

Saudi Arabia Faces the 1980s: Saudi Security Problems and American Interests

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The recent controversy over the sale of advanced weapons systems to Saudi Arabia and the decision of the Reagan Administration, albeit reservations, to support such a sale, has brought the desert kingdom back into sharp focus for American strategy and policy planners. While its medieval political and social structure grapples with modernization and the pressures of a vast accumulation of petrodollars, Saudi Arabia remains a critical element in American policy in the Middle East. In light of the ruthless invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and the Muslim fratricide of the Iran-Iraq war, the stability and longevity of the Saud family and the kingdom they rule have become more important — and problematic. In the following essay, Lincoln Bloomfield, Jr., presents a penetrating analysis of some of the internal and external pressures on Saudi Arabia, its princes, and the Washington-Moscow-Riyadh axes of tension and influence.

To most Americans, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is little more than an expanse of desert inhabited by princely sheikhs. It is common knowledge that the Saudis supply much of the oil (more than ten million barrels a day) which runs America's industries, homes and automobiles. It is also no secret that the rising price of OPEC oil affects the entire United States economy and makes certain Arab governments, among them Saudi Arabia, enormously wealthy.

Today there is a complex tangle of military, political, religious, social and economic issues shaping the course of events in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia is trapped in the crossfire. This paper will attempt to explore the royal family's perspective on security-related issues inside the Saudi kingdom itself, and at the global level, involving the superpowers. After reviewing and examining some of the uncertainties facing the Saudi leaders today, the reader will appreciate more fully the delicacy with which Saudi policy must be juggled in order for the conservative monarchy to stay afloat.

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DOMESTIC PRESSURES ON SAUDI POLICY

The legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy rests principally upon two pillars: guardianship of Islamic values; and ties of royal kinship with members of all of the tribes in the desert kingdom. The country's political roots date back to the mid-eighteenth century, when the historically powerful Saud clan, from the interior Nejd region of the Arabian peninsula, formed a religious-military confederacy with the puritanical Sunni Muslim followers of Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. After a century of preeminence in central Arabia, the Saud-led Wahhabis were driven eastward into what is today Kuwait by rival northern Shamman tribesmen.

From 1902 to 1906 Ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, mounted a successful campaign to force these enemy occupiers and their Turkish protectors out of the Nejd. For the next twenty years, Ibn Saud expanded his dominion, overtaking the Shamman tribesmen to the north, Turkish troops to the north and east, and finally British-armed Hashemite tribes to the west. The latter had expelled Turkish occupiers and established hegemony from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina northward to Iraq and Transjordan.

By 1926 Ibn Saud ruled Arabia from the Red Sea to the Gulf, and his 1932 decree established the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In roaming and conquering this vast territory, Ibn Saud had rallied fanatical Wahhabi zealots in virtually every tribe to fight for his cause; additionally, he had fathered more than 45 sons by women in 15 of these tribes.¹ Thus the bonds which originally united the people of Saudi Arabia are devotion to Islam and kinship to their king; today, the Saudi political system continues to rest upon these two pillars.

Of the world's seventy-odd countries housing significant Muslim populations, only Saudi Arabia can claim a 100 percent Muslim populace.² Islam permeates Saudi political life at every level. The King enjoys great prestige as the protector of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This elevated status in the Islamic world carries with it an implicit responsibility to faithfully preserve and exemplify Muslim ideals and traditions for future generations.

The Muslim clergy, or *ulema*, implement the *al-Sharia*, Islam's comprehensive legal code of conduct. There is a religious police force, the *al-Matawah*, to enforce daily adherence to the word of Allah. In exercising his religious duties, the King himself is ultimately accountable to an Islamic institution called *ahl al-aqd wal hal*, which entrusts approximately 100 princes and 60 senior *ulema* with a supreme oversight function. (It was this body which transferred the crown from King Saud to his brother Faisal in 1964.)

In the second element of political legitimacy, kinship to the King, one also

1. *New York Times*, 26 October 1979, p. A 2.

2. *New York Times*, 9 December 1979, p. D 1.

finds institutions which promote unity and loyalty among the Saudi people. In 1952, one year before his death, Ibn Saud introduced the *majlis*, a system of informal democracy which grants every subject in the kingdom the right of access to the royal family. The humblest tribesman can and does air his grievances while sharing a meal with the King or, for that matter, any member of the royal family. A second "bridge" between the princes and the people is the class of proud and patriotic *Ikhwan* (or "brethren"), drawn from the Bedouin tribes of the Nejd which originally provided Ibn Saud with his missionary army. The *Ikhwan* serve in all of the royal households and are an invaluable conduit of information between the rulers and the ruled.

These simple foundations of stability face a growing challenge in the 1980s. Saudi Arabia's oil reserves, believed to be the world's largest, have brought the kingdom great new influence and wealth — and even greater new responsibilities. Today the King has several overlapping responsibilities, as his Islamic role is augmented by increasing strategic, political and financial power in the Gulf and beyond. For better or worse, he has inherited the double burden of reliably supplying much of the West's oil while prudently dispensing the hundreds of billions of petrodollar revenues. As a result, irreversible forces of change are at work inside Saudi Arabia, forces which place the traditional political and social order in serious jeopardy.

MODERNITY VERSUS TRADITIONALISM

A generation of young elite Saudis has familiarized itself with Western ideas and lifestyles. Oil revenues have enabled royal family members and thousands of other wealthy Saudis to travel, study and conduct business in Europe and America. Many have come to enjoy the West's more liberal social milieu and appreciate its more egalitarian democratic traditions. Increasingly, Westernized Saudis are pressing for modernization at home.

Within the ruling circles, the majority feel that the oil wealth must be converted into tangible assets — universities, transportation facilities, energy and resource infrastructural systems — instead of being left to earn interest passively in money markets abroad.³ The unprecedented scale of Saudi Arabia's new five-year plan — \$250 billion — indicates that the ambitious reformers have prevailed in the policymaking process.

A growing urban middle class of educated technocrats, working in the public and private sectors, stands to become wealthier and more powerful from this process of modernization and expansion. Yet in future years the children of today's architects and engineers, having studied in the West, will probably retain

3. See Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Saudis Pressing Industrial Plan On a Vast Scale," *New York Times*, 7 March 1980, pp. A 1, D 13.

less devotion to traditional Muslim values than their parents, and could one day lose patience with the less-than-democratic nature of the Saudi monarchy.

Fearing this Western trend, conservative *ulema* and princes alike have resisted modernization. King Khalid's full brother, Prince Muhammed, has opposed rapid development plans because he feels that opening the country to foreign influences could erode and eventually supersede Islamic ways.⁴ On November 20, 1979, a loose coalition of clandestine Wahhabi groups, an ad hoc army numbering 500 men, invaded the Grand Mosque in Mecca and demanded a purge of pro-Western princes and their foreign military advisors from the government and a return to a "pure" Islamic society. The polarization already witnessed on this core issue is very likely a preview of stormier discord to come.

DISTRIBUTIONAL PROBLEMS

Saudi Arabia has five regions: the center Nejd, including Riyadh; the Hijaz, in the mountainous west, including Mecca, Medina, and the Red Sea ports; Asir, the relatively temperate southwest; Rub Al Khali (Arabia felix, or "the empty quarter"), the desolate territory of southeastern Arabia; and the Al Hasa province, the oil-rich east coast bordering the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia's entire petroleum industry is concentrated in the Al Hasa province, along with much of its commercial activity, investment, and development projects — in short, a grossly disproportionate share of the country's wealth. This regional inequality only becomes sharper each year as oil revenues climb steadily, exceeding \$90 billion in 1980 alone. As a result, to quote a Western observer, "social, political, and economic jealousies are growing acute among citizens to the north, south, and west."⁵

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of this regional jealousy is the widespread perception of corruption in the royal family, as evidenced by frequently aired allegations that the princes handling the kingdom's development plans are lining their own pockets with gold at the country's expense. Stories of \$100 million commissions for arranging massive contract awards, and multi-billion-dollar profits from land speculation based upon advance knowledge of major future infrastructural construction plans, have tainted the immediate families of some very senior figures, including Crown Prince Fahd, the King's half-brother. Says James E. Akins, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, "without dramatic internal reforms, the country faces serious problems, as the

4. Richard M. Preece, "The Future Role of Saudi Arabia," Congressional Research Service, FAND, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.), 25 June 1979, p. 534.

5. Dawn W. Williams, "Trouble in Camelot — Arabian Style," *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 August 1979, p. 23.

feelings about corruption are similar to developing feelings in Iran in 1976-77."⁶

There is a classic dilemma at the heart of the distributional question. On the one hand, Saudi rulers have acknowledged that the oil wealth must be shared among the country's regions. In this spirit, plans for twin ultra-modern industrial cities, on the west coast at Yenbo and on the east coast at Jubail, have been given special priority. Yet on the other hand, the emergence of huge new commercial and bureaucratic centers across the kingdom is likely to bring about a gradual devolution of power — political as well as economic — from Riyadh and Al Hasa, leading in time perhaps to greater regional rivalry.

The same dilemma, if viewed in a class context, yields even more profound implications. As the gap between rich and poor widens and the charges of royal corruption become more acrimonious, King Khalid must judge whether the rising expectations of his poorest subjects — satisfied by his largesse at present,⁷ perhaps, but learning to aspire for more — will still permit total submission to the monarchy in a future with much higher national literacy and political consciousness. By keeping the wealth in the family, as it were, the King would be leaving his potential domestic detractors relatively powerless, if bitter. By spreading the wealth throughout the kingdom, he is instead gambling that the privileged monarchy will survive the imponderable passage to modernity.

