

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01/05/2016	2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) OCT 2016 - APR 2017
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4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Saudi Arabia and the United States: A Necessary Strategic Partnership	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A
	5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A

6. AUTHOR(S) Rosales, Joshua, R., Major, USMC	5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A
	5e. TASK NUMBER N/A
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A
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9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Close official ties between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have come under significant scrutiny. Critics claim that Saudi Arabia has not been a good partner in fighting enemies of the United States, that the Kingdom has exported religious extremism that bolsters totalitarian groups such as Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, that dropping oil prices will lead to the decline of the nation and its importance as a partner, and that Saudi Arabia's competition with Iran threatens to destabilize the Middle East region. These concerns bring the value of the US strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia into question. Is maintaining Saudi Arabia as a close strategic partner worth the cost and effort?

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Saudi Arabia; Strategic Partnership; So-called Wahhabism

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	33	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

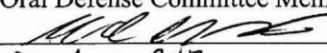
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

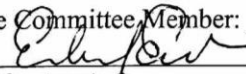
TITLE: Saudi Arabia and the United States: A Necessary Strategic Partnership

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR: Joshua R. Rosales

AY 16-17

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Douglas E. Streasand
Approved: 
Date: 20 April 2017

Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Edward J. Erickson
Approved: 
Date: 20 April 2017

Executive Summary

Title: Saudi Arabia and the United States: A Necessary Strategic Partnership

Author: Major Joshua Rosales, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: A Strong relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a necessity in order to facilitate the cooperation necessary to fight totalitarian Islamist Network nodes such as Al Qaeda and ISIL, safeguard global economic stability, and maintain stability and security in the Middle East.

Discussion: Close official ties between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have existed for over seventy years. The partnership served both countries well, in spite of significant challenges and criticism. Critics claim that Saudi Arabia has not been a good partner in fighting enemies of the United States, that the Kingdom has exported religious extremism that bolsters totalitarian groups such as Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, that dropping oil prices will lead to the decline of the nation and its importance as a partner, and that Saudi Arabia's competition with Iran threatens to destabilize the Middle East region. These concerns bring the value of the US strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia into question. Is maintaining Saudi Arabia as a close strategic partner worth all of the cost and effort?

Conclusion: The United States has a vital interest in maintaining a strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia's government. The United States should continue to work with the government of Saudi Arabia to ensure stability in the region, assist Saudi Arabia in preparing to transition to a post-petroleum dominated world, and cooperate with Saudi Arabia to defeat totalitarian Islamist groups. A strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia should be coupled with encouraging social and political reform within the Kingdom and ensuring Saudi actions do not undermine U.S. interests. Although Saudi Arabia and the United States have differing world views and different priorities, both have much to gain from a strategic partnership.

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Preface

I first became interested in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States after reading Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* over the course of a month-long stay in Saudi Arabia. I was there as part of a detachment from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit conducting a training exercise in 2005. This introduction to the complex relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States—while being on the ground in the Kingdom—combined with my interest in how the United States determines which countries it will form alliances or strategic partnerships with, influenced my decision to examine more closely the U.S.-Saudi strategic partnership. The Master of Military Studies program provided me with the opportunity to build upon my basic knowledge of Saudi Arabia and conduct a more comprehensive look into the Kingdom.

I would like to thank my Master of Military Studies advisor Dr. Douglas Streusand for his guidance and mentorship during the undertaking of this project. Dr. Streusand enhanced my understanding of the relationship between Islam and politics in Saudi Arabia, and significantly improved my understanding of the Totalitarian Islamist Network that threatens both the interests of Saudi Arabia and the United States. I would also like to thank Marine Corps University Librarian Christi Bayha for her assistance in tracking down resource materials necessary to complete my research. The assistance from Dr. Linda DiDesidero, Andrea Hamlen, and Stase Wells of the Leadership Communication Skills Center was invaluable; their insights and recommendations were critical to improving my writing. I would like to thank both the faculty and students at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College for their guidance, expertise, and professionalism. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Laura, and son Jack, for their patience, understanding, and support without which completion of this project would not have been possible.

Acronym list:

TIN: Totalitarian Islamist Network

KSA: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

SAAS: Saudi Arabian Armed Services

SANG: Saudi Arabian National Guard

AQAP: Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula

AQAI: Al-Qaeda in Iraq

MOI: Ministry of Interior

MOD: Ministry of Defense

USMTM: United States Military Training Mission

DAESH: Degrading name for so-called Islamic State in the Levant and al-Sham

Introduction

Close official ties between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have existed since the end of the Second World War. Over the last seventy years, the partnership served both countries well, in spite of significant challenges and criticism. Public officials, notably former President Barack Obama, former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and President Donald Trump, and others have questioned the necessity of a close relationship between the two nations in recent years. Critics have claimed that Saudi Arabia has not been a good partner in fighting enemies of the United States, that the Kingdom has exported religious extremism that bolsters totalitarian groups such as Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, that dropping oil prices will lead to the decline of the nation and its importance as a partner, and that Saudi Arabia's competition with Iran threatens to destabilize the Middle East. Some Americans, despite reports to the contrary, still believe the government of Saudi Arabia was in some way complicit in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.¹ Saudi Arabia's poor human rights record is also a concern and has caused tension in the U.S.-Saudi partnership.² These concerns put the value of the US strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia into question. Is maintaining Saudi Arabia as a close strategic partner worth all of the cost and effort? The answer is that, despite the complications of the relationship and the distaste many Americans have for it, the United States benefits significantly from its partnership with Saudi Arabia. The United States has a vital interest in maintaining a strong relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in order to fight totalitarian Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, safeguard global economic stability, maintain stability and security in the Middle East, and contain Iran. Concurrently the United States must ensure that Saudi Arabia does not undermine US interests while receiving US support.

