

MERIA

ANTI-AMERICANISM IN CONTEMPORARY SAUDI ARABIA

By Josh Pollack*

Several developments have contributed to the rise of anti-Americanism in Saudi Arabia since the end of the Cold War, including the steady growth of American influences on Saudi society and mores and the decline of common external threats. There were also a series of events that highlighted or symbolized two realities in conflict with the Kingdom's self-concept as the hub of Islam: dependence on the United States for external security, and American cultural influence. These events include the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91, the second Palestinian intifada, the terror attacks of September 11, and the second American war with Iraq.

In the past, anti-American sentiments and actions have played an important but episodic role in Saudi politics and foreign relations. The oil embargo of 1973-74 is the outstanding example. But since the end of the Cold War, anti-Americanism in word and deed has become one of the central features of the Saudi political landscape.

The change signals the erosion, if not collapse, of the bargain that has in the past characterized U.S.-Saudi relations: an ongoing transaction of economic and security relations without cultural exchange--or more precisely, without any forms of cultural exchange that visibly contravene Saudi Arabia's conservative Islamic self-portrayal. Security relations, too, could not so obviously signify dependency on a non-Islamic power that they trampled the image of an Islamic Kingdom, sovereign and pure, standing guard over the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina. Never entirely stable, the U.S.-Saudi bargain is now undergoing a metamorphosis under the heat of a new and withering antagonism.(1)

On the Saudi side, the emergence of that new antagonism--vehement and sometimes violent--can be traced to several developments: the steady growth

of American influences on Saudi society, through travel, education, business, and global news and entertainment media; the decline of common external threats, which had tended to suppress the intensity of differences between the two countries; and a series of events, starting with the Persian Gulf War, that exposed, highlighted, or symbolized both unacceptable Saudi dependence on the United States and unacceptable American influence on Saudi society and mores.

BACKGROUND: THE AMERICAN ROLE IN SAUDI ARABIA

In Saudi Arabia, America is not merely a symbol of modernity, but for decades has been the prime agent of modernization. Nowhere else in the region have large American businesses and government agencies been so disproportionately important in the life of a nation. This relationship extends well beyond just commercial ties between a major oil producer and a major oil consumer. Saudi Arabia's substantial and modern industrial and commercial infrastructures have been built up since the 1930s, largely on the strength of Saudi natural resources and American expertise. American construction firms

and oil companies have played major roles in this process.

The central expression of American involvement in Saudi economic development is the Aramco oil consortium, which prior to its nationalization in the late 1980s, was both the country's largest private employer and also a de facto economic development and social welfare agency in the Eastern Province, the Kingdom's economic heartland.(2) Another major example is the Bechtel Corporation, the San Francisco-headquartered global construction and engineering giant, whose activities in Saudi Arabia over the course of the last half-century include an array of pipeline, oil, gas, water, transportation, telecommunications, and power projects, collectively extending into the billions of dollars.(3)

Military modernization has proceeded along similar lines. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has built an extensive military infrastructure on Saudi territory.(4) American defense-aerospace firms have supplied the Saudi military establishment with many billions of dollars' worth of sophisticated arms, often in excess of its ability to wield them effectively. Finally, two American military training missions have operated continuously in the kingdom for decades. They remain in place even after the recent departure of the last American combat forces from the country.

By the early 1980s, the Saudi national security strategy had also become tightly meshed with America's own regional and global preoccupations, including the post-détente confrontation with the Soviet Union. In the Persian Gulf, revolutionary Iran menaced the interests of both countries, and the Communist threat had already reached Saudi frontiers in the form of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, as well as subversive activity in Oman. Further afield, but scarcely less alarming, was the potential Soviet military threat to the Persian Gulf.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 not only served as the immediate inspiration of the Carter Doctrine--a public presidential pledge to use force in defense of the Gulf region--but appears to have accelerated the above-mentioned program of military construction in the Kingdom. (In an unexpected twist, military facilities in Saudi Arabia completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during the 1980s would prove crucial during the wars with Iraq.) Reflecting the country's new wealth and its government's relative freedom of action, Saudi Arabia also funded U.S.-backed rebel activities in Communist or leftist states as widespread as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Angola, and Nicaragua.(5)

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE OLD BARGAIN

But because the claim to Islamic purity is the central ideological support of the Saudi state, the Saudi-American embrace has been conducted at arms' length. From the 18th century to the present, the legitimacy of the Saudi dynasty has been linked to its sponsorship of the religious revivalism of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Islamic purity assumed an even more profound role following the annexation of Hijaz in the 1920s, when the kingdom became home to the holy cities of Islam and the annual pilgrimage whose administration is one of the chief responsibilities of the Saudi government. (To this day, no non-Muslims are permitted in Mecca and Medina; in earlier times, scarcely any permanent non-Muslim presence was tolerated on the Arabian Peninsula outside of Yemen.) In recent decades, the ruling family has placed an increasingly greater emphasis on Islam and the Holy Places, first to counteract the Arab socialist claims associated with Nasserism, and later to counteract its own perceived closeness to the United States and the West, a matter of especially

pronounced concern after the Mahdist takeover of Mecca's Grand Mosque in 1979.