FORCES OF OPPOSITION

Foreign Workers

According to the Ministry of Planning, 40 percent of Saudi jobs are held by foreigners.⁸ There are over one million Yemenis in the kingdom, mostly manual laborers, and lesser numbers of Palestinians, Pakistanis, Egyptians, South Koreans, Japanese, Americans and western Europeans. Given the expanding scope of the country's development plans, there is no doubt that the proportion of foreign to indigenous workers in the kingdom must rise continually to keep pace with new construction.⁹

The indigenous Saudi population of roughly four million¹⁰ is inhibited from

6. Philip Taubman, "U.S. Aides Say Corruption Is Threat to Saudi Stability," *New York Times*, 16 April 1980, p. A 8; see also, "Saudi Prince is Said to Have Made a Fortune in Business," *New York Times*, 6 April 1980, p. A 8.

7. "[A]lthough a wide disparity between the upper and lower levels of society does persist, the standard of living of the poorer Saudis has improved to such an extent that they now seem to identify their interests fully with the preservation of the Saudi monarchy." Adeed I. Dawisha, *Saudi Arabia's Search for Security*, Adelphi Papers No. 158, International Institute of Strategic Studies (London 1979), p. 31.

8. *New York Times*, 5 February 1980, p. A 14.

9. See Dawisha, *Search for Security*, p. 14.

10. There is no reliable census figure for the indigenous Saudi population. Estimates range from

contributing more manpower by three factors: low rates (by Arab standards) of reproduction; social traditions which adjudge most manual labor for both sexes to be demeaning; and the orthodox Muslim prohibition against women working in public (which has been more strictly enforced since the Grand Mosque insurgency, although Saudi women continue to pursue education).

Opportunities for employment are thus plentiful and attractive enough to draw masses of workers from the anemic economy in North Yemen and elsewhere. Foreign workers, however, are denied many of the rights, privileges and benefits granted to Saudi nationals. For example, as part of his above-mentioned campaign to share the nation's wealth among his subjects, Khalid recently granted indigenous workers the opportunity to buy out the government's equity in the companies which employ them. Numerous perquisites of Saudi citizenship, such as free education, are similarly denied to foreign labor, while strict immigration quotas and ever-present threats of deportation for the slightest misconduct only reinforce their sense of victimization.

The more highly skilled non-Arab workers brought in by foreign (mostly Western) firms under contract to the Saudi government must, along with their families, live in company compounds, totally segregated from Saudi society. In spite of their restricted lifestyles,¹¹ these company people — approximately 750,000 in all — pose no security problem. It is the unskilled and semi-skilled Arab workers, particularly those working in and around the oilfields by the Gulf, whose mounting resentment of "second-class status" creates an ugly dilemma for the government.

To admit two million or more immigrant workers as full Saudi citizens could cause enormous problems of sudden assimilation into the society. Yet as Adeed I. Dawisha, a noted authority on Saudi security issues, points out, the present discriminatory policy is no less risky:

It seems clear that, as long as immigrant workers continue to be excluded from the full social and economic benefits and opportunities the state extends to Saudi nationals, such friction is bound to manifest itself in a growing confrontation that may eventually undermine the stability of Saudi Arabia's social and political systems.¹²

3.5 to 8 million. To quote J.C. Hurewitz of the Middle East Institute, Columbia University, "The true Saudi population as distinct from foreigners who are resident there, probably does not exceed four million." *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*, Show No. 5248, 11 June 1980.

11. See Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Pent-Up Life Numbs Aliens In Saudi Jobs," *New York Times*, 24 March 1980.

12. Dawisha, *Search for Security*, p. 33.

Alienated Shi'ites

Near the major oil facilities along the Gulf coast lives a minority pocket of Shi'ite Muslim Saudis, whose numbers are estimated at anywhere from 125,000 to over 400,000.¹³ Unlike the majority Wahhabis, who are Sunni Muslims, the Shi'ites — who make up 40 to 60 percent¹⁴ of the work force in the oil fields — harbor natural sympathies for the Shi'ite Islamic revolution across the Gulf in Iran. Recent disturbances in the eastern province have aroused government concern over the vulnerability of the oilfields to possible work stoppages or even sabotage by Shi'ites mobilized in opposition to the royal family.

In 1970, the predominantly Shi'ite town of Al Qatif, to the north of Dhahran, was quarantined for a month by government forces following protests against the monarchy; a similar confrontation in 1978 led to 50 arrests and a number of executions. Yet only since the Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran in early 1979 has the Saudi Shi'ite minority adopted a militantly subversive posture contesting the King's rule.

From December 3 to 5, 1979, two weeks after the Mecca Grand Mosque attack (and five weeks after the seizure of U.S. Embassy hostages in Teheran), thousands of Saudi Shi'ites — many bearing placards with Khomeini's picture — demonstrated in the oil region towns of Al Qatif and Khafji, and near the major Ras Tanura refinery complex. They chanted for a more equitable distribution of wealth, and demanded that the royal family support Iran's Islamic revolution. In response, the government reportedly moved in 20,000 National Guard troops to quell the uprising; at least five of the demonstrators are said to have been killed, and hundreds arrested.¹⁵

On January 17, 1980, Teheran Radio beamed the first of several broadcasts across the Gulf demanding "death to the criminal and mercenary government of the Saudi family," whose members "are forcefully using all of the vast wealth of the land for their own gain."¹⁶ For two days in early February, the eastern Shi'ites demonstrated once again, this time calling upon the authorities to release their fellow marchers jailed since the December incidents.¹⁷

13. Three conflicting samples: 125,000 — Steven Rattner, *New York Times*, 28 November 1979; 200,000-300,000 — Walter S. Mossberg, *Wall Street Journal*; and 10 percent of the total population (of perhaps 4 million) — *Washington Post*, 9 August 1979, p. A 16.

14. *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 February 1980, p. 12.

15. See "Saudis Are Said to Deploy Forces In Oil Region of East After Riots," *New York Times*, 4 December 1979; see also, Fred Halliday, "The Shifting Sands Beneath the House of Saud," *The Progressive*, vol. 44, March 1980, p. 39.

16. Walter Taylor, "Iran Calls for Overthrow of Saudi Rulers," *Washington Star*, 8 January 1980, p. A 7.

17. See James Dorsey, "Saudi Minority Sect is Restive," *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 February 1980, p. 12.

Although this minority is not large, the royal family is fully aware that the daily flow of Saudi oil — the kingdom's lifeline — depends critically upon the willingness of the Shi'ite labor force to operate the wells and refineries.

Sout al-Taliah — "Voice of the Vanguard"

Founded in 1973, this is a small group of leftist Saudis outside the country whose aim is to do away with traditionalism in the kingdom. Sout al-Taliah is financially supported by some of the Saudi students in the United States. According to the *Washington Post*, they "use the language of nationalism and human rights rather than that of Islamic fundamentalism, attacking compulsory mosque attendance and calling for a democratic presidential system to replace the ruling royal family."¹⁸

The royal family has responded to these and other democratic pressures. In March 1980, the government announced that King Khalid had authorized the formation of a nine-man commission (one prince, seven *ulema*, and one layman) to draw up two "charters": one for a national system of government, based on statutes derived from Islamic *Sharia* law; and the second for a "consultative council," or *shura*, to be composed of 50 to 70 members.¹⁹ Whether the royal family's substantive ruling powers will actually be transferred or even influenced by these new institutions is not clear from Riyadh's announcement; in all likelihood, any purported changes will turn out to be essentially cosmetic.

At this stage, Sout al-Taliah does not represent a threat to stability, but a warning that Western education of ever larger numbers of Saudi youth is likely to create an unprecedented political dialogue, one which could eventually lead to a peaceable or forcible democratization of the traditional monarchical system of governing the kingdom. For the time being, the more active opposition to the king comes from the opposite end of the socio-political spectrum — the fundamentalists.

"The movement"

"We are not Saudis. We are the people of the Arabian peninsula, as we were before the al-Saud family started to rule us, and as we shall be after they have gone."²⁰ So stated Nasser al-Saeed, leader of the Arabian Peninsula People's Union (APPU), nine days after the invasion of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979. The APPU, said al-Saeed, is just one of many diverse strands in a loose umbrella grouping known as "the movement," whose common

18. David Leigh, "Royal Family Target of Leftist Drive," *Washington Post*, 22 July 1980, p. A 8.

19. "Saudi Arabia — Democracy Itch," *Economist*, 5 April 1980, p. 30.

20. *Quoted in*: "A Growing Opposition in Saudi Arabia," by Helena Cobban, *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 November 1979, p. 6.

bond is opposition to the Saudi royal family. Other component groups include: elements within five Bedouin tribes, most notably the sizable Oteiba and Kahtani tribes; secret cells of disaffected officers and lesser-ranking soldiers in both the Saudi army and the National Guard; members of the Saudi intelligence service; university students; and foreign workers.²¹

Events surrounding the Grand Mosque insurgency have been somewhat distorted, and are difficult to verify. Nevertheless, it is important to review the details which have emerged since November 1979.²² As early as three months before the Mecca incident, Saudi authorities had questioned several junior officers in the army and even young princes suspected of disloyalty to the government. A number of officers were arrested in September 1979. "The movement," meanwhile, turned up in virtually every corner of the kingdom, distributing subversive literature and creating disturbances in Dhahran to the east, in the central Nejd region, in the northwestern city of Tabuq, and in Medina. The National Guard and the army were placed on partial alert in the last week of September. On November 10, Saudi police in Mecca and Medina rounded up and detained 1,500 known participants in the recent unrest. Since the yearly *hajj* (or pilgrimage) to Mecca was at its peak, "movement" leaders capitalized on the moment by organizing a peaceful protest at the Grand Mosque; 800 men, women and children took part and soon became engaged in protracted clashes with local police.