Countries with similar interests, despite different priorities, cultures, and forms of government, can—through strategic partnership—solve significant challenges that threaten the citizens, interests, and sovereignty of both countries. In the case of Saudi Arabia and the United States, although there are significant differences between the two countries, this research paper will demonstrate that the common interests of the two countries provide a basis for a strategic partnership critical to US interests. It will also address arguments put forth by detractors who believe a relationship between the governments of United States and Saudi Arabia is not in the best interest of the United States. This analysis refers to and analyzes journal articles, news reports, books, and other sources. Ultimately this paper will argue that a policy of not maintaining a strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia is no policy at all, and that it is essential to the security of the United States to remain a reliable partner to Saudi Arabia. The paper begins with a brief overview of the history of Saudi Arabia, discusses the history of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, presents the reasons to maintain a strategic partnership, and then addresses specific issues regarding the relationship. Finally, this research paper will offer recommendations for the United States moving forward to maintain a strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia, which is beneficial to US interests.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a prominent player in the Middle East and is intimately intertwined in much of the interworking of the region. Despite what many in the global community—particularly in the United States—perceive as shortcomings, it remains relatively stable. The Kingdom also plays a major role globally, because of its massive energy resources. Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East and according to Colbert C. Held and Thomas Cummings, “Saudi Arabia’s geography and economy place it prominently in international

rankings.”³ Saudi Arabia “possesses the world’s largest oil reserves, the largest single oil reservoir [and] the largest-capacity oil-export terminal...”⁴ As a result, Saudi Arabia is a prominent player in the global economy. Saudi Arabia is developed and stable in spite of its relative youth as a country. Saudi Arabia’s founding was the result of “a special combination of circumstances”⁵ arising from a pact between two prominent leaders—one the head of a powerful family, and the other a devout and conservative religious reformer. As a result, the conservative rigorously monotheistic form of Islam became the core of Saudi Arabia’s existence. Since its birth, it has “adhered to many of the traditions that were an integral part of its *raison d’être*. Such conservatism has mixed consequences: it strengthens the social fabric but both inhibits social evolution and invites foreign and domestic criticism.”⁶

The leadership and government of Saudi Arabia is inextricably tied to a rigorous and puritanical interpretation of Islam. This form of conservative Islam is referred to by its detractors as Wahabbism. The synthesis of this conservative Islam with the leadership of the Al Saud family ultimately led to the regime of mutually supporting religious clerics and the Al Saud royal Family. The close relationship between Islam and governance arose in the mid-eighteenth century when “...the Al Saud leader Muhammad ibn Saud led his family into alliance with religious reformer, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, linking Saudi political military power and Muslim puritanism.”⁷ Understanding this relationship, which is at the very core of the foundation of Saudi Arabia, is important to understanding the nature of the relationship between the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the powerful Muwahhidin followers of the brand of Islam brought forth by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. There is a dual nature to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that shapes the nation’s interests and how it conducts itself in the world. The two components are molded together and, in a sense, inseparable. Today, as they have for over two

centuries, the teachings of Muhhamd ibn Al-Wahhab are inextricably tied to the government of Saudi Arabia, with Saudi Arabia's conservative clerics serving as a de facto branch of government that wields significant influence.⁸ As David Long and Sebastian Maisel write in *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, "...one could argue that Abd al-Wahhab's Islamic revival is the ideological glue that has allowed the Saudi state to survive 250 years."⁹

The United States and Saudi Arabia: Foundations

As Held and Cummings observe, "Saudi Arabia's close relations with the United States began with Aramco's exploration for petroleum in the 1930s."¹⁰ In 1944, the United States established an embassy in Jiddah.¹¹ From the early years until present day, the partnership had its high and low points, but overall has proven to be mutually beneficial and important to the United States. A specific example of the complexity, importance, and consequences of the partnership is the 1991 Gulf War. During the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia provided airfields and logistical support, and it allowed for the staging and basing of U.S. troops within the Kingdom. Only because the situation for Saudi Arabia was so dire, were US forces allowed into Saudi Arabia amidst significant internal strife. Many of the ulema wanted to keep the infidels out of the Kingdom; however, the armed threat at Saudi Arabia's border eventually led to an endorsement from the ulema that allowed King Fahd to ask for "Arab and non-Arab countries to deter the expected danger."¹² Although having U.S. troops on Saudi territory was essential to ensuring the security of Saudi Arabia, and the ultimate defeat of Saddam Hussein's forces and liberation of Kuwait, the long-term presence of U.S. troops following the crisis was very unpopular in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.¹³ The tension caused by U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia is an example of the complexity of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia when they choose to work together. In the Middle East, there are multiple interests at work, layer upon layer

of complexity to grasp, and second and third order effects to contend with. The complexity is only compounded when the relationship is between a predominantly Islamic country, in this case Saudi Arabia—home to the most sacred places in all of the Islamic world—and the United States, a country that many in Saudi Arabia do not trust on the basis that many in the Islamic world categorizes Americans, although there are Muslims who are United States citizens, as non-believers. Western military forces in Islamic countries continue to be a sensitive subject from many in the Middle East, and the impact of U.S. troops based in Saudi Arabia as well as their presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has far reaching effects. The strongly held belief of “Let there not be two religions in Arabia,” which is from a well-known *hadith*, certainly resonates with many in Saudi Arabia.

Other areas where Saudi Arabia and the United States cooperate are by technical and economic assistance, military cooperation, and intelligence sharing/cooperation.

Technical and economic relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia arose during the early days of petroleum giant Aramco’s management and operation of Saudi oil fields.¹⁴ This led to an influx of Americans into the region, and organizations offering technical expertise assisted greatly with the modernization and development of Saudi Arabia. The continued technical and economic support will be a necessity as Saudi Arabia seeks to ensure that it is prepared for when oil is not the main source of energy, or when the wells have run dry. U.S.-Saudi relations will be essential for Saudi Arabia’s National Transformation Plan and Economic Vision to continue to modernize and prepare for the future. According to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s government website, “Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030” is a national transformation program that proposes efficient planning, efficient and timely completion of projects and ensures the sustainability of Saudi Arabia in the decades ahead.¹⁵ Ultimately, the government of Saudi

Arabia understands that it must institute significant changes in order to prepare its citizens to be productive and prosperous in a world where the global economy is not fueled by Saudi petroleum. As Bilal Y. Saab explains, “Saudi Arabia will need security, technical knowhow, capacity building, and foreign investment to get this major reform process right. Only the United States can deliver effectively on all four.”¹⁶