Madawi al-Rashid relates an oral narrative describing the Saudi king's management of the initial opening to the United States in 1933, during the negotiation of the oil concession. The literal accuracy of the anecdote is less significant than the understanding it conveys: an uneasy minuet of mosque and state opened a zone of toleration just sufficient to permit a Western presence inside the Kingdom:

The day was Friday, the time for noon prayers at Riyadh's main mosque. Shaykh ibn Nimr, the imam of the mosque in Riyadh, was delivering his usual khutba (sermon) to a large audience. Ibn Sa'ud was listening. The shaykh recited several Qur'anic verses including 'And incline not to those who do wrong, or the fire will seize you; and ye have no protectors other than Allah, nor shall ye be helped' (Qur'an, sura 11, verse 113). Ibn Sa'ud was furious. He asked Shaykh ibn Nimr to step down. Ibn Sa'ud began to recite sura al-kafirun: 'Say: O ye that reject faith. I worship not that which ye worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine' (Qur'an, sura 109, verses 1-6).(6)

The far-reaching Saudi-American relationship passes through this narrow opening. Westerners inside the kingdom live apart from Saudis, either in hotel rooms or within walled compounds where they have reproduced a Western lifestyle. Outside of these spaces, anything incompatible with the

kingdom's conservative Islam is unwelcome. Women must be covered, and either alcohol or any indication of non-Muslim worship is kept strictly out of sight.

Similarly, Islamic sensitivities have tended to restrict the extent and visibility of any American military presence. Since the early 1960s, significant American combat forces normally have been kept at a distance--"over the horizon," in the parlance of the 1980s--even as less effective Muslim troops hired from Pakistan have been quartered inside the Kingdom for extended periods.(7)

But the pursuit of American educational, business, and travel opportunities by the Saudi elites, including the royal family, has simply leapt over these local boundaries. Accordingly, a major avenue for the transmission of American social and intellectual influences into Saudi Arabia has appeared "behind the scenes," on university campuses and other locales in the United States, and increasingly also in the global electronic media. These influences have supported the emergence of a persistent reform movement with a middle-class orientation and liberalizing ideals.(8)

At the same time, the old ties have frayed considerably since the end of the Cold War. While the oil supply relationship remains unchanged, the kingdom's economy no longer depends on American expertise. Similarly, the United States remains important to Saudi national security, but even before the decade was out, the especially close-knit security relationship of the 1980s was showing signs of strain. The growing uncertainty of the United States as a supplier of advanced arms had encouraged the Saudis to find alternatives in the United Kingdom and China.(9) And in the years prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, neither Iran nor the Soviet Union could inspire the old anxieties. The Saudi-American

relationship was coming unmoored from its traditional couplings. In widely published remarks, King Fahd told Saudi military and security officials, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not tied to anyone and does not take part in any pact that forces upon it any sort of obligations....if things become complicated with a certain country we will find other countries, regardless of whether they are Eastern or Western... We are buying weapons, not principles."(10)

REACTION TO THE PERSIAN GULF WAR (1990-91)

In this uncertain time, with the role of the United States in Saudi Arabia seemingly on the decline, the Persian Gulf War came as a blow to traditional Saudi sensibilities. The American military and media buildup in the kingdom revealed to Saudis the extent of their dependence on a distant, non-Muslim power. In Islam's formative centuries, Christians and Jews came under Muslim protection, not the other way around; for Saudis, whose country lies at the very heart of Islam and who have never experienced colonialism, the reversal came as a shock. Shortly thereafter, the overwhelming defeat of Iraq's army eliminated any renewed sense of a threat next door that might have cemented ties.

The American buildup also stirred concerns that Western mores would liberalize and corrupt Saudi society. The worst fears of the traditionalists about a new "openness" were realized in November 1990, when a group of educated Saudi women staged a protest in Riyadh to demand the right to drive cars, and in December, when a group of Saudi liberals petitioned the government for broader participation in political life.