On November 16, four days before invading the Holy Mosque, armed groups of clandestine rebels from the most puritanical Wahhabi tribes scattered themselves throughout the Mecca/Medina region, including Yenbo and the area's lesser towns, to recruit new sympathizers. Many of the foreign insurgents, from Egypt, Sudan, North Yemen, South Yemen, Iraq and Kuwait, who were subsequently listed by the Saudi Interior Ministry as having been captured and executed, are believed to have joined the movement at this stage. The defection of numbers of army and National Guard troops enabled the rebels to enter and raid local military armories. This explains the initially mystifying appearance of seven truckloads of weapons, many American-made, as the Mosque was besieged. Other weapons used, mostly Czech and Soviet, are believed to have been smuggled in gradually from Lebanon, Iraq and North Yemen.

21. *Ibid*; also Youssef M. Ibrahim, "New Information Indicates Political Motivation Behind Mecca Mosque Takeover," *New York Times*, 25 February 1980, p. A 10.
22. References include: *FBIS*, NC 301154 and NC 301435, 30 November 1979, and LD 131625, 10 December 1979; *The Economist Foreign Report*, 1610, 28 November 1979, and 1613, 19 December 1979; *New York Times*, 26 November 1979, 18 November 1979, 30 November 1979, p. A 18, 5 February 1980, p. A 14, and 25 February 1980, pp. A 1, A 10; *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 November 1979, p. 6, and 11 January 1980, p. 4; and Halliday, "Shifting Sands," p. 39.

In addition to the 500 gunmen who attacked in Mecca on November 20, a second rebel faction simultaneously raided Medina, where regular troops, on alert since September, inflicted hundreds of casualties. Still a third armed contingent is said to have attacked just southeast of Mecca at Taif, in hopes of abducting the King, who, having changed his plans, was elsewhere.

The government's handling of the Mecca affair is also worth reviewing. With Crown Prince Fahd out of the country, and National Guard chief Prince Abdullah also unavailable, the burden of dealing with the crisis fell to King Khalid, whose poor health had reduced his daily participation in governmental affairs to a minimum. Upon the advice of armed forces commander Prince Sultan, the fourth-ranking royal family member, Khalid asked the leading *ulema* to allow the Saudi army to carry weapons into the Grand Mosque. More than three hours passed before any counter-insurgency personnel arrived at the Mosque, and fully twenty-four hours before an official response was decided upon in Riyadh. Even so, it took three more days to prepare army troops to storm the Mosque. Only after two weeks — despite the *ulema's* express early permission to use firearms — could the authorities claim to have cleared the Mosque of insurgents.

Saudi Minister of Information Yamani was quick to assert that the Holy Mosque attack had no social or political roots in the country, and that there was no proof linking the Mecca rebels to any organizational extensions, domestic or foreign.²³ Even if one accepts this questionable assessment, there remain several disturbing aspects of this affair which should be noted for future reference:

Bedouin disloyalty. The Oteiba and Kahtani tribes, out of which came many of the fundamentalist Wahhabi rebels, have long been primary sources of loyal manpower to protect the royal family. Members of the king's personal Royal Guard, as well as the 35,000-man National Guard, have been recruited from these and other devoutly religious Bedouin tribes since the days of Ibn Saud's original "White Army." It is therefore interesting that several National Guardsmen took part in the Holy Mosque attack. The rebels' leader, Juhayman al-Oteibi, was a former lieutenant²⁴ who successfully persuaded other members to join him in plotting against the ruling regime.

According to APPU leader al-Saeed, "It is known that these tribes had feuds with the Saud family and rebelled against it in the past, after some of them had stood on the side of the Saud family, and staged revolutions led by (the chief of the Mutray tribe and . . . the chief of the Oteiba tribe), both of whom were killed by the Saudi tyrants in the ugliest manner."²⁵ Without presuming to

23. *FBIS*, LD 140935, 14 December 1979.

24. *Reported in:* Helena Cobban, "Saudis Reported Concerned About Security Despite Rebel Executions," *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 January 1980, p. 4.

25. *Quoted in:* *FBIS*, LD 131625 London AD-DUSTUR, "Special Interview with Nasser al-Saeed, Leader of the Arabian Peninsula People's Union," 10-16 December 1979.

judge the veracity of al-Saeed's statement, it is fair to say that any bad blood between the royal family and these Bedouin tribes prior to the Mecca insurgency can only have been intensified by the authorities' overwhelmingly martial response.

Religious unhappiness with the royal family. What is most ominous about the Mecca uprising is the combination of forsaken allegiance to the king with a (literally) "holier-than-thou" message. This act of protest directly challenges the twin pillars of the royal family's legitimacy — tribal loyalty to the king and custodianship of Islamic ideals. It may just be that the 1744 pact between Mohammed bin Saud and Imam Mohammed bin Abd al-Wahhab is beginning to unravel.

Security apparatus shortcomings. Although constrained by less-than-perfect information, we can point to certain procedures undertaken by the Saudi government before and after the siege which, if not upgraded, could cause problems in any future security crisis within the kingdom. First, there is the apparent failure of Saudi intelligence in the days and weeks preceding the attack to take full cognizance of the subversive activities of the rebels, especially the recruitment of army and National Guard personnel and the acquisition by deception and force of quantities of government arms and vehicles. The attack itself and the trucks full of firearms to sustain it seem to have totally baffled the leaders in Riyadh — despite the eight-week-old partial alert status of the kingdom's troops.

Secondly, there is the evident lack of prior contingency planning to assist King Khalid in formulating a response to the insurgency. The delay in arriving at a decision, and the subsequent poor coordination between the army and the National Guard units which did respond (enabling the insurgents to smuggle in fresh reinforcements and supplies), indicate operational weaknesses in the Saudi security apparatus.²⁶

These criticisms should trouble American defense planners as well. As the United States readies its 110,000-man Rapid Deployment Force for possible rescue duty in the Saudi oilfields, two key lessons from Mecca might profitably be taken into consideration:

1. *Unreliability of information.* Within hours after the Holy Mosque was attacked, Saudi Arabia cut all communications with the outside world and maintained the blackout for at least 24 hours. The initial *New York Times* dispatch quoted "a senior American intelligence official" to the effect that his reports showed the insurgents to be Shi'ite Muslims from Iran.²⁷ This

26. "New Information," *New York Times*, 25 February 1980, p. A 10.

27. Philip Taubman, "Mecca Mosque Seized by Gunmen Believed to Be Militants From Iran," *New York Times*, 21 November 1979, pp. A 1, A 5.

turned out to be untrue, but for 24 hours it may have been the United States' operative assumption on the affair. At worst, in a future situation of heightened U.S.-Soviet tension in the Gulf, an internal Saudi crisis could be misread as — and hastily turned into — a superpower confrontation.

2. *Dedication of insurgents.* In March 1975 a fanatically religious young prince expressed his disaffection with the kingdom's drift away from Muslim values by stabbing his uncle, King Faisal, to death during a public session of the *majlis*; he was promptly beheaded. At Mecca in November 1979, the fanatics who stormed the Holy Mosque wore burial shrouds during the army's counterattack to show their total willingness to die for their cause;²⁸ in fact only 19 men and 23 women and children (out of perhaps 1000 total insurgents) escaped death by army gunfire or later beheading. If U.S. troops suffered a disadvantage in Vietnam due to the ideological dedication of their Viet Cong adversaries, how would they fare against unshakably confident Wahhabi martyrs?

TENSION WITHIN THE ROYAL FAMILY

Let me explain something to you. If there is one thing this royal family is agreed on, it is its own survival. We do not survive by fighting each other.

— anonymous Saudi prince²⁹

By most accounts, the confidence expressed by this prince is justified. A coup from within the House of Saud must be assigned a low probability measured against the other threats already discussed. But as the royal family controls the government and the nation's oil wealth, relations between and among its members have a magnified impact on the political climate throughout the kingdom, and thus an important bearing on the prospects for continued stability.

Not all of the roughly 4,000 princes and 4,000 princesses in the family are descendants of the Saud clan; there are three other blood lines as well — the Jaluwis, the Thunayans, and the Kabirs.³⁰ Each clan is subdivided into various factions, each one formed around a common grandfather or great-grandfather.

28. "Arabs in Paris Say 1,000 Joined Seizure of Mosque," *New York Times*, 30 November 1979, p. A 18.

29. *New York Times*, 26 October 1979, p. A 2.

30. Aheed I. Dawisha, "Internal Values and External Threats: The Making Of Saudi Foreign Policy," *Orbis* (Spring 1979), p. 131.

Still closer bonds unite sons of the same mother. Today, the most celebrated such family grouping is the "Sudairi Seven," so named for Husa al-Sudairi, whose sons include Crown Prince Fahd, Minister of Defense Sultan, Minister of the Interior Nayif, Deputy Minister of Defense Turki, Governor of Riyadh Salman, Deputy Minister of the Interior Ahmad, and Counselor of Royal Family Affairs Abd al-Rahman.³¹ The Sudairi Seven are the leading force for modernization in the kingdom. In this endeavor they are opposed by a conservative coalition led by the commander of the National Guard, Prince Abdullah, who ranks third in power after King Khalid and Crown Prince Fahd. Abdullah enjoys wide support among conservative Bedouin tribes as well as many leading *ulema*.

There are other such factions and issues which politically separate the family. Yet the wealth, power and privilege enjoyed by royal family members — not to mention their mutual kinship — provide an overriding incentive for unity and a *nonpareil* guarantee of loyalty. From a security standpoint, the drawbacks in this system of government rule by an extended family are perhaps not as apparent as its advantages. Nevertheless they should not be overlooked.