Significant military cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia began in 1942. King Abd al-Aziz approved US air base construction and set in motion a military partnership between the two countries.¹⁷ Today, the United States collaborates with Saudi Arabia primarily through the United States Military Training Mission (USMTM). The USMTM “is a unique Security Assistance and Security Cooperation organization under the authority of the US Diplomatic Mission.”¹⁸ The USMTM, in its Security Assistance role focuses on training, advising, and assisting. In its Security Cooperation role, the USMTM “facilitates most Title 10 DoD activities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, primarily at the direction of the Commander, US Central Command...”¹⁹ The mission of the USMTM is to “enhance US National Security through building the capability and capacity of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces (SAAF) to defend our common interests in the Middle East region.”²⁰ In addition, Saudi Arabia was the largest purchaser of U.S. arms between 2001 and 2015.²¹ The U.S.-Saudi defense relationship reflects the importance of Saudi security to the global economy and the Saudi role in maintaining regional order. With this unlikely to change for the foreseeable future, it is important that Americans understand the role that the United States and Saudi Arabian forces play in cooperating to fight totalitarian groups that pose a threat to both the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Perhaps the area where the United States and Saudi Arabia benefit the most is in counterterrorism efforts and intelligence sharing. This cooperation is vital to thwarting attacks and defeating totalitarian groups that conduct terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia and against U.S. interests. According to a State Department report, “Saudi Arabia continued to maintain a robust counterterrorism relationship with the United States and supported enhanced bilateral cooperation to ensure the safety of both U.S. and Saudi citizen within Saudi territories and abroad. Saudi Arabia stood as a member of the Global Coalition to Counter the so-called Islamic State, taking military action in support of coalition efforts.”²² Without this exchange, it would be significantly more difficult for either nation to fight terrorist networks unilaterally.

The important takeaway is that, although many observers view the United States’ relationship with Saudi Arabia to be about oil, the fact is that it is much more comprehensive than that and with much more far reaching implications to national security and regional stability. While oil’s effect on the global economy is extremely important, the partnership between the two countries goes beyond petroleum. The security of U.S. interests and the stability of the region are at stake. The United States can leverage Saudi Arabia to support its goals in the region and, by being a partner, assist Saudi Arabia in maintaining security against terrorist groups.

The United States and Saudi Arabia: A Strategic Partnership

At present, the United States and Saudi Arabia maintain a relationship that former President Obama characterized as “complicated.”²³ Numerous government officials and many Americans have called into question whether close ties with Saudi Arabia are in the interests of the United States. One area that many critics point to when arguing against strong U.S.-Saudi Arabian ties is that Saudi Arabia exports its own brand of fundamentalist Islam that directly

contributes to global jihadist groups and terrorism. They believe that so-called Wahhabism is directly linked to totalitarian Islamist groups, and because so-called Wahhabism maintains a close relationship with the government of Saudi Arabia, that through its support of preachers and non-governmental organizations, Saudi Arabia is supporting totalitarian Islamist groups.²⁴ President Trump has called the Saudis “the world’s biggest funders of terrorism,”²⁵ Hilary Clinton deplored Saudi Arabia’s support for “radical schools and mosques around the world that have set too many young people on a path towards extremism,”²⁶ and Fareed Zakaria writes that the Saudis have “created a monster in the world of Islam.”²⁷

It does not help, either, that many Americans believe—despite official reports—that the government of Saudi Arabia played a role in the September 11th, 2001 attacks.²⁸ In fact, “the 9/11 Commission found no evidence of institutional or senior-level Saudi support.”²⁹ However, it is understandable the resentment many Americans have for Saudi Arabia as a result of the 9/11 attacks, as it is undeniable that Saudi citizens were amongst the nineteen hijackers who conducted the attacks on New York and the Pentagon. Following the 9/11 attacks, “terrorists killed fifty people, including nine Americans, in Riyadh in 2003, and a full-scale assault on the US consulate general in Jiddah in December 2004 killed four non-American staff members.”³⁰ These attacks reinforce the impression that Saudi Arabia supports terrorism and that a relationship with Saudi Arabia is not in the interest of the United States. Upon closer examination, however, it is evident that both the government of Saudi Arabia and the United States share a vital interest in combating totalitarian groups and terrorist activity. The so-called Islamic State and Al Qaeda are top security threats for the government of Saudi Arabia. Daniel Byman writes that “The Islamic State has declared Saudi Arabia to be its enemy, and its propaganda shows its black flag flying above Mecca... More broadly, the Islamic State threatens

the regime's legitimacy, claiming that it—rather than the Kingdom—is the true embodiment of a state under God's Law.”³¹

Despite most Americans and American policymakers' distaste for Saudi Arabia's close relationship with a brand of fundamental Islam that they believe directly contributes to global jihadism and terrorism, this should not blind decision makers to three important aspects: First, the legitimacy of the Saudi regime depends on the support of the ulema, including descendents of Muhammad ibn abd al-Wahhab. Secondly, totalitarian groups such as the so-called Islamic State and Al Qaeda are significantly separated from the government of Saudi Arabia and differ significantly from the puritanical revivalism of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Most importantly, Saudi Arabia fears the very totalitarian groups it is accused of supporting because these groups pose a significant threat to the leadership and Government of Saudi Arabia. It is also important to understand how totalitarian groups receive support from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a complex country, and to simply state that Saudi Arabia—the nation—directly or indirectly supports totalitarian groups does little to clarify how such support networks work. To generalize all of Saudi Arabia—the private citizens, members of the royal family, and the government—into one group and make judgments and decisions based on what a small part of any of those components do—perhaps as an example, finance terrorist groups—complicates the efforts necessary to discourage or defeat support of terrorist groups and clouds a discussion that needs to be clear in order to ensure U.S.-Saudi ties are worth the effort. Ultimately, Americans may need to understand that, as Mohammed Alyahya asserts, “Blaming Wahhabism or Salafism for violent radicalism... is a distortion that stands to obstruct fighting violent radicalism and understanding its causes.”³²

Critics of the US-Saudi relationship contend that the Saudis have been slow and reluctant to engage Sunni enemies such as al-Qaeda and over emphasized with the Shi'i threat from Iran. The United States has encountered difficulty in convincing Saudi Arabia to commit resources to fight the enemies high on the United States priority list, and Saudi Arabia has dragged its feet in response to continued US prodding. Saudi Arabia continues to be engaged in armed conflict in Yemen, and is too focused on Iran to consider reallocating resources to meet all of the demands of the United States. However, many Americans support the Saudi policy and believe this policy supports US interests. These supporters contend that Saudi efforts contain Iran better than US policy does.³³ This is no doubt frustrating to the United States. That being said, there is still significant value in a close partnership with Saudi Arabia when it comes to fighting totalitarian groups as it is clear that the Saudis have made valuable contributions in the struggle against the Sunni totalitarians. It is also important to remember that Saudi Arabia has a vital interest in fighting totalitarian groups, and at the very least, keeping them at bay and unable to threaten Saudi governance. The intelligence cooperation and sharing of information is an invaluable aspect of the relationship between Washington and Riyadh and alone is arguably well worth the trouble of maintaining a complicated and often strained relationship.