The result was an upsurge of anti-American sentiment expressed in the voice of a newly militant Islamic revivalism. Moroccan feminist Fatima

Mernissi, meditating on the fate of Mecca under the protection of the U.S. Air Force, described it as a response to a sense of impotence in the face of the American invasion, in both its military and cultural aspects:

The Muslim man had to be alert, on the defensive, with one eye on the *hudud* that hemmed in the women, the other on the frontiers of the empire. What happens when the two boundaries give way, and both at the same time? The enemy is no longer just on earth; he occupies the heavens and the stars and rules over time. He seduces one's wife, veiled or not, entering through the skylight of television. Bombs are only an incidental accessory for the new masters. Cruise missiles are for great occasions and the inevitable sacrifices. In normal times they nourish us with 'software': advertising messages, teenage songs, everyday technical information, courses for earning diplomas, languages and codes to master. Our servitude is fluid, our humiliation anesthetizing.(11)

The new opposition centered on the activities of two *ulama*, or Islamic jurists, Shaykh Salman al-Awda and Shaykh Safar al-Hawali, who circulated audiotaped sermons denouncing the United States as an occupying power. The supporters of the so-called "awakening shaykhs" petitioned the senior *ulama* and the rulers to demand Islamic reforms and the participation of *ulama* in politics and governance. By 1994, both shaykhs had been arrested, and London was becoming the center of gravity for the Sunni Islamist opposition in exile.(12)

In the following years, the "American occupation" remained a touchstone for opponents of the royal family, who came

to include veterans of the Afghan *jihād*. In November 1995, a bomb killed seven foreigners, including five Americans, at a Saudi Arabian National Guard training site in Riyadh. Another bomb killed 19 U.S. Air Force personnel at the Khobar Towers housing facility in Dhahran in June 1996, although this second attack appears to have been the work of Saudi Shi'ites connected to Iran. In August 1996, the former mujahidin organizer and Sudan-based Saudi oppositionist Usama bin Ladin published his "Declaration of War" against America and the Saudi royal family. His first grievance was "the occupation of the Land of the Two Holy Places--the foundation of the House of Islam, the place of the revelation, the source of the message, and the place of the noble Ka'ba, the direction of prayer for all Muslims--by the armies of the American crusaders and their allies."(13)

To bin Ladin, the al-Saud family had forfeited its right to rule by its failure to adhere to proper *shari'a* (Islamic law), and by its inability to defend the country independently of the "American crusader forces," whose presence he also blamed for the kingdom's economic problems. Similarly, the February 1998 proclamation of *jihād* by bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida organization compared the American forces defending the kingdom to devouring locusts. The occupiers of the peninsula were "plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples." He held the Saudi royal family to be acquiescent in these outrages.(14)

By the end of the decade, the worst of the surge of anti-American feeling seemed to have passed. Western armed forces in Saudi Arabia had lowered their profile, and the government felt confident enough to release the "awakening shaykhs" from prison. But the legacy of

the 1990s, building on the disorienting experience of the Persian Gulf War, was a supply of money and recruits for bin Ladin's organization, including within the Kingdom itself.

The attempts of the ruling family to counteract the opposition by burnishing its own Islamic credentials yielded the terms of the argument to the extremists, and ultimately served to increase their freedom of action and access to resources. Among the actions cited by the regime in its own defense were "spending on Islamic aid, the establishment of Islamic charitable organisations abroad, and the funding of Islamic education."(15) These moves proved, at best, counterproductive; subsequent revelations strongly suggest that al-Qa'ida was among the beneficiaries. A Council on Foreign Relations report of October 2002 found that "[f]or years, individuals and charities based in Saudi Arabia have been the most important source of funds for al-Qa'ida; and for years, Saudi officials have turned a blind eye to this problem."(16)

A wave of small-scale bombings and shootings of Americans, British, and other Westerners residing in Saudi Arabia commenced in the fall of 2001. The authorities preferred at first to deny any significant terrorist presence, and instead arrested other Westerners and charged them with the killings, which they claimed were related to the illegal trade in alcohol.(17) Only in May 2003, after the first of a series of major terrorist attacks on Western targets in Riyadh, did the full extent of the problem start to become apparent.

REACTION TO THE PALESTINIAN INTIFADA

The outburst of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000 was accompanied by ubiquitous broadcasts of Israeli military actions in Gaza and the West Bank on Arabic satellite television, inspiring a new wave of anti-American feeling in

Saudi Arabia. These sentiments were frequently explained in terms of a perception that the United States was, by dint of "silence" about Palestinian suffering, offering unlimited support to Israel. Critics generally described the Bush administration as reluctant to intervene in any manner that would put a stop to Israeli military actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A typical editorial called for the United States "to take urgent action to halt Israeli aggression against the Palestinians... like it or not, after years of unqualified U.S. backing for Israel, that country's acts are taken to be an American responsibility."(18)

Arab sympathy for the Palestinians during a violent conflict with Israel comes as no surprise. But the persistence with which Saudis, including members of the royal family, took the intifada as an occasion to criticize the United States requires explanation. One reason for this perspective is simply the belief that making demands on Washington may get results. The idea, often exaggerated but not wholly unwarranted, is that American leaders have the ability to affect Israeli decisionmaking, and that Saudi leaders in turn can influence American decisions. On more than one occasion during the intifada, Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah was able to portray this avenue for pro-Palestinian action as a major justification for continued ties with the United States.