1. *High cost of disunity*. Just as the Saudi royal family enjoys automatic popular acceptance of those policies which reflect a broad family consensus, so does it legitimize opposing viewpoints when the family is of two minds. By dissenting from the operative policy, the conservative princes who equate rapid modernization with undesirable Westernization are lending moral support to the fundamentalist tribesmen who share their concerns, including the extremists.

According to a recent study published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, ". . . it is clear that there are rivalries within the House of Saud, and there is evidence of differences of opinion and even antagonism between some of the senior princes. These might in the future prove divisive, or even seriously destabilizing."³² There is always the possibility, therefore, that secret cells of disaffected National Guardsmen will find sympathizers among their royal commanders, and the Sudairi Seven will be faced with an in-house "colonels' coup" aimed at returning the kingdom to fundamentalist purity.

2. *Incompetence*. By placing his closest relations in charge of the National Guard, General Intelligence, the ministries of

31. *Ibid.*

32. Dawisha, *Search for Security*, p. 13.

Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and many other key security organizations, the King can count on strong loyalty in those posts. But the absence of a merit system — at all levels — seriously inhibits the upgrading of each branch's capabilities.

This point is especially relevant to the policy debate in Washington regarding sales of high-technology armaments to the Saudis. According to a congressional analyst, "the premise of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, particularly the Air Force, has been that they must achieve superior technology and a sophisticated air defense system to compensate for small numbers in manpower."³³

In order for the weapons systems to be credible as a deterrent, the "small numbers in manpower" must be fully capable of operating and maintaining them. But because Saudi culture rewards birthright, not achievement, there is a qualitative manpower deficiency as well. The most able young men are often drawn into the Saudi private sector, which offers matchless financial opportunities. "As a result," writes one observer, "all three arms of the services are under strength and are characterized by deficient leadership, lax discipline and poor motivation."³⁴ Ironically, this technology-oriented defense doctrine, in the absence of skilled indigenous manpower, only increases the country's dependence upon on-site foreign technical experts with their unwanted Western ways.

3. *Inexorable diffusion of central control.* Every day that the Saudis pump 10.5 million barrels of oil at \$32.00 per barrel, the kingdom receives \$336 million in revenues. This is equal to \$84.00 for each Saudi man, woman and child every day, or \$84,000.00 per prince. In fact, the funds are even more centrally controlled, as a *New York Times* correspondent explains:

The royal family receives yearly allotments of oil revenues determined by seniority and predominance in the hierarchy. Leading tribal figures get land and benefits. Senior officials who are not royalty are rewarded for services with land and cash, and so on.³⁵

As more and more huge new investment projects come into operation — two entire industrial port cities, the world's largest

33. Preece, "Future Role for Saudi Arabia," p. 529.

34. Dawisha, "Internal Values and External Threats," p. 138.

35. Youssef M. Ibrahim, "In Saudi Arabia, Stability Rests On Loyalty To Saud Family," *New York Times*, 26 October 1979, p. A 2.

water desalinization facility, aluminum smelters, steel mills, twin coast-to-coast oil pipelines, new refineries, oil and LNG export terminals, petrochemical plants, airports, a massive telecommunications system, military cities in the desert, and some of the West's finest conventional weapons systems — the senior princes must continually relinquish direct operative control over the kingdom's military-industrial complex. The result is what one analyst has termed "a developing trend from monarchical to ministerial rule."³⁶ Furthermore, the expertise required to manage this burgeoning labyrinth can only come from advanced Western education. As mentioned above, most Saudis currently studying abroad and planning to return are likely to opt for the rich rewards of the private sector; foreign experts will have to be imported in ever-greater numbers.

In short, the oil wealth is increasing much faster than the population. The entire country is becoming more prosperous, more advanced, and more powerful. The popular base of support for the monarchy is broadening as new benefits accrue to all Saudis. Yet as economic and bureaucratic power expands, the King's share of it must shrink. He and the royal family are helpless to prevent the rise of a well-educated and bureaucratically powerful technocratic class, or to avoid the influx of more Western experts and many more immigrant workers. The private sector, meanwhile, will generate new groups of incomparably wealthy businessmen, some of whose materialistic excesses can only further alienate the religious fundamentalists. For those who cherish the traditional way of life in Saudi Arabia, the 170-billion-barrel reservoir of oil sitting under Al Hasa's sands is clearly more a curse than a blessing.

SUPERPOWER PRESSURES ON SAUDI ARABIA

THE U.S.S.R.

Since the 1820s all strong Russian rulers have aimed at Russian military domination of Afghanistan as a step towards a southward expansion.

— William E. Griffith, Massachusetts
Institute of Technology³⁷

36. Preece, "Future Role for Saudi Arabia," p. 528.

37. William E. Griffith, "Super-Power Relations after Afghanistan," *Survival* (July/August 1980), p. 149.

Despite the panic-mongering allegations of U.S. propaganda, no one will see Soviet tanks and soldiers on the shores of the Persian Gulf or other warm seas.

— Georgi Arbatov, Soviet Institute of the U.S.A. and Canada³⁸

They want to get their hands on the wealth of the Arabian Peninsula.

— Qabus bin Said, Sultan of Oman³⁹

The singular political goal of promoting the ultimate global triumph of Marxist-Leninist principles of government provides one explanation of Soviet behavior beyond the U.S.S.R.'s borders. A second element is the bureaucratic momentum and appetite for conquest generated in an inherently expansionist power whose greatest foreign policy asset is military strength.⁴⁰ A third motivating factor (emphasized by Saudi Oil Minister Sheikh Yamani, among others⁴¹) is the Soviet Union's growing need for imported energy, particularly oil and natural gas.⁴² Fourthly, there is the desire to counter the perceived threats posed by the U.S.S.R.'s chief adversaries, the U.S. and China. By acquiring a degree of control over the availability of Middle East oil to Europe, Japan and many Third World consumers, the Soviets could not only pressure the U.S. directly, but also effectively neutralize America's allies and strategic materials suppliers with the ever-present threat of an oil supply disruption. A fifth possibility is that the U.S.S.R. believes it necessary to prevent forcibly the Middle Eastern Islamic resurgence from advancing further eastward into its own Islamic republics in Central Asia.⁴³

Long before the December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, the Saudis viewed Soviet activities in the Gulf and the Horn of Africa with trepidation and suspicion. These fears, based originally upon strong Saudi antipathy toward Soviet atheism and revolutionary ideology, have recently taken on a geostrategic

38. *Tass* commentary, 17 April 1980.

39. *Quoted on:* "60 Minutes," CBS News, 24 August 1980.

40. According to Dimitri Simes: "Soviet behavior does not amount to strategy; yet it is more than simple opportunism. It is an increasingly defined pattern of imperial behavior from a position of strength. Such behavior always has the potential for developing into something more comprehensive and far-reaching." Dimitri K. Simes, "The Death of Détente?," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Summer 1980), pp. 19-20.

41. *New York Times*, 8 February 1980, p. A 6.

42. An April 1977 C.I.A. study predicted that by the mid-1980s the U.S.S.R. would have to import 3.5 million barrels of oil per day. This estimate has since been revised downward, but the trend of declining self-sufficiency is still foreseen. See: *New York Times*, 15 April 1980, p. A 14. Lack of deep-drilling and permafrost technologies inhibits Soviet plans to recover their extensive Siberian natural gas reserves.

43. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, "Shifting Sands of Peace in the Middle East," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Summer 1980), p. 72.

character as Soviet encroachment has progressed in the region. The steady buildup since the early 1970s of Soviet arms and/or military advisors in Libya, Syria, Iraq, the Horn of Africa and, most menacingly, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, has by no means gone unnoticed in Riyadh, although it is rarely discussed publicly by Saudi leaders. The *New York Times* reported in 1979 that senior Saudi officials had "charged that the Soviet aim was eventually to deny the West access to oil from the Persian Gulf and . . . that the Russians were 'expanding their regional predominance'."⁴⁴ It is precisely this thinking which lay behind the (successful) Saudi offers to "buy" regime and tribal loyalties away from the U.S.S.R. in Somalia and the Y.A.R. in recent years. The suspicion of Moscow's involvement in the 1979 Mecca attack has certainly kept Saudi apprehensions alive.⁴⁵

To compound Riyadh's fears, the fall of the Shah and the termination of his regional security contribution seem to have shaken Saudi confidence in America's ability to deter Soviet advances to the Gulf. Since early 1979 the Saudis have shown a decreased willingness to risk antagonizing the U.S.S.R. with their words and deeds. New external opportunities as well as looming energy difficulties appear to have inspired a Soviet diplomatic offensive aimed at improving relations with the Gulf monarchies (of which only Kuwait presently has formal ties to Moscow). When the Khomeini regime cut off Iranian natural gas shipments to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1979, Soviet dependence upon oil supplies from Iraq increased considerably. Saddam Hussein, once in power that summer, could therefore proceed with his rhetorical anti-superpower crusade secure in the knowledge that Soviet arms and diplomatic leverage would nonetheless be available to him.

Riyadh has responded to the new conciliatory tone in the U.S.S.R.'s Gulf diplomacy. The prospects for normalizing Saudi-Soviet ties were officially discussed for the first time in June 1979. Soon afterward, Crown Prince Fahd surprised many Western observers with his deferential remark in a *Le Monde* interview that, "We are aware of the important role played by the Soviet Union in international politics; it is our wish that in playing this role it will go on backing the just demands of the Arabs."⁴⁶

Yet after the U.S.S.R.'s move into Afghanistan in December 1979, the

44. Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Saudis, Stressing Regional Stability, See Soviet Threat," *New York Times*, 4 October 1979, p. A 10.

