. Furthermore, these American values are not compatible with the prevailing inclination towards social unity and collective welfare observed in several

of these nations[3].

There are many fundamental and maybe impossible obstacles that hinder the development of stable partnerships between the United Nations and several nations in the Near East, with which it now maintains weak or problematic connections. The aforementioned (concise) description fails to acknowledge the multitude of historical and pragmatic factors that introduce more difficulties. The primary adverse effects arising from the existing situation between the United States and the Near East are not caused by our adversaries (whether perceived, hypothetical, or actual), but rather by our most significant Arab partner in the region: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This article aims to clarify the nature of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. I will provide a historical narrative of the interactions between the United States and its Saudi allies, with a primary emphasis on the various differences and challenges that have emerged between the two partners. I will evaluate the nature and scope of the existing United States relationship with the Kingdom by analyzing data and statistics provided by independent and governmental organizations and committees. Specifically, I will focus on the exchange of American weapons technology and military knowledge in return for affordable Saudi petroleum. Next, I will provide an analysis of the current state of human rights and representative government in Saudi Arabia. This will include an examination of the efforts made by domestic groups and individuals to promote the implementation of formal rights and constitutional restrictions on the authority of the Saudi Royal Family and Nejd religious authority. To conclude, I will provide an evaluative assessment of the current status of US-Saudi ties, along with a set of potential measures that might enhance or modify this relationship[4][5].

#### **THE COLD WAR SAW STRONG INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS.**

In the history of US-Saudi relations, the close of World War II and the start of the Cold War would prove to be turbulent times. Saudi Arabia agreed in 1945 to let the US keep an aviation facility in the eastern city of Dhahran. With its easy access to the Near East, this site was strategically significant since it would let the US to safeguard its commercial interests in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, a country that continues to dread imperialist goals, benefited from the availability of an American military force that was prepared. But suddenly the Soviets were the one that Ibn Saud—and so the United States—had to fear instead of France or Britain. Ibn Saud considered the state of Israel in particular to be "a bridgehead into the Near East of communist ideas and influence." (Lippman (2009), 213)[6].

Saudi opposition to communism was rooted in the challenge it posed to state sovereignty and the distinctly godless nature of its ideology, rather than its (perceived or actual) connection to Zionism or the threat it might pose to the Kingdom's economic interests in the region and worldwide. The concepts and tenets of communism were always seen by the Kingdom as incompatible with human contemplation and health. The Kingdom completely rejected Marxist concepts. Bronson (2006), 136 President Truman supported defense of the Kingdom in 1950, citing it as "important to the preservation of the peace and security of the Near East area, and to the security of the United States," acknowledging the strategic and economic significance of a Saudi state free from socialist doctrine. (Lippman, 277) The United States had a chance to demonstrate its resolve in the early 1960s when Nasser's Egypt threatened Saudi Arabia with military action, even bombing a few Saudi cities and dropping weapons in areas that might be sympathetic to the Nasserist cause. Nasser's Egypt was enraged at Saudi opposition to the republican coup in Yemen that Nasser had supported. In lieu of his reckless and unreliable brother, King Saud, Prince Faisal

carried out many royal tasks at the time and thought Nasser "had one sole aim, namely, to crush the authority of the Saudi Arabian Government." Bronson (2006), p. 85 Kennedy encouraged Faisal to pursue domestic reform, claiming that the only way to stop Nasserism from spreading across the Kingdom was via internal change that would benefit Saudi residents. Kennedy thought he had won when Faisal delivered the ten-point "Basic Law for the Government," but other than outlawing slavery, the institutional changes it called for were essentially toothless and had little effect on the lives of the general public. President Kennedy told King Faisal that he was working with the UN to set up a truce after Egypt's bombs struck Saudi territory in 1962. But Faisal saw a pro-Nasser slant in the president's conversations, raising doubts about his dedication to the Saudi kingdom, and Kennedy authorized the use of fighter planes to show US support for Saudi Arabia. President Kennedy lost any potential influence for change inside the Kingdom by doing this. Bronson (2006), 88 Kennedy gave up on long-standing US goals, just as FDR did in his historic meeting with King ibn Saud. He felt that the US's relationship with Saudi Arabia was too crucial to the preservation of US hegemony in the Near East to jeopardize[7].