A second, more complicated reason for linking Israeli military actions to America relates to continuing unhappiness with American and British military activities in Saudi Arabia, including the projection of air power against Iraq out of Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB), sometimes without notifying Riyadh of planned bombing raids.(19) This situation continually revived the troublesome memory of the Persian Gulf War and the underscored the Kingdom's continuing dependence on a non-Muslim power for its security. Perceived as a standing affront to the sovereignty of

Muslims in their own heartland, the basing arrangement was routinely characterized by the extremists in terms of occupation and oppression. Saudi criticism of *America* for the highly visible actions of the *Israeli* military therefore seems to reflect popular anger and humiliation over the role of the *American* military in Saudi Arabia, but displaced into an area where the government was more willing to allow Saudis to express their feelings. By the same token, leading members of the ruling family found in the embrace of the Palestinian cause an opportunity to assert their independence from the United States and reassert their credentials and legitimacy at American expense.

In a December 2000 interview, an unnamed senior prince told an American journalist that the "reputation of the United States in the Arab region has dropped to zero," adding that "too biased a stand makes an awkward situation for America's friends."(20) In April 2001, the Saudi government pledged \$225 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority, which it had refused to aid during the peace process era of the 1990s.(21)

For months, Crown Prince Abdallah refused repeated requests to visit the White House, apparently in response to President George W. Bush's frequent meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and his refusal to meet Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. In a June 2001 interview with the *Financial Times*, Abdallah delivered a veiled rebuke to Washington by hinting that the American role in resolving the Middle East crisis had become so passive that it was now up to the Saudis to provide leadership.(22)

In the fall of 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks--described more fully below--leading members of the royal family contributed large sums of money to a televised fundraising event intended to support the families of Palestinian *shuhada*.(23) At the same time, Abdallah began to

implicitly portray Saudi ties with the United States as a balm to the suffering of the Palestinians. News reports described Abdallah as having revealed to a gathering of prominent Saudis a letter to President George W. Bush, stating that "a time comes when peoples and nations part. We are at a crossroads. It is time for the United States and Saudi Arabia to look at their separate interests. Those governments that don't feel the pulse of the people and respond to it will suffer the fate of the shah of Iran." This ultimatum allegedly had been rewarded with a renewed American commitment to the emergence of a Palestinian state. Unnamed American diplomats confirmed the existence of the letter, although one described the passage cited in news reports (i.e., the quote that appears above) as "embellished."(24)

All these dynamics played out again of the course of a few weeks in March and April 2002. In the middle of March, Vice President Dick Cheney toured Middle Eastern capitals to secure support for a war with Iraq. Arab leaders, including Crown Prince Abdallah, sent him home with the message that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front would be necessary first. Abdallah also took advantage of the visit to accept an invitation to the United States after a number of earlier refusals.(25)

In late March, in a gesture of dissatisfaction with American leadership, Abdallah unveiled an anticipated Arab-Israeli peace initiative at an Arab summit meeting in Beirut. But the Beirut Declaration was overshadowed by a series of large-scale terrorist attacks in Israel, followed by the Israeli army's reentry into the urban centers of the West Bank. The unusual occurrence of protest demonstrations, including in front of the United States Consulate in Dhahran, suggest the intensity of feeling in Saudi Arabia at that moment.(26) While still in Beirut, Abdallah delivered bitter denunciations of Israeli Prime Minister

Ariel Sharon, and announced to reporters that he had secured from Washington a guarantee of Arafat's safety.(27)

Crown Prince Abdallah's visit to the United States, which took place at President Bush's ranch in Texas in late April, was preceded by a dramatic warning in the pages of the *New York Times* from an unnamed "person close to the crown prince", "It is a mistake to think that our people [i.e., the al-Saud] will not do what is necessary to survive... and if that means we move to the right of bin Laden, so be it; to the left of Qaddafi, so be it; or fly to Baghdad and embrace Saddam like a brother, so be it. It's damned lonely in our part of the world, and we can no longer defend our relationship to our people [i.e., the Saudi public]."(28)

Scheduled to last two days, the visit ended after five hours of meetings, in which the Crown Prince warned the President of a "deep rift." In another indication of Abdallah's lack of confidence in American efforts to date, the Saudis presented the Americans with an eight-point proposal for moving the Israelis and Palestinians into a cease-fire and a peace agreement along the lines of the Beirut Declaration. The meeting did not conclude with the customary joint statement.(29)

REACTION TO SEPTEMBER 11

The devastating terrorist attacks on the United States by a group of 19 Arabs loyal to Usama bin Ladin, including 15 Saudis, successfully appealed to pent-up resentment against America, reportedly prompting spontaneous celebrations in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries.(30) The attacks also unleashed a wave of recriminations from the United States. A barrage of criticism from congressmen, journalists, and activists spared no aspect of Saudi society, starting with the government's widely perceived tolerance for terrorist activities if not actual complicity, and moving from there

to the Kingdom's lack of democracy, freedom of religion, or rights for women.