45. "Of the 500-odd men who joined the attack on the Grand Mosque, according to West European intelligence sources, 70 to 80 had been trained under Cuban and Soviet supervision at a camp . . . 40 miles from Aden. . . . During the assault . . . the South Yemeni army was mobilized along the Saudi border, together with its Soviet bloc advisers, apparently poised to intervene on the pretext of 'defending the holy places,' if the revolt showed signs of success. . . . The whole exercise . . . was supervised by a special Soviet command team." Robert Moss, "What Russia Wants," *The New Republic*, 19 January 1980, p. 25.

46. *The Middle East*, August 1979, p. 33.

Saudis took the lead in organizing the January 1980 Islamabad Muslim conference to condemn the Soviet invasion and to aid the Afghan freedom fighters and refugees. Riyadh's pledge was \$25 million.⁴⁷ Saudi Arabia became the first country to agree to boycott the 1980 summer Olympic Games in Moscow. At the same time, though, Egypt's President Sadat castigated Riyadh for permitting Soviet military aircraft continually to overfly Saudi Arabia en route to the P.D.R.Y.⁴⁸

There are several possible explanations for the Saudis' apparent ambivalence in their dealings with the Soviet Union. Appeasement has already been implicitly suggested above; whereas the U.S. mainland is over 8,000 miles from Saudi Arabia, the Soviets could now mount a major strike from Afghanistan, less than 900 miles away, with reinforcement from Aden and the Horn of Africa. Riyadh may also be attempting to demonstrate a new even-handedness toward the superpowers, partly as a signal to Baghdad that Saddam Hussein's friendship is valued by the Saudi leaders. A third possibility, suggested by Sadat, is that the Saudis are using the Moscow relationship as a lever to obtain a stronger and more credible security commitment from the United States.⁴⁹

In all probability, the Saudis are uncertain how best to deal with the gentle overtures from Moscow. Having witnessed the Soviet Union's rapid armored thrust into Afghanistan and the repositioning of advanced Soviet weaponry on virtually every side of the kingdom, the Saudi rulers may have come to the conclusion that only by strengthening the common bonds among the region's Arab countries — either through pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism — can the growth of Soviet military power and influence in the Gulf be successfully arrested.

Such an approach, however, can be credible to Soviet-supported Arab countries only if Saudi Arabia itself gives the appearance of backing away somewhat from its own superpower patron, the United States. In this regard, the increasing collusion with Iraq has helped to create the impression of increased Saudi solidarity with all Arab countries. Still, the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia is very complex; it rests on an extensive network of interdependencies, developed over several decades. For this reason, it is worth discussing the nature of those ties, to suggest what costs and risks can accompany various Saudi moves to distance itself politically from Washington.

47. *Economist*, 24 May 1980, p. 50.

48. Christopher S. Wren, "Sadat Accuses Saudis of Playing Off East Against West," *New York Times*, 29 January 1980, p. A 3.

49. *Ibid.*

THE UNITED STATES

Economic Ties

It is well-known that the secure flow of Saudi oil to America, Europe and Japan represents a vital interest to the United States. Less obvious is the fact that this economic dependence runs in both directions. The United States is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, and the repository of at least \$60 billion in Saudi assets. Over 85 percent of the kingdom's total wealth is denominated in U.S. dollars, since only the American financial markets are capable of handling so great a volume of currency.⁵⁰

A Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, set up in June 1974, provides a permanent mechanism for consultation between the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and the Saudi Minister of Finance and National Economy. American secondary schools and universities presently accommodate 13,000 Saudi students,⁵¹ most of them seeking to acquire the financial and technical skills necessary to manage the kingdom's colossal investments at home and abroad. The royal family, therefore, has a number of powerful incentives for supporting the economic health of America and its currency. Within OPEC, Saudi Arabia's unwillingness to raise prices as rapidly or as steeply as most of the other 12 member countries — resulting in a two-tier (and, from June to September 1980, a three-tier) oil pricing system — is largely attributable to this concern for stability in the world economy.

Defense Ties

Complementing this economic interdependence is the substantial U.S.-Saudi security relationship. Since 1942, when President Roosevelt extended U.S. lend-lease assistance to the Saudis with the words, "I hereby find that the defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States,"⁵² America has provided them with military advisory assistance. Thirty-seven years after Roosevelt's pledge, President Carter reiterated the American commitment to protect the Gulf's oil supplies "by any means necessary, including military force."⁵³ Senator Frank Church, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, elaborated on the Carter Doctrine, stating that the United States

50. Dawisha, *Search for Security*, p. 141.

51. *Washington Post*, 22 July 1980. D. A 8.

52. *Quoted in*: George Linabury, "The Creation of Saudi Arabia and the Erosion of Wahhabi Conservatism," *Middle East Review*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (Fall 1978), p. 9.

53. State of the Union Address, 23 January 1980.

would be willing to commit American forces to counter any outside aggression against Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴

In the defense sphere as in the economic sphere, American reliance on Saudi cooperation is mirrored by Saudi dependence on U.S. assistance. Although there is no U.S.-Saudi defense treaty,⁵⁵ over 90 percent of the kingdom's imported military advice, official and privately contracted, comes from the United States. America's military mission in Saudi Arabia, begun informally during World War II, now oversees approximately 15,000 (mostly civilian) personnel.⁵⁶ Since 1965 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has assisted with Saudi defense-related infrastructural projects; in 1979 the value of construction projects supervised by the Corps was \$20 billion.⁵⁷ Private U.S. companies work closely with the various branches of the Saudi defense establishment: Lockheed and Raytheon assist with air defense modernization; Bendix Corporation with the regular army; Vinnell Corporation with the National Guard; AVCO Corporation with the Coast Guard; TWA with the Saudi national airline; and so forth. By the end of 1979, the aggregate value of American arms sales (approved, not delivered) to the Saudi government exceeded \$25.6 billion.⁵⁸

Yet for all the tangible security benefits inherent in advisory assistance and arms sales, neither of these has ever served to duplicate the unique power projection function traditionally carried out by U.S. naval warships "showing the flag." Since the Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR) was first stationed in Bahrain in 1949, the U.S. has continued to maintain a Gulf naval contingent (expanded in 1979 from three to five ships) which enjoys temporary docking privileges each year at a number of Bahraini and Saudi ports.

Recent Discord

Since early 1979, the U.S.-Saudi relationship has come under considerable strain. The Iranian revolution and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan have raised the level of tension and apprehension in both Riyadh and Washington, making cooperation more difficult for both parties.

Bilateral Strains. America's concern over its excessive dependence on foreign oil supplies led to the decision to create a one-billion-barrel "strategic petroleum reserve." This stockpiling facility, if filled, would eliminate U.S. vulnerability to a short-term oil supply interruption, thus robbing the Saudis of

54. "Issues and Answers," ABC News, 18 March 1979.

55. Under a 1951 mutual defense assistance agreement, the U.S. provided arms and training to the Saudis in return for American access to the Dhahran airbase; the Dhahran "lease" was discontinued in 1962.

56. Dawisha, *Orbis*, p. 138.

57. *Washington Star*, 14 July 1979, p. A 5.

58. *U.S. News and World Report*, 5 November 1979, p. 29.

their most effective lever on the American policy-making process, and, by extension, a degree of prestige and influence in the Arab world.⁵⁹

The Saudis have taken steps of their own in the past two years to reduce their dependence on the United States, resulting in bad feelings in Washington. Riyadh has signed a number of bilateral oil supply contracts with European governments, thereby undercutting the potential for U.S.-led economic (and arguably, political) policy solidarity among Western oil-consuming countries. The Saudis have decreased the level of their investment in U.S. government securities, even though their U.S. dollar revenues have continued to rise.

Riyadh offended the Carter Administration in 1979 by expelling the CIA station chief and then floating the idea of normalizing ties with the Soviet Union. The May 1980 diplomatic discord surrounding the broadcast in America of the controversial film *Death of a Princess*, a dramatization of Saudi society portraying corruption, promiscuity and sacrilege, was irritating for both governments. Most recently, the Saudis' attempt to reap an armaments windfall during the assertive new Reagan Administration's political honeymoon with Congress has placed a high price on their friendship when a less demanding approach would likely have yielded just as much concern in Washington for their security needs.

The Palestine Dispute. Saudi Arabia's refusal to support the Camp David peace process reflects a frustration, according to an Egyptian journalist, "that in spite of the 'special relationship' between Riyadh and Washington, the United States has systematically neglected to follow Saudi advice on the peace drive and only informed them of its moves after the fact."⁶⁰

King Khalid appears to have found a new diplomatic comrade-in-arms in Iraq's President Saddam Hussein. The combined political clout of these two OPEC giants, if further consolidated, could raise new complications for the U.S.-Saudi security relationship in the coming years.

In conjunction with Iraq, the Saudi government in August 1980 threatened to cut off oil supplies to any country recognizing Israel's annexation of Jerusalem; a holy war was even mentioned. This action appears to have advanced the Iraqi strategy of destroying Western solidarity vis-à-vis Israel, as the United States subsequently found itself torn between Israel and the Europeans in a UN Security Council vote on a resolution criticizing Israel's Jerusalem policy. While all fourteen of the other members voted against Israel, the U.S. abstained — thereby not only isolating the United States within the Council, but also deeply upsetting Israel, which had expected a U.S. veto. If and when Israel moves to formally annex the Golan Heights, the United States will be

59. See Richard D. Lyons, "U.S. to Resume Filling Oil Reserve, Officials Say, Despite Saudi Protest," *New York Times*, 23 May 1980, pp. A 1, D 7; see also, *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 September 1980, p. 24. The reserve presently holds 135 million barrels.

60. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

caught once again in the middle of a no-win situation, faced perhaps with even costlier choices.