Saudi Arabia supported Syria and Jordan in their anti-Nasser rhetoric in 1966 as tensions between Egypt, Syria, and Israel grew. They claimed that Egypt had abandoned its Arab brothers in Syria by not offering defense against Israeli raids on Syrian land. The Arab world saw a rapid rise in tensions, mostly due to Egypt's alleged lack of support for Palestine. As a gesture of solidarity, the King rallied Saudi soldiers in southern Jordan when Faisal came under fire for his own lack of support for Palestine. After falsely accusing the US of supporting Israel with air cover the day after the Six Day War broke out, Nasser forced Iraq, Algeria, and Kuwait to stop selling oil to the US and the UK. The next day, Saudi Arabia followed suit, with rioting and assaults by its population across the eastern region of the Kingdom against American oil workers and diplomatic missions. Despite the vehement denials from American and British ambassadors, their assertions were greeted at best with cautious suspicion and at worst with open incredulity. The experience of one British journalist encapsulates the state of the rumor throughout the Kingdom: "Almost all Arabs in this area who read the newspaper or listen to the radio strongly accept President Abdel Nasser's statement. Our televised denials are mostly ignored and simply not taken seriously. I think about that more than anything else, this accusation has severely tarnished our image in the Arab world and generated a wave of mistrust or animosity against us that will linger for the foreseeable future in some form. (Podeh, 2004).

The 1967 Arab Oil Embargo by Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Libya, United Arab Republic, and Saudi Arabia was the direct result of Nasser's accusations and represents the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' first significant and open use of petroleum resources as a political negotiating chip. Even though the impacted nations were able to effectively get around the temporary ban by changing trade agreements and using excess local oil supplies, OPEC members now possessed a fully functional means of extorting political power across international borders. Because of the inelastic nature of oil relative to the world's main economies, petroleum politics are particularly successful. History would repeat itself when the Yom Kippur War broke out in October 1973, and the Arab governments that produced oil would fully exploit the oil embargo's influence[8].

More significantly, however, the Israeli defeat of the combined Arab troops turned out to be a watershed moment in the history of the whole area. The spirit of Arab nationalism swiftly faded once Nasser and the other Arab Unionists were defeated. Because of the failure of secular movements, Islamic fundamentalism gained traction

across the Arab East, and as a consequence, "power began migrating across the Red Sea from Egypt to Saudi Arabia." Bronson (2006), 103 Given the ongoing Cold War tensions in the Middle East, Washington would use this intense religious fervor to combat the "godlessness" of communism. The primary objective of US policy in the Near East under Nixon was to impede the expansion of communism in the area. Nixon drew a path toward the Near East that was "even handed," striking a balance between the US's historically unwavering support for Israel and a more equitable treatment of its Arab neighbors. However, Nixon prioritized the fight against communism, saying, "Our interest is what gives the Soviet[s] the most trouble—don't let Arab-Israeli conflict obscure that interest." Bronson (2006), p. 110

Instability increased inside Palestine and among Palestinian refugees throughout the Near East as American support in the Arab-Israeli peace process declined. US involvement in the Near East was minimal in the early 1970s, with "virtually no Middle East Policy other than supporting the status quo." Bronson (2006), p. 115 Bombs were directed towards Saudi oil infrastructure by disgruntled Palestinians in Saudi Arabia, and Shiekh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the oil minister and mastermind behind plans to move OPEC operations closer to the public sector, issued a warning that Saudi petroleum policy may need to change significantly if the US did not press for Israel's withdrawal from the areas it had occupied during the Yom Kippur War. Faisal became more concerned that another round of Arab-Israeli violence would permanently destroy his support base as resistance to Saudi Arabia's diplomatic links to the US grew. Nonetheless, the elites of American foreign policy disregarded the king's threats of an embargo.

### **Diverse Courses of Action**

There was far less binding the United States and Saudi Arabia together after the first Iraq War ended. After the Soviet threat and numerous other perceived significant threats to the Kingdom were eliminated, there was little shared interest between the two countries. Instead, long-standing (and now mostly relic) arms deals and the debt from funding Desert Storm together nearly completely depleted Saudi financial reserves. Discontent spurred by the apparent puppeteering of the Kingdom was further fueled by widespread indignation over these loans paid on behalf of the United States and the inability to remove Saddam Hussein from Iraq. There is a great deal of deeply ingrained societal discontent directed at the monarchy and its supporter, the United States. And the only ideological avenue available to these individuals is Islamic fanaticism. Chomsky (2006), 37 Osama bin Laden was one of the most outspoken opponents of King Fahd and the Saudi religious establishment. He had offered to utilize his mujahideen troops in the Iraq War, but the Royal Family had turned him down. His increasing backing was seen by the Royal Family as the biggest danger to Saudi security, which resulted in his exile to Sudan in 1991[9].