Americans' anger tended to prompt rebukes even from normally pro-American, reform-oriented Saudis, who recoiled at what they considered unreasoned hostility, and voiced alarm at the treatment of foreign Arabs in the United States. Their responses to Americans' sudden wrath included the abrupt return of Saudi students, a sharp fall-off of Saudi tourism to the United States, and the reported divestment of billions of dollars. Many consumers also embraced--at least verbally--boycotts of American brands such as Coca-Cola, helping to build a market for new products whose makers pledged to distribute some of their proceeds to the Palestinian cause.(31)

A Gallup poll conducted in late January and early February of 2002 found 64 percent of Saudis to have an unfavorable view of the United States.(32) This would seem to be a high number in light of the longstanding relationship, but no earlier data appears to be available for comparison.(33) A Zogby International poll conducted in February, March, and April 2002 found 51 percent of Saudis to have an unfavorable view of the United States. Eighty-seven percent of Saudi respondents had an unfavorable impression of American policy toward the Palestinians.(34)

Regardless, many Western-oriented Saudi writers found ways to defend their national honor against American attacks without disregarding their own enduring interest in ties with the United States. Their ripostes tended to express resentment at a perceived betrayal, while holding out hope for a future reconciliation. One particular approach was to attribute the problems to the Bush Administration, suggesting that the United States would begin behaving more rationally after a change in power. Another view points to the temporary ill

effects of September 11 on the American national psyche.(35)

But the most common view, one also expressed by leading members of the royal family, has held that the problem is neither the Administration nor the United States as a whole, but an anti-Saudi "smear campaign" conducted by a small handful of critics, frequently portrayed as either exclusively Jewish or controlled by Jews. In January 2002, Crown Prince Abdallah told a New York Times correspondent, "The people of the kingdom have not been affected by what certain newspapers publish and you know who is behind this media."(36) Even some prominent *ulama*, apparently mirroring the royal family's agenda, have spoken about the "smear campaign" in narrowly anti-Jewish terms, rather than broadly anti-American ones.(37)

After September 11, the Saudi government also was confronted with rapid American preparations for war in Afghanistan, and the possible reactivation of the anti-American and anti-regime militancy that had followed the 1990-1 Persian Gulf War. While quickly breaking off relations with the Taliban, the authorities sought to restrict the scope and visibility of the American war effort on Saudi territory. Spokesmen, including Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, hinted in advance that any American requests to send aircraft against Afghanistan from Saudi bases would not be welcomed. Reflecting early concerns about a possible new war with Iraq, they explicitly ruled out attacks on any other Arab country from Saudi soil, a point they would reiterate at tense moments to come.(38) Only in September 2002, after President Bush reversed himself and sought a new UN Security Council resolution on Iraq did Prince Saud relax this stance.(39)

Leading princes also mobilized against any signs of renewed upset, downplaying the remaining foreign military presence in the kingdom, and

describing it as consensual, non-aggressive, and internationally sanctioned. Defense and Aviation Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, addressing the citizens of the conservative bastion of Qasim, the hometown of Shaykh Salman al-Awda, reminded his audience of the professions of faith reaped during the Persian Gulf War, in an attempt to recast the perceived crusade as a *hajj*. Sultan insisted:

that there is no military agreement between the kingdom and the United States or any other European country. He added that we do not accept that a single soldier remains in our country to fight the Arabs and the Muslims.

"We sought the assistance of some forces when an Arab country [Iraq] occupied another Arab country [Kuwait]. When the problem was solved with the return of Kuwait to its people, all the forces were withdrawn and the only soldiers in our country are Saudi soldiers."

He claimed that more than 6,000 soldiers of those who participated in the war to liberate Kuwait embraced Islam, particularly in al-Qasim, and performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Many of them are members of the U.S., British, and Russian forces, and we thank God for this blessing." Prince Sultan said that 40 French, British, and U.S. planes which fly over southern Iraq in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution and concluded, "We do not trust the Iraqi regime." (40)

Despite these efforts, the start of the war in Afghanistan was marked by continued attacks on Westerners in the cities of Riyadh and Khobar.