In the past, the Saudis could play an ill-defined "moderate" role, conveniently traversing the gray area between the extremes of overt pro-Americanism and explicit anti-Zionism. They no longer enjoy this luxury, for several reasons. First, in the wake of Iran's revolution, Iraq has developed ambitions to become the leader of the Arab world; the September 1980 assault against Iran was largely intended to demonstrate Iraq's regional military supremacy. Thus challenged, the Saudi royal family has missed no opportunity to enhance its own power and prestige within Islamic institutions, OPEC, and the Palestinian movement.

Second, whereas before 1978 Saudi Arabia's military contribution was never considered significant in aggregate Arab defense considerations, the removal of Egypt from the equation and the scheduled acquisition of 62 F-15 jet fighters (possibly with added range and ordnance capabilities) by Riyadh has elevated the kingdom to "front-line" status in any potential war with Israel. Burdened with this new "commitment" (born of Arab expectations), the Saudis may feel more secure participating as a *bona fide* leader of the Arabs than they would if the formulation of pro-Palestinian politics were left entirely to more radical Arab influences.

Third, the Saudis can no longer avoid a clear commitment on the Palestinian problem since the issue now centers on the nonnegotiable question of the Old City of Jerusalem, site of the holy Al-Aksa Mosque. The royal family's legitimacy rests on its role as guardian of the traditions and holy places of Islam. Thus, when the Israeli Knesset annexed East Jerusalem, it obliged King Khalid to take up the leadership of the rejectionist Arab coalition. This explains Crown Prince Fahd's immoderate statements that, "[t]he talk about peace with Israel has become a kind of illusion," and that war has become "the only answer to this Zionist religious and racist arrogance."⁶¹ It furthermore explains Riyadh's willingness to pursue a course of action — i.e., collaboration with Iraq's political strategy — which explicitly contravenes American interests.

*Torn Between Washington and Baghdad:
New Security Dilemmas for Riyadh*

A Saudi policy of cooperation with Iraq holds several advantages for Riyadh. First, by eliminating bilateral tensions, it minimizes the chances that Iraq's vastly superior army will ever be directed against Saudi Arabia. Second, Iraq's involvement in the new Gulf defense quasi-alliance makes all of the sheikh-

61. *New York Times*, 14 August 1980, p. A 7. Israeli Prime Minister Begin's reply to the Saudis: "We'll show them a holy war." *New York Times*, 29 August 1980, p. A 2.

doms militarily better endowed against external attack by either Iran or the Soviet Union. Third, notwithstanding the continuing intra-Arab differences over the ultimate disposition of the state of Israel, Saudi Arabia's standing in the Arab world is greatly enhanced by the perception that the royal family has finally decided to join forces with the majority of Arab states in pressing the Palestinian cause at the expense of the Camp David peace framework. Fourth, Iraq's "anti-superpower" political dogma, as a unifying principle for the Arab world, helps the Saudis in their unending drive to root out Soviet influence from the region.

The anti-superpower doctrine, however, may be a two-edged sword for the Saudis, who neither wish to see Saddam Hussein succeed in becoming a Nasser-like pan-Arab potentate, nor desire to forfeit the security guarantee embodied in their present ties to the United States. It is possible that King Khalid cooperated with President Hussein on the August 1980 Jerusalem sanctions as much to avoid being upstaged by Hussein as to enlist his economic muscle. The Saudi royal family prizes its Islamic and Arab leadership roles, and would not willingly yield to a radical usurper, no matter how well-endowed economically, militarily or ideologically. For this reason, a swift and decisive Iraqi rout in the war with Iran would have been viewed with some misgivings in Riyadh, despite the Saudis' dislike of the Khomeini regime in Teheran.

The concern for maintaining American protection makes the consequences of a Riyadh-Baghdad political coalition more complicated. Given America's continuing vulnerability to a disruption of Saudi oil supplies, a further political estrangement from the Saudis could produce stronger support for three policy directions within the U.S. Government: a further reduction of American dependence upon foreign oil; a new openness in dealings with Iraq; and the upgrading of American military capabilities close to the Gulf region. These policies, and their potential impact on Saudi interests, merit close examination.

1. *Reduction of U.S. dependence on foreign oil.* Although the noncommunist world presently holds unprecedented levels of petroleum inventories,⁶² the economies of Europe, Japan and, to a lesser extent, the United States, are still critically dependent upon foreign oil. Alternative energy sources and conservation programs have not yet alleviated this dependency, either because they still are not cost-effective compared to oil, or because the conversion to other forms of energy is not feasible in the short-run. In the United

62. Petroleum Intelligence Weekly reported last fall that, "Oil inventories in some European nations have now reached the equivalent of 120 days' supply, while Japan is at a record 110 days and rising, and the United States at about 75 days." *Boston Globe*, 1 September 1980, p. 21. This assessment came before Iran and Iraq went to war and halted their oil exports, the loss of which tightened the world oil market.

States and Germany, public action groups have inhibited increased reliance on nuclear energy. The influence of companies which sell petroleum-based products, and the lack of consensus for action within the governments themselves further impede energy conversion. Thus, in the near term, a forceful and dramatic threat to U.S. energy security (such as a Saudi production cutback of two million or more barrels a day⁶³) could galvanize the Congress into appropriating increased funds to fill the strategic petroleum reserve, a move which would sharply cut Saudi leverage in Washington and within OPEC as well.

In short, playing "hard ball" with Iraq could backfire on Riyadh. Excessive Saudi toughness in demonstrating the kingdom's commitment to the Palestinian cause could provide an effective catalyst for inducing the United States and, in time, its allies to accept the short-term sacrifices necessary to rid themselves of their acute dependence on Arab oil. In the long run, it is the Saudis whose power and security would stand to suffer the most.

2. *New U.S. Openness Toward Iraq.* The United States and Iraq have not had formal diplomatic relations since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Baghdad's close ties with the Soviets, its extreme anti-Zionism, and its blatant (and often bloody) disregard for domestic human rights and international norms of conduct have kept America's interest in restoring relations with Iraq at a minimum. Several developments, however, have caused some U.S. policymakers to reconsider their official contempt for Iraq's radical Baathist regime.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the replacement of the Shah by a violently anti-American group of revolutionaries in Iran left U.S. leaders looking for ways to balance these setbacks to America's strategic position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Gulf. After former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski visited the Khyber Pass in early 1980 as a demonstration of American resolve to present further Soviet moves, he revealed the Carter Administration's openness to the prospect of mending relations with Iraq. In April, then Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David B. Newsom announced that the United States was prepared to resume diplomatic ties with Baghdad (Iraq did not respond).

63. In the summer of 1980 the Platts Oilgram News quoted a "senior Saudi government official," considering oil production cutbacks from the then-current level of 9.5 million barrels per day as an incentive for the West to pressure Israel to change its Jerusalem policy, thusly: "We could go to 7.5 million barrels a day, and then the next month, drop to 6.5 million, and so on." *Washington Post*, 29 August 1980, p. E 1.

Significantly, Anwar Sadat's surprising announcement in April 1981 that Egypt had sold spare parts to the Iraqis for their Soviet weapons⁶⁴ appears to signal a hopeful, if fragile, first step toward a post-Camp David bilateral rapprochement.⁶⁵ Such a development could greatly facilitate Washington's diplomacy in the Arab world.

There is an economic underpinning to the changing American attitude toward Iraq. The level of U.S. exports to Iraq in 1980 was more than twenty-five times that of 1972. Significantly, the U.S. Government has begun to relax its prohibition on sales of military-related items to Baghdad. Although delivery was held up due to the Iraq-Iran war, General Electric has been officially allowed to sell gas-turbine engines to be put into Italian-made warships for Iraq.⁶⁶

Courting Iraq's friendship — to the extent that it succeeds — can serve two constructive purposes for the U.S. within the Washington-Riyadh-Baghdad triangle. On the one hand, it may help to temper President Hussein's nearly exclusive emphasis on anti-Americanism in his "anti-superpower" machinations; and on the other hand, it might relieve the Saudi leaders of the diplomatic agony of having to aggrrieve one partner as it consorts with the other. Since Riyadh's recent drift has been toward favoring Iraq and other Arab states at America's expense on Palestinian issues, both effects would be of some value to the United States. It remains to be seen, however, how deeply support for renewed ties with Iraq runs within the Reagan Administration and the ninety-seventh Congress.

3. *Upgrading of U.S. Military Capabilities Near the Gulf.* Strategic setbacks in Iran and Afghanistan, rather than disagreements with the Saudis, are at the root of America's decision to create a network of bases and supply depots for use by U.S. forces in a Gulf crisis. Undiminished concern for assuring Israel's security may also be involved. But regardless of the causes, it is worth noting the probable effects of a heightened U.S. regional military presence on the Saudi-U.S. relationship and the security interests of both countries.

For several years, American naval vessels in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea have deployed principally out of the U.S. base at

64. *New York Times*, 2 April 1981, p. A 2.

65. According to a *New York Times* dispatch of 3 May 1981, p. 3: "[I]n a televised speech . . . Mr. Sadat extended an invitation to all the Arab nations that turned their backs on him because of his 1979 peace treaty with Israel to 'forget our grudges' and 'get together'."

66. Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. May Let Iraq Buy Jets Despite Terrorism Question," *New York Times*, 6 August 1980, p. A 5.

Diego Garcia, 2,500 miles southeast of the Gulf. Recent U.S. initiatives, however, promise to diversify and enlarge American logistical capabilities in the area.