While some critics may attempt to reduce the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia as being solely about oil, to do so would be an oversimplification. In fact, the United States gets very little oil from Saudi Arabia. But the global economy depends on Saudi oil and disruption to Saudi oil production would be catastrophic to the global economy. As a result, it also has the potential to have catastrophic results on the delicate global economy should it be unable to maintain global economic stability as well as its own economic stability. Additionally, if Saudi Arabia as a whole were to become unstable it would create a dangerous

economic situation. The United States has a crucial interest in maintaining global economic stability, and therefore, while it may not be dependent on Saudi oil imports, it must prioritize Saudi Arabian stability due to how much it can affect global economic stability.

The Middle East can be characterized, especially as of late, by instability. Failed states, totalitarian groups such as the so-called Islamic State and Al Qaeda advancing their causes, and other remnants from over fifteen years of American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan have made the region a very dangerous place. On top of these concerns, there is growing concern about the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Two of the few remaining powerhouses in the region will continue to face-off against each other for dominance in the region. However, with continued US support of Saudi Arabia, the Saudis will be able to contain Iran and meet US goals of Iranian containment. Close ties with Saudi Arabia will be important to US security concerns within the region and will allow the United States to bolster stability. It is certainly valuable to have a close relationship with one of the very few stable nations in an unstable region.

So-Called Wahhabism and Totalitarian Islamist Organizations

For some Americans, and many critics of the U.S.-Saudi relationship, the connection between Saudi Arabia and terrorist organizations is clear: Saudi Arabia works with, supports, and funds fundamentalist Islamic groups, and in turn fundamentalist Islamic groups work with, or are, global jihadists/totalitarian groups such as the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda, and conduct terrorist activities that threaten Americans, U.S. interests, and global stability. The reality, in fact, is much more complicated. The complex and mutually beneficial relationship between Saudi Arabia and fundamentalist Islam began decades ago with a deal between two Muhammads—Muhammad Ibn Saud and Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab—at the birth of Saudi Arabia. The deal between the two men created the duality that dominates Saudi Arabia's identity

today. “[Mohammed] Ibn Saud would protect and propagate the stern doctrines of the Wahhabi mission, which made the Koran the basis of government. In return, Abdul Wahhab would support the ruler, supplying him with ‘glory and power.’ Whoever championed his message, he promised, ‘will, by means of it, rule lands and men.’”³⁴ The result of this deal has had far reaching impacts on how Saudi Arabia is viewed globally and is at the core of why many attempt to make the connection between terrorist organizations and Saudi Arabia.

Critics of Washington’s relationship with Riyadh frequently assert that Saudi Arabia is to blame for totalitarian Islamist violence arising from the government’s enmeshment with so-called Wahhabism.³⁵ The idea that Saudi Arabia is exporting religious fundamentalism that leads to jihadist violence appears to be widely—although inaccurately—accepted. This is no doubt reinforced by the multiple government officials and journalists publically pointing out that the Government of Saudi Arabia is responsible for terrorist activity. However, Karen House, a respected journalist and author of *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future*, offers that although many in the West want to:

...dismiss the Saudis as religious zealots who are reaping the results of Islamic extremism that they set in motion, the decisions of the Al Saud affect both the economic prosperity of Western societies and, of course, the lives of Western citizens who continue to be targets of radical Islamic terrorists. As a result, the West needs to understand, if not sympathize with, the high-wire act of the Al Saud amid the changing winds that are buffeting the region and the regime.³⁶

According to Scott Shane, So-called Wahhabism is a “literalist, ultraconservative form of Sunni Islam.”³⁷ So-called Wahhabism was founded by Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century. Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab was born in 1703. His mastery of the Koran at an early age made him somewhat of a child prodigy. He was well traveled throughout the Islamic world and heavily influenced by Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, an early reformer of Hanbali law whose views underlay modern Sunni extremism. As result, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab built much

of his revival movement on the fundamentals of Islam “and rejection of false innovations, as well as the use of independent reasoning in interpreting Islamic law.”³⁸

Long and Maisel, in *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* provide a succinct summary of the tenants of so-called Wahhabism:

At the heart of the revival movement is the Islamic doctrine of tawhid (strict monotheism). It also condemns innovations or false practices that crept into Islam over the centuries.”³⁹ “Although Shaykh Muhammad rejected the supremacy of any single Sunni school of Islamic jurisprudence his reform movement was firmly based on Hanbali law, the most conservative in personal and family law of the four recognized Sunni schools. The movement is now generally called Wahhabism, a term first used by its detractors. To this day, many of the followers of the revival take offense at being called Wahhabis, believing that it denotes the deification of the movements founder...”⁴⁰

Today, however, many observers and decision makers in Washington connect so-called Wahhabism with terrorism. On the surface, the connection can be made, and many Americans will readily accept the simplified relationship between totalitarian groups and conservative Islam. This allows for critics to state that Saudi Arabia supports terrorist networks that actively seek to harm U.S. interests. In an essay in the *New York Times*, Mohammed Alyahya offers that “Wahhabism is, in fact, a loaded, anti-Saudi synonym for Salafism, a puritanical strain of Islam that encourages emulating the ‘salaf,’ or predecessors, the first followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Salafism has historically been apolitical and the overwhelming majority of Salifis are not violent.”⁴¹

Alyahya further attacks the argument that Saudi so-called Wahhabism is closely tied to terrorist groups: “Most Islamist militants have nothing to do with Saudi Wahhabism. The Taliban, for example, are Deobandis, a revivalist, anti-imperialist strain of Islam that emerged as a reaction to British colonialism in South Asia Most members of Al Qaeda follow a radical current that emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement that defined itself largely in

relation and opposition to the West and its values. When totalitarian currents come out of Saudi Arabia, Muslim Brotherhood has been responsible for them. Although some terrorists do identify as Salafi, Islamic sects that are ideologically oppose to Salafism—Naqshbandi Sufis and Shiites, among others—have engaged in violent jihad in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.”⁴² While there are bound to be some connections from those within Saudi Arabia that can be traced to terrorist groups, it is misleading to state that there is a strong and focused effort from Saudi Arabia and religious clerics within Saudi Arabia to support religious extremism.