REACTION TO THE INVASION OF IRAQ

As the widely anticipated American-led invasion of Iraq increasingly took on the appearance of inevitability, officials from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs began to struggle to hold preachers to an apolitical line, declaring that Friday sermons "should be aimed at uniting the nation on the principles instead of dividing people, driving a wedge between them, and raising political issues that should not be discussed during Friday sermons, because it is not a media channel or means of spreading rumors." (41) Even if the Saudi leaders were aware that they could not plausibly camouflage all U.S. war preparations reportedly proceeding in their country, they appeared to be pressing hard to block any open expressions of dissent that might galvanize a new internal opposition.

In keeping with these requirements, the televised sermon of grand mufti Shaykh Abdul Aziz al-Shaykh, before a reported two million pilgrims on the plain of Arafat during the *hajj* in February 2003, warned against sedition in the name of patriotism or "protecting rights." The mufti instead dwelled on variations on the rhetoric of the "smear campaign," declaring that Islam "is being targeted today by its enemies," who are attacking the Muslim religion, "and even school curricula. They claim that these curricula call for terrorism and deviation. They say many things. They also target the nation's economy. They try to dominate it and link to their own economy." (42)

Opposition nevertheless appeared to be widespread and intensely felt. In the week before the commencement of combat, a group of Saudis, described as 200 intellectuals, both men and women, published a petition both condemning the war and demanding a measure of democracy at home. (43) Once the battle commenced, while the Saudi government expressed its deep concern, the

editorialists voiced revulsion at a conflict they envisioned as the use of high-technology firepower against helpless civilians--a close parallel to Saudi and other Arab descriptions of the Palestinian intifada.(44)

One news report published during the first week of the fighting described how just a few of the prominent, educated Saudi women invited to a tea at the U.S. embassy chose to attend, and how those who did attend used the occasion to deliver speeches and letters of protest.(45) Another report from the same week claimed that the air war was being directed from inside Saudi Arabia, but most Saudis remained unaware of it. An unnamed "senior Arab diplomat" in Riyadh described the country as a "volcano" ready to erupt, and suggested that if the public were aware the location of the air operations center, "they'd be in the streets."(46)

Public opinion survey data also suggests an intensification of anger around this time. A new Zogby poll conducted in July 2003, once the occupation of Iraq was well underway, found 70 percent of Saudis to have an unfavorable view of the American people, up from 51 percent the year before. 81 percent took an unfavorable view of U.S. policy towards Iraq, essentially unchanged from before. Ninety-four percent had an unfavorable view of U.S. policy towards the Palestinians, up from 87 percent the previous year.(47)

CONCLUSION

The actual peak of anti-American sentiment in Saudi Arabia may have occurred with the bombings of May 2003, when al-Qa'ida brought unrestrained violence into the capital, killing Saudis, Americans, and other foreigners alike. One of the compounds attacked belonged to the Vinnell Corporation, which trains the Saudi Arabian National Guard on contract for

the U.S. military. The royal family appears to have concluded that it now faced an intolerably dangerous situation, and shifted its mixed strategy of suppression, redirection, accommodation, and exploitation of anti-American sentiment towards a much greater degree of suppression, backed by considerably more forthright language about terrorism. In August, Crown Prince Abdallah turned Islamist rhetoric on its head, assailing "the corrupt aggressors in the holiest places on Earth--Makka and Madina."(48)

Still, while the United States military remains in Iraq, and while the Palestinian intifada continues, anti-American sentiment in Saudi Arabia is likely to remain high. Even if one were to assume an easing of regional conflicts, the absence of any excessively overt Saudi dependence on the United States for its security needs, and a sustained convergence between American and Saudi interests in fighting al-Qa'ida, the continuing struggle between reformers and traditionalists alone would remain likely to perpetuate tensions. In this unlikely scenario of minimum friction, Saudi conservatives can be expected to continue to oppose what they perceive as pernicious social influences stemming from the United States. It is more likely that American military power also will continue to play a prominent role in the Persian Gulf region and will continue to attract resentment as well. Under these conditions, it is not easy to envision an early return to the relatively stable and cooperative U.S.-Saudi relations of the past, as difficult as they often could be.