Growing resistance was not appeased by Bin Laden's banishment, which probably added credence to the notion that the ulema and the Royal Family had little interest in upholding Wahabist customs. "Clearing 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," demanded a 1991 public declaration by religious authorities critical of the status quo. (Bronson 2006, 212) A year later, with even more backing, this message was reinforced with demands that the Royal Family "[end] foreign aid to 'atheistic' regimes such as Iraq, Jordan, and

Egypt, [create] a half-million man army aimed at fighting Jews and helping Muslims, and [outlaw] the teaching of Western law." Bronson (2006), 213. Throughout the 1990s, anti-House of Saud feeling became stronger until the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights was established in 1993 (more on this organization's history later in this article)[10].

The availability of unfiltered information on the internet and satellite television contributed to the escalation of this anger in the mid-1990s, which led to terrorist strikes within the Kingdom against US and Saudi state targets. Saudi Arabia was engulfed in a domestic crisis that only became worse after King Fahd's catastrophic stroke in 1995, which left Crown Prince Abdullah as the country's de facto ruler despite his limited authority. Even if Abdullah was less eager to sacrifice all for American interests and was aware of the rising unrest among the populace, not much could be done to stop the uprising. The first significant violent event occurred in 1995 when an assault on a Saudi National Guard training facility claimed the lives of five Americans. Nineteen American troops were killed and 372 injured when an explosives-packed vehicle exploded outside the Khobar Towers military housing complex a year later. The Royal Family downplayed these episodes, even going so far as to invite twenty thousand more American soldiers into the Kingdom in 1994 when Saddam Hussein once again took an aggressive stance toward Kuwait. Bronson (2006), 218 Into the new century, these military numbers increased sharply.

After realizing the extent of the danger presented by dissidents, the Royal Family and other members of the Saudi government made the decision in 2003 to forbid US forces from being stationed on Saudi soil and to stop supporting the controversial US operations against Iraq. (2003: Military to Remain) Due to the chaotic situation in Afghanistan, which resulted in an increasing number of mujahideen returning to Saudi Arabia and a few Arab governments and non-state entities engaging in proxy wars for influence inside Afghanistan, fundamentalism gained more momentum within the Kingdom. After being exiled to Sudan, Osama bin Laden returned to prominence in the war for Afghanistan in 1996. Bin Laden used the previously mentioned funding from Abdel Aziz bin Baz and Prince Salman to establish al-Qaeda. He was able to turn the failed state of Afghanistan into a terrorist recruitment center by drawing in mujahideen who were left over from the Soviet-Afghanistan affair and volunteers who were dissatisfied with the efforts of established governments and charity groups. He stated his intentions in the World Islamic Front's "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders" two years after he arrived in Afghanistan. Taking on the tenor of a fatwa, he said that murdering Americans and their allies—whether they be military or civilian—was a "duty" ordained by Allah. Subsequently that year, nearly 200 people (but only twelve Americans) were killed and others were injured in al-Qaeda bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which garnered considerable notoriety for bin Laden. These strikes demonstrated al-Qaeda's readiness to carry out actions that, although being directed against Americans, caused serious "collateral damage" to the local populace[11][12].

## THE FALLOUT FROM US-SAUDI DOMINATION

Oil-for-security deals between Saudi Arabia and the US have had negative ideological effects. This violates American values and many presidents' goals. As mentioned on previous pages, Saudi Arabia is one of the least democratic developed nations and has a long history of human rights abuses. In the 2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and 2007 Background Note on Saudi Arabia, the US government acknowledged the Kingdom's questionable human rights situation. Many legislative, presidential, and public pronouncements have

addressed this topic in recent decades[13]. The Department of State has raised concerns about prisoner mistreatment and isolation, restrictions on freedom of speech, press, peaceful assembly, association, and religion, the denial of citizens' right to change their government, systematic discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities, and worker rights suppression. The US State Department provided this background note in 2007.