It is not difficult for some to argue that so-called Wahhabi Islam is bigoted, ultraconservative, and contributes to global extremism, the point that is typically overlooked is that the Saudi royal family has little interest in fueling totalitarian Islamist violence that can threaten their governance of the Kingdom.⁴³ The odd relationship between so-called Wahhabism and the Saudi government exists because the Saudi royal family’s control of Saudi Arabia is reliant on a partnership with the sect of Islam. While the royal family retains control of the Kingdom, it does so at a cost of associating with and supporting a very strict sect of Islam that seeks to share in control of the country. Bilal Y. Saab, a subject matter on the Middle East, explains the relationship succinctly: “Although it is true that the Saudi king cannot rule effectively without the clerics, he does hold absolute power as the country’s 1992 Basic Law of Government clearly stipulates. He also controls the country’s wealth and the armed forces and selects the leader of the country’s highest religious office—the grand mufti.”⁴⁴ It is also ironic that while the government is intertwined with so-called Wahhabism to secure its ability to govern, it is this form of Islam that—although significantly distanced from the Saudi government when it takes on a totalitarian jihadist form—is a direct threat to Saudi Royal Family governance.

While Saudi Arabia's close ties with fundamentalist Islam may be concerning to the West, it is important to remember why these close ties exist—they were there at the Kingdom's founding and are likely to persist into the future. There is a symbiotic relationship between the clerics of conservative Islam and the leadership of Saudi Arabia that allows for the Kingdom to exist as it does. The Saudi regime depends on so-called Wahhabi tradition for legitimacy. The totalitarian Islamist ideology that originated with the Muslim Brotherhood challenges the Saudi regime. Simply because some connect the dots from Saudi Arabia to terrorist networks, using fundamental Islam as the glue that binds the two together, does not mean that such a connection is as clear cut. In fact, "Saudi Arabia has not controlled the global Salafi-Wahhabi movement since the 1980s and that since the 1990s that movement has turned its sights on the Saudi regime itself."⁴⁵ Accepting Wahhabism for what it is, as well as understanding the indirect connection of fundamental Islam to totalitarian groups, is essential to clarifying the complex relationship and understanding why it is not entirely accurate to state that "Saudi Arabia promotes terrorism through Wahhabism."

The Totalitarian Islamist Network

To clarify the separation between the government of Saudi Arabia and the totalitarian Islamist organizations that are wreaking havoc in the region, it is important to understand the nature of the Totalitarian Islamist Network and its narrative. The Totalitarian Islamist Network is three competing major nodes: Al Qaeda, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the so-called Islamic State. Each of the nodes claim to be the guardians and practitioners of the true form Islam. The ability of these organizations to recruit and regenerate their ranks depends on the effectiveness of their narratives. In order to effectively recruit, a node, such as the so-called Islamic State, will conduct information operations to spread the narrative of the Totalitarian Islamist Network to

appeal to potential recruits. The narrative is comprised of three important components. The first component is that each node of the Totalitarian Islamist Network believes it is the guardian of true Islam, the second component is that the United States is leading the West in a war against Islam, and the third component is that governments, such as the Al Saud-led government of Saudi Arabia, that lead Islamic countries, are apostate governments not representative of true Islam.⁴⁶ This narrative has proven to be an extremely effective recruiting tool. In order to defeat a node of the Totalitarian Islamist Network, such as the so-called Islamic State, it takes a combination of kinetic means and information operations attacking the Totalitarian Islamist Network narrative. One of the obvious difficulties with the use of kinetic means—often essential to reclaiming territory and attacking or capturing terrorists—is that they can feed into the totalitarian Islamists’ narrative and be counter-productive if not executed responsibly. Therefore, in conjunction with kinetic means, the United States, and countries like Saudi Arabia, must defeat the totalitarian Islamist narrative through information operations that discredit propaganda and invalidate the totalitarian Islamist narrative. An important aspect of accomplishing this is understanding that the United States does not have the necessary standing or legitimacy amongst the Islamic community to do this alone—specifically when it comes to determining, for the Islamic community, what is the true form of Islam and what is a terrorist misrepresentation of Islam. This is where a strategic partner, such as Saudi Arabia, can take a leadership role and lead the fight against the Totalitarian Islamist Network narrative. Saudi Arabia, unlike the United States, *does* have the legitimacy and standing within the Islamic community to take on the totalitarian Islamist narrative and say that it is not safeguarding true Islam, but are misrepresenting Islam to further their totalitarian goals.⁴⁷

A Stable Partner

Oil and the Stability of the Global Economy.

Saudi Arabia is a global player because of its oil production. However, the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is not just about access to oil. The United States gets increasingly less of its oil from Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi Arabia still wields tremendous influence over the global oil market. This means that the economic viability of Saudi Arabia and the stability of its government directly impacts the global economy—a significant U.S. interest. “Saudi Arabia is a charter member of both OPEC and OAPEC and has played a particularly major role in the former since its founding. As its production constituted an increasingly greater share of the OPEC and world totals, it played a ‘swing role’ in influence the world price of petroleum for several years by varying its output. As the world’s leading producer, it was the only country with sufficient spare capacity to increase output significantly enough—1.5 to 2 mn bpd—to stabilize or bring down oil prices.”⁴⁸

Thirty percent of the world’s oil comes from the Persian Gulf with Saudi Arabia providing for a third of that production. Any impact on Saudi oil production will have a ripple effect on the global economy⁴⁹, and if that impact is negative enough, the ripples may more resemble a tidal wave. In his article in *Foreign Affairs*, F. Gregory Gause III provides this example of how significantly Saudi Arabia’s oil production affects global economic stability:

To see how important a role Saudi policy still plays in the global market, just ask the shale oil producers in North Dakota and Texas how the recent collapse in global prices has affected their business. Although the collapse was largely the result of a surge in supply caused by those same drillers, Saudi Arabia’s decision not to cut its production in response to that glut also played a huge role. Put simply, no other country wields more influence in the global oil market—yet another reason why Washington still needs Riyadh.⁵⁰

While the United States receives the vast majority of its petroleum from sources other than Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia’s entrenchment as one of the most powerful players in the

global oil community solidify the Kingdom a major factor in the global economy. Whether or not the United States receives oil from Saudi Arabia is not as important as how much impact a destabilized Saudi oil production apparatus would negatively affect the global economy. Critics will argue that the United States has distanced itself from Saudi oil, and therefore it is the right time for Washington to distance itself from Riyadh. To do so, however, would put at risk global economic stability. The United States will continue to have a vital interest in ensuring that Saudi Arabia contributes to global economic stability and, most importantly, that Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources never fall into the wrong hands. While Saudi Arabia has taken steps to secure its own resources and advance its counterterrorism capabilities, there is too much at stake for the United States to not continue to provide the requisite complimentary support and cooperation to ensure stability. Karen House provides a stark outlook on what could happen if Saudi Arabia's resources fell into the wrong hands in her book:

Optimists believe that even in the worst of scenarios, even if Islamic extremists were to gain control, they would continue exporting the oil that fuels the global economy. That seems entirely too sanguine an assumption about Saudi religious fundamentalists who believe that society would be better off with a more medieval lifestyle that wouldn't require earning hundreds of billions of dollars from exporting oil to the infidel West. Islamic terrorists, or course, who seek to destroy the West, have an even clearer reason to curb oil exports. As unlikely as this scenario sounds in a country notable for the passivity and conformity of its people, just as unlikely, in a different way, is a twenty-first-century society totally ruled by a family of seven thousand princes.⁵¹

While Saudi Arabia has taken steps to secure its own resources and advance its counterterrorism capabilities, there is too much at stake for the United States to not continue to provide the requisite complimentary support and cooperation to ensure stability.

The Fight Against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.

The aspect of the relationship at the forefront of the partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia is the cooperation between the two to fight against and defeat totalitarian

Islamist groups, such as the so-called Islamic State and Al Qaeda. These groups and other terrorist networks like them threaten Americans, US interests, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the overall stability of the region. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula continues to be a significant threat. The group operates out of Yemen and is led by Saudi nationals. According to a State Department assessment, it is focused on inspiring “sympathizers to support, finance, or engage in conflicts outside of the Saudi Arabia...”⁵² as well as encouraging acts of terrorism within the Kingdom. However, despite the danger posed by Al Qaeda, perhaps the greatest threat to US interests and Saudi Arabia, at the moment, is that posed by the so-called Islamic State.

The so-called Islamic State provides an existential threat to Saudi Arabia. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s plan is to “ignite a sectarian civil war in Saudi Arabia by targeting the Shia community and provoking them to unleash their anger against the Saudi government.”⁵³ Successful terrorist attacks within Saudi Arabia have supported this plan. So-called Islamic State leaders want to convince Sunni Muslims to switch allegiance from the Al Saud family to the caliphate that the Islamic State has established. Clearly it would be illogical for Saudi Arabia to be funding and supporting the very groups with the desire and means to bring about its destabilization. The alternative, therefore, is to ensure that Riyadh and Washington cooperate to make certain that Al Qaeda and the Islamic State are defeated. To combat this enemy, both nations must bring together their unique capabilities to bear against a determined enemy. Saudi Arabia successfully held off Al Qaeda’s campaigns within the Kingdom thirteen years ago, but now may face an even more dangerous enemy. The so-called Islamic State is well funded, has access to resources, and has proven to be resilient to significant efforts from western efforts as well as those by Saudi Arabia. In order to defeat the so-called Islamic State and groups like it,

“Riyadh will need foresight, statecraft, and above all, introspection...”⁵⁴ to repeat the success it had against al-Qaeda over a decade ago.

However, it has not always been easy to motivate Saudi Arabia to fight the enemies at the top of Washington’s list. This, naturally, brings about questions from American decision makers about the commitment of Saudi Arabia to defeating totalitarian groups. There are numerous factors at play that underline how, when, and why Saudi Arabia chooses to fight terrorist groups. While some are understandable and most likely need to be accepted and worked around, others require closer cooperation and more of an effort on the part of Saudi Arabia to ensure the partnership remains worth the trouble. It is important to note that while the Kingdom is accused of dragging its feet in some efforts, Riyadh openly states that Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda affiliates, the so-called Islamic State, and other Salafist-jihadist groups are direct threats to Saudi national security.⁵⁵ Some patience from the United States as well as an understanding of the reasons why Riyadh may “drag its feet” or appear reluctant to take significant action outside of its own timetable may help to calm the calls for a reduced partnership based on Saudi Arabia not doing enough to fight America’s enemies. For example, the Saudi obsession with Iran is a significant detractor from Saudi Arabia committing more resources to the fight against totalitarian groups. According to F. Gregory Gause III in his article in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Saudis continue to fear Iranian encirclement; they refuse to concentrate their resources on the fight against the Islamic State and al-Qaeda...”⁵⁶ The United States, as it continues to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in the fight against totalitarian groups will also need to work to maintain a balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran to prevent these two nations from continuing to raise the stakes and creating a dangerous situation in the region. This is especially important because of how dangerous and close of an enemy the so-called Islamic State is proving to be.

There are also internal pressures and complications difficult for the West to understand when it comes to fighting totalitarian groups. The leadership of Saudi Arabia maintains a delicate balance with conservative religious leaders and groups within Saudi Arabia, some of which have different views on how totalitarian groups should be dealt with, and just how much Saudi Arabia should be involved with the United States. As a result, Saudi leaders must be careful and patient when it comes to some of their efforts in dealing with organizations that may have ties to fundamentalist organizations. Alistair Crooke, in an article in *The World Post*, provides this perspective: “Saudi Arabia’s internal discord and tensions over ISIS can only be understood by grasping the inherent (and persisting) duality that lies at the core of the Kingdom’s doctrinal makeup and its historical origins.”⁵⁷ This is something that can cause considerable frustration and takes much effort, understanding, and patience on the part of Americans and decision makers in Washington to add to their equations when calculating how important a partnership with Saudi Arabia is to the United States. The stakes for Saudi Arabia—including control over Islam’s holy cities, and control of the immense oil resources within its borders—are high.