**Josh Pollack is a Washington, DC-based defense policy consultant. His recent work on Saudi-American relations includes articles in MERIA Journal and Limes: Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica.*

NOTES

1. As is discussed below, the growth of the new Saudi anti-Americanism has been accompanied by a new American anti-Saudism. The two phenomena are not precise parallels, but they feed off each other. For an overview, see F. Gregory Gause III, "The Approaching Turning Point: The Future of U.S. Relations with the Gulf States," Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World, Analysis Paper Number Two, May 2003.
2. Before being nationalized by the Saudi government in 1988, Aramco was responsible for electrifying the province, building roads, hospitals, and schools, mechanizing agriculture, and providing free health care and interest-free home loans to hundreds of thousands of employees and their dependents. Anthony Cave Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 156, 362-64; Arthur P. Clarke et al. (ed.), *Saudi Aramco and Its World* (Houston: Aramco Services Company, 1995), pp. 202-68.
3. A Bechtel Corporation brochure lists the following projects, both completed and ongoing: Ghazlan electric generating complex; Hawiya and Uthmaniya GOSPS (gas-oil separator plants); Ibn Rushd PTA/aromatics and polyester plant; Jeddah desalination plant; Jubail Industrial City; Kingdom Trade Centre, Riyadh; King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah; King Fahd International Airport, Eastern Province; King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh; Ras Tanura refinery I, II and III; Riyadh power plant; Shaybah field development producing facilities; Shoaiba power project; TEP-6 telecommunications project; Trans-Arabian pipeline (Tapline); Yanbu petrochemical plants.
4. Janet A. McDonnell, *Supporting the Troops: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996, EP 870-1-50), pp. 33-35.
5. Josh Pollack, "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, Vol.6, No.3, (September 2002), <<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2002/issue3/jv6n3a7.html>>
6. Madawi al-Rashid, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 91.
7. F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), p. 125.
8. Eighty percent of the members of the present Saudi cabinet hold an advanced degree from a university in the United States, according to the report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World. Edward P. Djerejian et al., "Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World," Submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, October 1, 2003, p. 35.
9. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 155-58, 178-80.
10. Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Saudis Reaffirm a Right to Vary Arms Dealings," *New York Times*, July 28, 1988.
11. Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 9.
12. The Islamic opposition is described in detail in Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), and Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).
13. Bin Ladin was shortly thereafter expelled from Sudan, finding sanctuary in Afghanistan. His manifesto originally

appeared in *al-Quds al-Arabi*. Translation in Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin (eds.), *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East: A Documentary Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 137-39.

14. Translation in Rubin and Colp Rubin (eds.), *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East*, pp. 149-50.

15. Al-Rashid, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 176.

16. Maurice R. Greenberg, William F. Wechsler, Lee S. Wolosky, et al., "Terrorist Financing," Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, October 17, 2002, p. 8. Another study, commissioned by Colombia's ambassador to the United Nations, concluded that al-Qa'ida had raised "between \$300 [million] and \$500 million over the last 10 years from wealthy businessmen and bankers, whose fortunes represent about 20% of the Saudi GNP, through a web of charities and companies acting as fronts." Sebastian Rotella, "Saudis Must Stem Cash for Terror, Report Says," *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 2002.

17. "US Involvement" (editorial), *Arab News*, May 28, 2001.

18. Pollack, "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002."

19. Howard Schneider, "Bombing in Saudi City Kills American; Monarchy Braces for Eruption of Popular Dissent Against U.S.," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2001; "A year of attacks on expats," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2002; Robin Allen and Roula Khalaf, "Saudi Car Bomb Kills British Banker: Explosion in Riyadh Heightens Fears for Safety of Foreigners in Osama bin Laden's Home Country," *Financial Times*, June 21, 2002.

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

21. The previous October, the Arab League had pledged \$800 million to preserve the "Arab and Islamic identity of

Jerusalem," plus another \$200 million for families of Palestinians killed in the fighting. How much of this money was ever disbursed is unclear. Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat reportedly received \$45 million during a July 2001 visit to Saudi Arabia, which may have counted against the \$225 million pledged in April. Alfred B. Prados, "Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, July 8, 2002, p. 6.

22. "We are the country with high credibility with all parties in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Maybe we are also the one qualified to persuade all concerned to come to the peace table. But we cannot play this role... while Israel continually frustrates every peace initiative." Roula Khalaf, "Regal Reformer: Crown Prince Abdallah, Regent to Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, has Spearheaded Diplomatic and Economic Change," *Financial Times*, June 25, 2001.

23. Neil MacFarquhar, "No Jerry Lewis, but Saudi Telethon Reaches Goal," *New York Times*, November 9, 2001.

24. James M. Dorsey, "Saudi Leader Warns US of 'Separate Interests,'" *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 2001. According to Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the letter was Abdallah's impassioned and spontaneous response to an answer to a question about the Palestinians given by the President during a press conference on August 24, 2001. Robert G. Kaiser and David Ottaway, "Saudi Leader's Anger Revealed Shaky Ties," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2002. Another account had Abdallah's letter delivered in early September. Sulayman Nimr, *al-Hayat*, November 6, 2001, translated by FBIS.