Following the seizure of American hostages in Teheran on November 4, 1979, the U.S. dispatched two carrier task forces to the Arabian Sea. In March 1980 four warships with 1,800 marines were also sent to the Arabian Sea, and in early April, former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown announced plans to preposition military supplies for a 12,000-man Marine Corps brigade in seven freighters at Diego Garcia. During the spring of 1980, American B-52 bombers conducted at least four reconnaissance missions in the area from their base on Guam.⁶⁷

In early June, a basing-for-aid pact with Oman was announced. The Omani island of Masirah offers British-built port and airfield facilities, with the added advantage to both countries of being visually removed from the mainland. It is possible that a second port in northern Oman could also be used by the U.S. Navy if minesweeping operations became necessary in the Strait of Hormuz.⁶⁸

On June 27, 1980, the State Department announced an agreement with the government of Kenya expanding American access to port facilities at Mombasa and Kenyan airfields as well.⁶⁹ The U.S. Navy has long enjoyed permission to use Mombasa for servicing, refueling and shore leave. Under the new agreement, the U.S. is providing Kenya with approximately \$65 million in aid for one year, in return for which American forces will obtain unspecified "additional access" to Mombasa — the interpretation of which could entail the prepositioning of at least nonmilitary supplies for American use in a Gulf crisis.⁷⁰

On August 22, 1980, the United States concluded an agreement with Somalia under which, according to a *New York Times* report, "American forces will have access to airfields and port facilities at Mogadishu in the Indian Ocean, at Berbera in the Gulf of Aden and possibly other locations." The same report lists the price to America as "at least \$151 million in military, economic and

67. "U.S. Sending Freighters To Join Fleet in Arabian Sea," *New York Times*, 8 April 1980.

68. *Economist*, 30 August 1980, p. 32.

69. *New York Times*, 28 June 1980, p. A 5.

70. See Gary Thatcher, "American Ships to Test the Water at Indian Ocean Ports," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 August 1980, p. 3.

refugee assistance over a two-year period."⁷¹ The Somali facilities at Berbera offer many advantages to the United States besides their proximity to the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea. There is a 13,500-foot runway and a secure harbor with extensive docking facilities and fuel storage capacity. Furthermore, there is far less local maritime traffic in Berbera than in Mombasa or the Omani ports.⁷²

Less than a week after the accord with Somalia was signed, details of yet another agreement for U.S. military access to the region's facilities became publicly known. The government of Egypt is to make its Red Sea port of Ras Benas available to the United States "for certain limited purposes." Ras Benas is to be developed into a major base with a "first-class" airfield capable of handling B-52s, new warehouses and fuel stores, and rebuilt piers; estimates for this project, including rental fees, run close to \$400 million. American defense planners may well intend for this base to become the central staging ground for any Middle East missions undertaken by the 110,000-man Rapid Deployment Force.⁷³ The United States has also asked Egypt to permit nuclear-powered warships to transit the Suez Canal under a set of safety regulations that would exclude Soviet vessels; as yet no decision has been taken in Cairo.⁷⁴

Regional Political Repercussions

There is a political price for these improved U.S. military capabilities. In Oman, Sultan Qabus has encountered vehement opposition to his introduction of a U.S. presence from several Arab states, principally Iraq. Before the U.S. and Somalia came to terms, Ethiopia requested the withdrawal of the American ambassador. Many observers have questioned whether the U.S., by supplying arms to Somalia, will be able to avoid becoming indirectly involved in Somalia's conflict against Soviet- and Cuban-backed forces in the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, which is less than 150 miles from Berbera.⁷⁵

71. Graham Hovey, "U.S. and Somalia Sign Arms Accord," *New York Times*, 23 August 1980, p. A 3. A subsequent report lists the first year price to the United States as \$20 million in military sales credits and \$58 million in economic aid. *New York Times*, 17 September 1980, p. A 14.

72. Samuel S. Stratton, Member of Congress, 28th Dist., N.Y., Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 27 July 1980, p. E 20.

73. "U.S. to Spend Up to \$400 m to Develop Base in Egypt," *Boston Globe*, 26 August 1980, p. 4; see also, "American Bases — Buying Friends," *Economist*, 30 August 1980, pp. 32-33.

74. *New York Times*, March 9, 1981, p. A 3.

75. In February 1980 Ethiopia "threatened invasion of Somalia if the U.S. should come to

The American agreement with Kenya may encounter African resistance, especially if Kenya stockpiles American resupply materials. It is also worth noting that in July 1980 the Organization of African Unity went on record demanding that the U.S. vacate Diego Garcia. In Egypt, President Sadat's dauntless embrace of American interests reinforces the convictions of those Arab leaders who equate the Camp David "peace framework" with U.S. imperialism.

In short, America's moves to strengthen its military projection capabilities in the Gulf are highly unpopular within the region's political arena, regardless of how various leaders may feel privately. It is extremely costly for any Gulf state to openly identify its interests with those of the United States.⁷⁶ As the polarization between Israel and the Arab rejectionists intensifies, there is far less middle ground for Riyadh to occupy comfortably.

Impact on Saudi Interests

Saudi Arabia has been under considerable pressure from Iraq and other Arab states to disentangle itself from the United States. At the same time, the Saudis have no reason to desire an actual reduction in their relations with the United States, other than for inter-Arab political convenience. While Saudi leaders cannot say so publicly, they surely welcome America's improved intervention capabilities, since the kingdom's security against external attack ultimately depends upon perceptions of U.S. ability and political will to fight in the Gulf should the need arise.

It may appear that the Saudis are enjoying both the security benefits of an enlarged U.S. military presence and the political rewards of what amounts to a diplomatic anti-U.S. alliance with Iraq. Current Western dependence on Saudi oil is such that as long as the kingdom keeps the oil flowing, it can count on American protection regardless of Riyadh's foreign policies. But it should be pointed out that by decoupling their political orientations from their deep-rooted relationship with the United States, the Saudis run the risk of compromising their security in potentially significant ways.

Arms procurement is one example of this. Following Iraq's lead, the Saudis in mid-1979 arranged to purchase a \$1 billion Shahine air defense system from France; additionally, the French agreed to sell advanced AMX-30 tanks for three Saudi armored brigades, and to supply 450 military advisors to train new units inside the kingdom.⁷⁷ In May 1980, the Saudis signed an agreement with

Berbera." John H. Spencer (former "principal foreign advisor to Ethiopia"), Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 29 August 1980, p. A 18.

76. Following the aborted U.S. attempted rescue of the hostages in Iran in April 1980, Saudi and Kuwaiti press reports were extremely critical of the American action, some calling it "terrorism." *New York Times*, 27 April 1980, p. 16.

77. *Newsweek*, 6 August 1979, p. 35.

France for naval equipment; French naval contracts with both Iraq and Saudi Arabia were said to total \$3.3 billion. *Le Monde* had earlier reported that France and Italy were competing for a substantial contract to sell Riyadh missile-equipped patrol boats and anti-submarine gunboats.⁷⁸

The advantages to the Saudis in diversifying their arms purchases away from Washington may include faster delivery, fewer restrictions, reduction of dependence upon a single supplier, more comfortable ties with Baghdad, and the regional political rewards of appearing to reject American primacy in Saudi defense planning. Yet the disadvantages are potentially greater: reduced ability to coordinate operations on a national scale if parts are not interchangeable; greatly increased difficulties in creating an indigenous pool of trained Saudi mechanics due to linguistic and mechanical complications; and the possibility that the United States might limit the technical sophistication both of weapons sold to the Saudis and of information imparted through training missions, if sufficient doubts arose over the security of sensitive U.S. technologies within the kingdom.

For the time being, these considerations pose no great problem, unless the Saudis begin to overlap their American weapons with similar French and Italian purchases on a larger scale. But in wartime, the kingdom's "defense-in-depth" doctrine relies on the ability to pull troops from the border bases and have them operate effectively with other units and equipment based throughout Saudi Arabia. Diversifying their arms purchases may erode the effectiveness and thus the credibility of the Saudis' deterrent against external attack.

Other manifestations of broadened Saudi policy latitude might include more forceful opposition by Riyadh to the Camp David peace process (particularly if the rival European negotiating effort were to gain further momentum), and a more tolerant disposition toward the Soviet Union. In the first instance, Riyadh would delight many Arab states by lending its prestige and oil power to a more concerted rejection of the U.S.-Israel-Egypt peace process. But by so doing, the kingdom would be forfeiting any pretension of moderation on the issue, and the long-term risk of a preemptive Israeli air strike against Saudi Arabia in a crisis would increase. Furthermore, such a policy would poison the atmosphere for any new Regan Administration peace initiatives, while further inclining the the Congress against arms sales to Arab states other than Egypt. Saudi prospects for restoring relations with Egypt would also be set back considerably.

Insofar as relations with Moscow are concerned, the Saudis may find it politically convenient to soften their opposition to the Soviet advisory presence in the Yemens, or to Soviet cultural and diplomatic contacts within the Gulf shiekdoms. Allowing Moscow to retain and expand cultural footholds near the Gulf may be innocuous in the short term, but over time it could erode the

78. "French-Saudi Arms Deal Reported by Riyadh Radio," *New York Times*, 12 May 1980.

potential for rallying Arab sentiment against the Soviets should Saudi Arabia one day find itself strategically outmaneuvered by Moscow.

The Saudis would be wise to limit their participation in Iraq's anti-Israeli strategy to primarily symbolic acts, lest they destroy Western political and economic cohesion, press Israel into diplomatically-isolated bellicosity, over-inflate Saddam Hussein's ego, and offer the Soviets an opportunity to ride the crest of pan-Arab solidarity against Israel. Whether the Saudis recognize it or not, their interdependence with the United States will remain a fact of political life for many years to come.