Ultimately, for the United States to get what it needs out of the partnership to make it worth the effort, Washington must continue to push for an increased effort from Saudi Arabia in return for United States’ support. Information sharing, collection, and intelligence cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the United States are invaluable components of the relationship and will be absolutely essential for success against defeating totalitarian groups. The United States will continue to bring immense intelligence gathering and technological advantages to the fight, but Saudi Arabia can also provide unique resources and capabilities necessary to be as effective as possible. Most importantly, Saudi Arabia has the legitimacy and standing within the Islamic community to challenge the narrative of the Totalitarian Islamist Network. Saudi Arabia has its

hands full, with more than 400 so-called Islamic State members arrested in the Kingdom, and a vast majority of those being Saudi nationals. In April of 2015, Saudi forces arrested ninety-three so-called Islamic State members and “learned that they were planning to attack the U.S. embassy in Riyadh.”⁵⁸ This is a clear indication that Saudi Arabia and the United States have a vested mutual interest in working together to defeat the so-called Islamic State. However, the United States, with all of its advantages, would still have much difficulty operating in the Middle East without a strong relationship with a stable government that has the necessary standing and legitimacy amongst the Islamic community to challenge the totalitarian Islamist narrative. Saudi Arabia provides this very thing and understands that it has much at stake.

Saudi Arabia and Iran

Saudi Arabia’s chief competitor in the region is Iran. The Saudi leadership views Iran’s policies as an attempt to empower Shia Muslims in the Middle East to the detriment of Sunni Muslims.⁵⁹ While the Kingdom faces dangerous threats from totalitarian groups conducting attacks inside its borders and on its periphery, the security concern that dominates Saudi Arabia’s leadership is the perceived threat posed by Iran. F. Gregory Gause III explains that “the Saudis see all regional politics through the lens of Iranian advances...”⁶⁰ As a result of this, Saudi Arabia will continue to commit most of its efforts and resources toward balancing against Iran and mitigating threats posed by Iran’s policies. This can be frustrating to policymakers in the United States who want to focus on balance and stability in the region and want Saudi Arabia to focus on fighting terrorist threats. Observers in the United States point out that as a result of Saudi obsession with Iran, Saudi Arabia is becoming an unreliable partner to the United States and may undermine US interests. However, the reality is that Saudi actions to contain Iran have been very effective, and therefore their focus on Iran is in fact greatly contributing to the US

strategic goal of containing Iran. This is an aspect of the partnership that Americans need to understand and accept. Saudi Arabia is unlikely to back down from its efforts to compete with Iran for regional supremacy and security and it is not in the best interests of the United States to want them to do so. As a result, the United States should be wary of walking away from Saudi Arabia and giving Riyadh on the basis that it is too focused on Iran and not on the immediate priorities of the United States. A departure from Saudi Arabia at a critical time could have negative effects for stability as it may cause Saudi Arabia to act more drastically to hedge against Iran, and in turn become more susceptible to terrorist threats. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is likely to exist for the foreseeable future. An all-out war between the two would be a catastrophe for the Middle East and would have far reaching negative impacts globally. The partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia allows for mitigation of a dangerous regional competition as well as lends peace of mind to the Saudis that they are not being abandoned by the United States and in turn gives the United States the result it is looking for—a contained Iran.

Saudi Arabia's continued concern for Iran's policies and nuclear program will dominate its priorities and therefore will continue to be an important point when examining the partnership between Riyadh and Washington.⁶¹ It is evident that "...the two countries still share interests, but they have different priorities. And they disagree on how to respond to Iran's growing power."⁶² As a result, the United States should be prepared to put the Saudi leadership at ease as Riyadh fears rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran will lead to a departure of U.S. support for the Kingdom. The United States has a critical interest in ensuring that Iran and Saudi Arabia do not escalate their competition to a point where it would destabilize the region. The United States is in a position to do so, but to continue to do so will need to remain a partner with Saudi Arabia.

Significantly reducing cooperation between Washington and Riyadh would be a detriment to security in the region.

Recommendations

Moving forward, the United States—while understanding that no relationship with Saudi Arabia will be without complications and criticism—should continue to be a reliable partner to the Kingdom for a number of reasons. Recommendations for the United States, as it manages its role in the Middle East and specifically as a strategic partner to Saudi Arabia, are to continue to work closely with Saudi Arabia in regards to intelligence sharing and counterterrorism and where possible expand this relationship to thwart attacks both against Americans and the interests of the United States as well as the Kingdom. It will most likely continue to take a concerted effort to ensure the Saudis hold up their end of the bargain when it comes to fighting totalitarian groups (specifically ones at the top of the United States’ list), but with the right approach the United States should be able to prod Saudi Arabia in the right directions. At the core of this effort will be continued training, advising, and support in counterterrorism and most importantly a continued willingness to cooperate with intelligence sharing. American forces will need a close relationship with Saudi Arabia and its connections, networks, and capabilities to locate, close with, and defeat terrorist organizations. Saudi forces and collection assets are “on the ground” speak the language, understand inner-workings of organizations, and have unique capabilities that, not only does the United States not possess, but also complement the significant collection, exploitation, and operational capabilities of the United States.

Countering the financing of terrorism will also be of significant importance and should continue to be at the top of the US priority list. Currently, Saudi Arabia is a member of the Middle East Financial Action Task Force, and the government of Saudi Arabia has shown it is

committed to combating terrorist fundraising and disrupting terrorist fundraising.⁶³ This is a significant step in the right direction and one that the United States should encourage Saudi Arabia to continue to take further and incentivize.