25. Michael R. Gordon, "Bush Plans Talks With Saudi Prince on Mideast Plan," *New York Times*, March 18, 2002.

26. "Back Palestinians with Deeds not Words, Says Naif," *Arab News*, April 6, 2002, cited in F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Perceptions of the United States Since 9-11," prepared for the conference

on "Western and Non-Western Perceptions of America in the Aftermath of 9-11," CERISciences Po, Paris, September 30-October 1, 2002.

27. Neil MacFarquhar, "As Arabs Seethe, Saudi Says Uprising Will Go On," *New York Times*, March 30, 2002; Neil MacFarquhar, "Anger in the Streets Is Exerting Pressure On Arab Moderates," *New York Times*, April 3, 2002; Serge Schmemmann, "Israel Persisting With Sweep Despite U.S. Calls," *New York Times*, April 8, 2002. For U.S. intervention with Israel over Arafat's fate, see Tracy Wilkinson, "Israel Asks: Is It Time For Arafat To Leave?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 2002.

28. Patrick E. Tyler, "Saudi to Warn Bush of Rupture Over Israel Policy," *New York Times*, April 25, 2002. See also Howard Schneider, "Saudi Crown Prince To Carry Warning To Visit With Bush; U.S.-Israeli Alliance Frustrating Arab Leaders," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2002.

29. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Saudi Tells Bush U.S. Must Temper Backing of Israel," *New York Times*, April 26, 2002; Patrick E. Tyler, "Saudi Proposes Mideast Action Led by U.S.," *New York Times*, April 27, 2002.

30. Cameron S. Brown, "The Shot Seen Around the World: The Middle East Reacts to September 11th," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, Vol.5, No.4, (December 2001), <<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue4/jv5n4a4.htm>>.

31. "Summer Vacationers Shun the U.S.," *Arab News*, February 15, 2002; Robin Allen, "Bank's Deposits hit by 'anti-US protests,'" *Financial Times*, May 24, 2002; Scott Peterson, "Saudis Channel Anger into Charity," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 30, 2002; Roula Khalaf, "Saudi Investors Pull out Billions of Dollars from US: Move Signals Deep Alienation Following September 11," *Financial Times*, August 21, 2002; Peter Baker, " 'I'll Never Go Back'; Saudis

Who Once Embraced America Now Feeling Embittered and Betrayed," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2002.

32. As cited in F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Perceptions of the United States since 9-11."

33. Zogby International began polling in Saudi Arabia in October 2000, but apparently did not begin surveying attitudes towards America until 2002. See Zogby International news release of April 4, 2001, <<http://www.zogby.com/intnews/ReadNews.dbm?ID=3>>.

34. Zogby International news release of July 31, 2003, <<http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=725>>.

35. One prominent writer proposed that "11 September was something resembling a violent shock that caused the United States to lose its memory, or lose consciousness at the very least. Today it lives in a state of violent vertigo and it is not clear when it will be cured of it." Turki al-Hamad in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 18, 2002, translated by FBIS.

36. Elaine Sciolino, "Taking a Rare Peek Inside the Royal House of Saud," *New York Times*, January 28, 2002. See also Marc Perelman, "Defensive Saudis Lash Out at 'Zionist' and U.S. Critics," *Forward*, December 28, 2001.

37. "Smear Campaign Unmasks Zionist Designs: Sudais," *Arab News*, February 2, 2002.

38. Roula Khalaf, "Riyadh Fears the Fallout from War," *Financial Times*, October 8, 2001.

39. CNN Live Today, September 16, 2002. See also Todd S. Purdum, "Saudis Indicating U.S. Can Use Bases If U.N. Backs War," *New York Times*, September 17, 2002.

40. *Ukaz*, September 30, 2001, translated by FBIS.

41. Abd-al-Rahman al-Shamrani, "Warning Against the Trap of Unconfirmed News, Al-Amman: Friday Sermons Not the Place for Politics,"

Ukaz, December 21, 2002, translated by FBIS.

42. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia TV1, February 10, 2003, translated by FBIS.

43. Agence France-Press, "Saudi Intellectuals Oppose War on Iraq," *Jordan Times*, March 16, 2003.

44. "Smart Weapons in Evil War" (editorial), *al-Jazirah*, March 24, 2003, translated by FBIS.

45. "Saudi Women Send Regrets," *Washington Post*, March 27, 2003.

46. Craig S. Smith, "Saudi Arabia Seems Calm, but, Many Say, Is Seething," *New York Times*, March 24, 2003.

47. Zogby International news release of July 31, 2003, available at <<http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=725>>. Significantly, the pollsters found that 91% of Saudis watched satellite television, and 63% had internet access--more than those (47%) who read a daily newspaper.

48. P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "Sympathizers Are Terrorists Too: Abdallah," *Arab News*, August 15, 2003.