Since establishing diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in 1933, practically every US president has contradicted his declared goals by supporting governments that have or tolerate these traits or failing to vigorously campaign against them. George W. Bush's National Security Strategy after 9/11 is notable for its clarity. "The United States must strongly support the essential requirements of human dignity, which include the following: adherence to legal principles; restrictions on the unrestricted authority of the government; the right to express oneself freely; the freedom to practice one's religion; fair treatment under the law; the recognition and equality of women; acceptance and understanding of different religions and ethnicities; and the acknowledgment and protection of private possessions." Bush (2002, 3) is cited. Additionally, the Bush administration's opening declaration on Middle Eastern reform is that the US would help these nations achieve stability, prosperity, peace, and flexibility. The US wants to promote democracy in the Muslim world more than ever. Source: Haass (2003). The seeming discrepancy casts doubt on the American government's sincerity and weakens US goals on the world arena, reducing the efficacy of soft power' vital to international relations. The book *Perilous Power* by Noam Chomsky and Gilbert Achcar examines the roots of Islamist non-state terrorism. The authors believe the US's advocacy of secular nationalism has fueled these groups' antipathy against the West. Saudi Arabia's support for Islamic fundamentalism to combat communism and intrastate nationalist movements, notably the mujahideen in Afghanistan, is the main cause of Arab animosity of the US. Why does the US suppress Near Eastern democracy? Achcar claims that democracy in certain countries may empower anti-Western organizations, implying that the "bad guys" will win. Reference (Chomsky 2006, 42). Chomsky agrees with Achcar that prominent US organizations only support democracy if it supports the country's economic and strategic aims. Reference (Chomsky 2006, 43). The 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections, organized by the US, are a prime example of this: "Mubarak ensured that the Muslim Brotherhood, a fundamentalist group, clearly emerged as the primary beneficiary of this meticulously orchestrated liberalization." He argued that promoting democracy would elevate these people to power. Please stop harassing me. Reference (Chomsky 2006, 45-6)[14].

Ideology drives violent anti-Western terrorism in the Near East and beyond. This kind of large-scale battle requires significant financial resources from terrorist groups. An review of American subsidies to Saudi Arabia shows that some of the financing went to terrorist groups that attacked Americans locally and globally. A detailed financial investigation found a worrying pattern of Saudi cash sponsoring regional schools and mosques that preached bigotry and intolerance and recruited al-Qaeda members. On page 236 of Bronson's 2006 paper, this information is cited. After 9/11, an inquiry into terrorism funding found that several Saudi charity groups and wealthy oil businessmen funded al-Qaeda. On page 237 of Bronson's 2006 paper, this information is cited. The discovery strained relations, forcing the Saudi authorities to make concessions to the US. These concessions included boosting counterterrorism measures, closing the Saudi Royal Family's official charity, and working closely with American official Fran Townsend and Saudi counterterrorism specialist Muhammad bin Naif to oversee activities in the Kingdom. The citation is from pages 243-244 of "Bronson" (2006). "We have

collaborated with the Saudis to elucidate the movement of funds and address previous shortcomings that facilitated the relatively smooth transfer of funds to terrorist entities." The language pertains to the 2005 US Senate. Implementation has improved, although discontent with these measures is prevalent. Victor Comras, a former State Department official and UN al-Qaeda monitoring committee member, spotlights Yassin Qadi, a rich terrorist funder who runs his worldwide company from Switzerland and Saudi Arabia. Comras further notes that although Saudi Arabia has disrupted terrorist fundraising organizations inside its borders, they may continue their operations outside of Saudi Arabia without official involvement. Source: Comras (2005). Dr. Gal Luft, co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, stated: "We find ourselves in a peculiar situation where we are engaged in a war against terrorism, yet we are financing both sides of the conflict." The language pertains to the 2005 US Senate[15][16].

## CONCLUSION

The Saudi Arabian people represent the last significant obstacle to transformation inside the Kingdom. Mostly detached from Saudi politics, it is unclear how a liberalized Kingdom that takes into account the needs and preferences of its people might look like. Although most public interactions with the Saudi government in the past have been unfavorable, it's possible that the majority of Saudi society has much more moderate views than the noisy extreme minority represented by those participating in these types of demonstrations. This unidentified element also influences how hard the US and other countries should press for change. Even while a democratic Saudi Arabia (if one would ever exist) is a long way off, the existing system and the political atmosphere it creates may be more dangerous for both internal and international peace. It is possible that the harsh beliefs and statements made by radical clerics are not representative of the loudest and most extreme elements of Saudi society, but rather a measure of broader popular opinion.

President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to Near East reform in a speech given in June 2009 at Cairo University, pointing out 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'm highlighting these kinds of domestic investments. Additionally, America is now seeking a wider involvement in this region of the globe, when in the past we have concentrated on oil and gas. (2009 Obama Egypt Speech) The creation of exchange and international internship programs, as well as the increased accessibility of telecommunications technology in the Near East, are specific actions to promote education and communication. Obama also suggested increasing US-Near East business collaborations and holding an entrepreneurship conference as ways to foster more commonalities between the two regions. The ties that bind the United States and Saudi Arabia will hopefully be repaired and strengthened through these concerted efforts for tangible progress, in addition to cooperation on political and institutional reform with foreign heads of state like King Abdullah. If this goal is accomplished, it will undoubtedly go a long way toward improving the historically turbulent relations between the United States and the Near East.

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