

The Saudis

Are they our friends . . . or our enemies?

For decades the U.S. has considered Saudi Arabia our friend—and an important source of oil. But now, because fifteen of nineteen of the September 11 hijackers were Saudi citizens, because Saudi schools and newspapers teach anti-American and anti-Semitic hatred, and because Saudi Arabia refuses to cooperate with U.S. efforts to stop terrorism, many are asking whether this “friendship” still makes sense.

What are the facts?

Militant Islam thrives in Saudi Arabia. Not only were most of the 9/11 terrorists Saudis, but some 80% of the prisoners held at Guantánamo are Saudis, Osama bin Laden is a Saudi, and recent evidence proves that Saudi Arabia has been a principal supporter both of al Qaeda and of Palestinian suicide bombers.

But these obvious connections to terrorism are just the beginning. The Saudis actively support more than 30,000 Wahhabi religious schools and mosques in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Western Europe and the United States. Wahhabism calls for the destruction of the United States and Israel and Western values, replacing them with totalitarian Islamist regimes and fundamentalist societies, similar to the one created by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Despite friendly-sounding rhetoric from its leaders, the Saudi government refuses to assist the U.S. capture Islamic terrorists. In 1996, the Saudis refused a U.S. request that they seize Osama bin Laden. In 1995, they refused to hand over Imad Mughniyah, the likely perpetrator of the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon. After 9/11, the Saudis opposed the U.S. attack on the Taliban and have failed to crack down on their own al Qaeda supporters. No wonder the Saudi-supported press regularly praises terrorist actions against the U.S. and Israel, or that secret documents found recently prove that the Saudi government gives money to terrorist organizations and bestows handsome cash rewards on the families of suicide bombers in Israel.

It's also no wonder that a much-publicized report to a Pentagon advisory board recently concluded that “the Saudis are active at every level of the terror chain, from planners to financiers.” The report labeled the kingdom “the most dangerous opponent of American interests in the Middle East.”

“The U.S. must reconsider its relationship with Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, we must think of it as our enemy and consider this reality in our global fight against terrorism.”

Saudi Arabia rejects important basic human freedoms. Saudi Arabia is run by a totalitarian regime—the oil-rich House of Saud, a tyranny of princes and royal cousins. None of the basic freedoms held sacred by Western democracies—the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, rights for women, private property, free speech, equal justice, religious tolerance—is tolerated by the Saudis. Indeed, Saudi culture is barbarically restrictive: Woman may not drive and are treated as chattel by their husbands and by the regime; the press is ruthlessly censored; and public executions and dismemberments are still practiced. During the Gulf War, President Bush was prevented by the

Saudi government from conducting a religious service on a U.S. military base on Saudi soil. U.S. servicewomen in Saudi Arabia must wear veils in public. Saudi men routinely abduct their

U.S. citizen children, forcefully convert them to Islam and, if girls, press them into marriages – often polygamous ones.

The myth of our dependence on Saudi oil. Saudi oil policy has always been openly self-serving—the Saudis have threatened or implemented at least three oil embargoes over recent decades, including one in 1973-74 that triggered a deep economic crisis in the U.S. In reality, they have sold us oil when it served their financial and political purposes.

While at one time the U.S. relied heavily on the free flow of Saudi oil—since as much as 25% of the world's supply may lie within its boundaries—things have changed. Russia and Mexico have become reliable suppliers, and vast new oil fields around the Caspian Sea are coming on line. New energy technologies are reducing our dependence on oil in general. Finally, most analysts agree that the Saudis need the U.S. as their customer much more than we need them as a supplier. The Saudis are not likely to cut us off, and if they do, we can obtain plentiful oil from other sources.

Given its totalitarian policies, its open support of terrorism, and the anti-American, anti-Israel vitriol spewing daily from its state-sponsored press and religious institutions, the U.S. must reconsider its relationship with Saudi Arabia. It's time to acknowledge that the Saudis are effectively waging a war against us—that they are behaving like enemies. Fortunately, Saudi Arabia's reduced importance as a supplier to the U.S. now allows us to make decisions based on human rights and our greater strategic interests, rather than solely on our energy needs. Just as a change in regime in Iraq would benefit the U.S. and the world, so would a change in the feudal regime in Saudi Arabia—the ousting of the royal ruling class. Above all, we should encourage our government to confront the hypocritical and dictatorial Saudi rulers. In addition, if we can find Saudis of valor and vision, we should encourage them to lead their country to democracy. In the meantime, we must consider Saudi Arabia our enemy and consider this reality in our global fight against terrorism.

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