The United States should continue its military support of Saudi Arabia, but must do so responsibly. The conflict in Yemen is an excellent example of how arms and support from the United States, used by Saudi Arabia, can bring significant criticism and concern from Americans. Saudi Arabia will need the equipment and technology to fight and defeat its enemies and the enemies of the United States, but must be responsible and not undermine U.S. interests in doing so. The United States has options when it comes to getting what it wants from Saudi Arabia, to include cancelling arms shipments—which it has done—to not selling arms to Saudi Arabia at all, if Saudi Arabia will not cooperate. A militarily capable Saudi Arabia is in the interests of the United States, and because the United States plays a significant role in training and advising, arms sales, and most importantly due to its significant presence in the region, it can play a significant role in ensuring Saudi Arabia uses its capabilities in a way that promotes stability and does not undermine US interests.

This reinforces another recommendation, which is to continue to provide the necessary advice, guidance, and training to ensure the safeguarding of Saudi Arabia's oil production. As discussed, Saudi Arabia plays such a significant role in maintaining global economic stability that it is a critical US interest to ensure Saudi Arabia's resources are not threatened by terrorist networks. A capable Saudi military force ensures the security of Saudi Arabia's oil production and therefore safeguards the stability of the global economy as well. What must never happen is the abundance of Saudi resources ever falling into the wrong hands or used to threaten regional stability or the United States.

While these are some of the more significant areas that the United States should continue to be intimately involved in, additional areas where close cooperation will contribute to US interest are continue to support Saudi Arabia’s countering of radicalization and violent extremism. According to the State Department, the government of Saudi Arabia is working diligently to raise public awareness of counter-radicalization and provide programs to further refute radical Islamic interpretation and ideology. Additionally, the Saudi leadership, in response to the rise of the so-called Islamic State recruitment efforts, is implementing a wide-ranging information campaign across television, in mosques, and in schools to discourage Saudi citizens from becoming foreign fighters and to warn them of the “dangers of extremism and terrorism.”⁶⁴ Of significant importance, Saudi Arabia is continuing “its ongoing program to modernize educational curriculum, including textbooks used in religious training criticized for intolerance of other religious traditions. Imams and other religious leaders also receive re-education to prevent them from inciting violence and the mosques are monitored for indications of radical teachings.”⁶⁵ These actions are a step in the right direction and should continue to be a requirement for the partnership between Washington and Riyadh.

Human rights will continue to be a flash point for many in the United States when discussing a continued partnership with Saudi Arabia. It is true that Saudi Arabia has a long way to go in improving its human rights record. “Many gender-rights issues in Saudi Arabia remain subject to domestic debate and international scrutiny...”⁶⁶ and the Saudi government readily arrests or fines individuals associated with protests advocating for women’s rights.⁶⁷ Additionally, the government of Saudi Arabia has received attention for treatment—to include arrests and floggings—of citizens that are speaking out for human rights improvements within the Kingdom.⁶⁸

While Saudi Arabia may fall short on its human rights record, the United States must understand that progress in Saudi Arabia will be slow, sometimes excruciatingly slow. This is the nature of Saudi Arabia, as numerous factors, groups, and traditions within the country greatly affect what changes and how quickly changes happen. Many in Saudi Arabia are apprehensive about change. What the United States can do is continue to push for Saudi Arabia to make the right political and social reforms and incentivize doing so. Saudi Arabia has made notable improvements, to include allowing Saudi women to vote and stand as candidates in political elections.⁶⁹ In the meantime, Americans may need to live with being a partner to a country that has some unpalatable policies for the sake of maintaining a strategic partnership of significant importance. It is also important to realize that there are many Saudis in Saudi Arabia that have been exposed to American ideals, and have been educated in the United States. Abandoning these citizens would be a significant detriment to progress within Saudi Arabia. The alternative could be a complete regression if Saudi Arabia were to destabilize, which could happen if left to deal terrorist threats on its own.

Conclusion

Due to the importance of maintaining global economic stability, the necessity of having a stable partner in the fight against totalitarian groups, the critical importance of intelligence cooperation, and maintaining a relationship with a stable government in an uncertain region, The United States should continue to be a reliable partner to Saudi Arabia. The American public will need to find a way to stomach the distasteful aspects of Saudi Arabia in order to benefit from what the relationship can provide in terms of security in the region and meeting the interests of the United States. Saudi Arabia undoubtedly has a long way to go in improving its human rights practices and striking a balance with its fundamental Islamic [other half], but there is value in

maintaining close ties with Saudi Arabia. As Daniel Byman, a Middle East expert succinctly put it: “In the end, policymakers would do well to remember that Saudi Arabia is a key partner but not a friend: The United States and Saudi Arabia share many common interests, but they do not share common values or a common worldview.”⁷⁰ Saudi Arabia, while being part of the problem, also will play a significant role in providing a solution. Stability in the region, and global stability, are too important and as a result the United States must continue to work with Saudi Arabia to make the relationship as tenable and acceptable for Americans as possible. Saudi Arabia is what it is, and Americans are going to have to accept some of the bad with the good. That is not to say however, that the United States cannot continue to apply pressure where possible to encourage Saudi Arabia to, in a sense, meet the United States in the middle in some areas. The United States has the weight to stipulate many of the terms of the partnership and should not waver in doing so—It should be clear to Saudi Arabia that Saudi policies cannot undermine the interests of the United States while accepting US support.⁷¹ Whether Americans like it or not, the United States will continue to have interests in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia is one of a few stable governments available to work with to maintain security and stability. When it comes to defeating totalitarian groups that threaten the United States and its interests, Saudi Arabia can provide intelligence and conduct operations to assist in that fight. Ideally, Saudi Arabia can take a leadership role in fighting the Totalitarian Islamist Network and allowing the United States to take on a supporting role. The danger to US interests, the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia, and the stability of the global economy is real. One of the best chances for safeguarding security and stability is for the United States and Saudi Arabia to see past their differences and work together to maintain an effective strategic partnership.

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- ⁶³ The United States Department of State. "Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa Overview." Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2014, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239407.htm>
- ⁶⁴ The United States Department of State
- ⁶⁵ The United States Department of State
- ⁶⁶ Blanchard, Background, 9.
- ⁶⁷ Blanchard, Background, 9.
- ⁶⁸ Blanchard, Background, 9.
- ⁶⁹ Blanchard, Background, 9.
- ⁷⁰ Daniel Byman,
- ⁷¹ Council on Foreign Relations, 21 April 2016, Accessed 28 December 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/saudi-arabia/us-saudi-relations/p36524>

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