CONCLUSION — THE QUEST FOR STABILITY

On New Year's Day 1980, the official Saudi press agency announced that King Khalid had requested and received the resignations of the Chief of Staff, the Commander of the Public Security Forces, the Commander of the Air Force, and several other top officials in the Ministry of Defense and Aviation.⁷⁹ The King's dissatisfaction was understandable, given the poor performance of the armed forces in both forestalling and quelling the Mecca uprising. News of significant defections among Bedouin guardsmen must have been very disconcerting to Khalid. But the attitude that top bureaucratic and security posts are to be used as "plums," offered or withdrawn as a measure of the King's pleasure, is unhealthy. Furthermore, the King's preoccupation with keeping his regime's potential domestic rivals fragmented and powerless only perpetuates the following security drawbacks:

1. The al Saud clan's near-monopoly control over the leadership of the armed forces reinforces the low level of technical expertise and precludes the adoption of a merit system throughout the ranks.
2. The King's frequent reshuffling of military leaders has prevented the various defense branches from establishing an effective joint staff operation; this has impeded development of the institutional autonomy and continuity necessary to foster greater efficiency and *esprit de corps*. The serious recruitment problems and the high AWOL rates in all branches⁸⁰ are due in part to this deficiency.
3. The al Saud family's total control over military ammunition and fuel makes the army excessively vulnerable to a kidnapping of the King or some such paralyzing act of blackmail. Since the

79. "Key Saudis Removed In Wake Of Violence," *New York Times*, 2 January 1980, p. A 10.

80. Of the 40 National Guard units, only 17 are functional due to AWOL attrition. Halliday, "Shifting Sands," p. 40.

country's military and economic power centers are so well dispersed, a synchronized coup would otherwise be much less feasible.

4. The total lack of systems coordination between the National Guard and the armed forces — evidenced by separate arms procurement policies and separate, but not redundant, command, control and communications systems — render combined arms operations ineffective, as shown at Mecca in 1979. With only 71,000 men under arms in both organizations, this forced separation underutilizes the country's scarce manpower.⁸¹
5. Precautionary refusal to deploy the armed forces anywhere near the population centers, the royal leaders, and particularly the Al Hasa oilfields limits their deterrent value against external attack on eastern targets. Failure to train the National Guard, who must defend these key locations, in front-line combat further contributes to this vulnerability, since the Saudi army does not presently have the capability to airlift its tanks in an emergency — only APCs. However, there is now talk of an "industrial anti-sabotage force" of at least 1,000 men to guard the oilfields.⁸²

Conversely, giving the armed forces a freer hand to develop and interact might prove disastrous for the royal family. A coup was attempted in 1969 by air force officers; a decade later, in mid-summer 1979, there were unconfirmed reports of another coup attempt by the air force's northern regional command, stationed just seventeen miles north of Riyadh at the Sharja base.⁸³ It may be, therefore, that the royal family's safeguards against an internal military challenge will continue to be considered a necessary evil, however much they reduce the defense establishment's vitality.

If so, it will be unrealistic to expect Saudi Arabia's military establishment to significantly improve its indigenous capabilities as foreign advisors and sophisticated technologies are introduced in future years. In all likelihood, the Saudi forces will remain unable to absorb high-quality imported weapons and training assistance. With superpower forces steadily closing in on the Gulf, Iraq and Iran blowing up each other's oil installations and threatening the Straits of Hormuz, and a Saudi air war with Israel far more thinkable in the 1980s than in previous decades, the question of Saudi Arabia's defensive capabilities is a matter of serious consequence to friend and foe alike.

81. IISS, *The Military Balance 1979-1980*, p. 44. A National Service Program of conscription for all Saudi males between 18 and 35 was introduced in 1980.

82. Walter S. Mossberg, "As Mideast Heats Up, U.S. Frets Over Peril To the Saudi Oil Fields," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1980, pp. 1, 10.

83. Halliday, "Shifting Sands," p. 40.

Thus, Riyadh would do well to clarify the kingdom's security doctrine. The bungled Mecca operation stripped the Saudis of any false pretensions of improved operational abilities. If the Saudi armed forces are to remain pathologically inept, who are they counting on to guarantee the kingdom's territorial integrity? The United States? Iraq? It is a fundamental problem lacking an obvious solution.

The Deterrence Dilemma — What Role for the United States?

In happier years — when international issues separating Riyadh and Washington could be more comfortably side-stepped — it was understood that America's "special" defense relationship with Saudi Arabia included protection against external aggression. "The Saudis are . . . erecting a gigantic 'trip wire.' " wrote Louis Turner and James Bedore in early 1978, "because Western countries are so involved with both Saudi defenses and Saudi oil that any attack on the kingdom would inevitably run such a chance of provoking Western retaliation that potential aggressors will think twice." This strategy was believed sufficient to deter even Israel, who "must seriously appreciate the tremendous adverse impact that the casualties amongst Western technicians would have on the United States."⁸⁴

The political drift between the United States and Saudi Arabia, coinciding with Western strategic reversals in Iran and Afghanistan, has made it easier for American leaders to agree on the necessity of undertaking self-protective military and economic measures. Yet because these controversial acts only widen the split between the U.S. and much of the Arab world, Riyadh must continually downplay its American ties, even while augmenting its U.S. arms requests. Thus, due to circumstances which neither party can control or ignore, the U.S.-Saudi bilateral estrangement feeds upon itself.

The day that America's energy policies finally succeed in terminating the vital oil dependency which has bound the U.S. to Saudi Arabia for decades, Washington's concern for the royal family's political survival is certain to diminish. Perhaps in preparation for this — but more probably in response to the current opportunities and constraints involved in pan-Arab and pan-Islamic unity politics — the Saudis have been exploring new security initiatives which do not include U.S. participation at all:

1. *A Gulf security alliance*, combining Iraq, Saudi Arabia and most or all of the sheikhdoms, with probable help from Jordan as needed. This prospect makes good sense for all parties involved, including the United States. Washington's goal should

84. Louis Turner and James Bedore, "Saudi Arabia: The Power of the Purse-Strings," *International Affairs* (London), vol. 54, no. 3 (July 1978), p. 416.

be to try to mitigate Saddam Hussein's anti-Americanism, so as to permit Riyadh to sustain good relations with both the U.S. and Iraq.

2. *An increasingly diversified arms purchasing policy*, giving Europe new business which earlier might have gone to the U.S. This trend, if pursued on a major scale, could hurt the Saudis militarily, as noted. Moreover, it could lead to pressure from non-wealthy Arab states on the Saudis to fund advanced European weapons for them as well since, unlike American arms transfers, the European sales are comparatively free of restrictions governing use or technology-sharing with third parties.
3. *Use of regional states' troops as proxies* to compensate for deficient Saudi manpower. Pakistan, which has agreed to provide military engineers and support personnel to the kingdom, is also reported to have arranged the stationing of an army division, or 10,000 Pakistani soldiers, in Saudi Arabia.⁸⁵ In return, Riyadh is to provide General Zia's regime with military and economic assistance estimated at anywhere from \$1 billion to \$12.5 billion. Writes the *Economist*, "Both are . . . haunted by justified fears of internal dissidence. It makes sense that they should turn discreetly to one another, rather than to an outside power."⁸⁶ Local trading of financial assets for military assets is not unheard of in the Gulf. Egyptian troops have been "rented" by Oman, while Jordanian army troops and advisors are on loan to North Yemen.⁸⁷

Publicly disassociating Saudi security planning from U.S. "imperialism" and seeking regional security solutions instead will win Riyadh great popularity and support in the Arab world. As the Saudis have undoubtedly calculated, U.S. advisors in the kingdom will continue to serve as a trip wire deterrent, and America's Rapid Deployment Force will faithfully stand guard in case the kingdom should be threatened and require U.S. help. Thus the royal family can still afford to keep its own armed forces impotent as a precaution against a military coup. The arrangement seems militarily adequate and politically very convenient for the Saudi leaders. Nevertheless, this security scheme is seriously flawed. In terms of capabilities, it rests upon:

85. Richard Burt, "Pakistan Said to Offer to Base Troops on Saudi Soil," *New York Times*, 20 August 1980, p. A 5.

86. "Scratch My Back," *Economist*, 13 September 1980, p. 40.

87. *The Middle East*, August 1979, p. 31.

- perpetuation of indigenous military weakness;
- risk of jeopardizing the congressional support, sophistication of training and arms transferred, and overall program coherence which have been the by-products of the Saudis' "special" defense relationship with the U.S. in past years;
- new reliance on untested allies (such as Iraq) with potentially dangerous regional enemies of their own (such as Iran), and on proxy troops (Pakistanis and Jordanians) whose loyalties to the al Saud clan cannot be assured in an era of secret cells of disaffected National Guard officers and Air Force coup attempts;
- ultimate reliance on an untested regional U.S. military presence⁸⁸ which, because of its very high political and dollar costs, may last only long enough for America to "de-vitalize" its interests in the Gulf, assuming that the host governments do not withdraw their basing privileges first.

Thus the Saudis' most effective, and hence most essential, deterrent — American power projection — is also the most geographically distant and, in some ways, the least certain, while Saudi defensive assets are progressively less capable nearer the high value targets in the eastern province. For the time being at least, the Saudis can count on a strong U.S. commitment to deter Soviet aggression, since it is difficult to envision future American leaders remaining indifferent to a Soviet lunge toward the oilfields, even if U.S. vital interests are no longer at stake. Short of an overt Soviet military action, however, this tenuous patchwork of defensive assets seems quite inadequate to the task of

88. A congressional analysis of possible U.S. military intervention to defend Saudi Arabia's oilfields concludes that success in securing the continued flow of oil to the West would depend upon two critical conditions: damage to key installations must be slight; and the U.S.S.R. must abstain from armed intervention (should the U.S.S.R. arrive on the scene first, U.S. odds for success are greatly reduced). John M. Collins and Clyde R. Mark, "Petroleum Imports from the Persian Gulf: Use of Armed Force to Ensure Supplies," Issue Brief no. 79046, CRS/FAND, Library of Congress, 26 April 1979, p. 16. In addition to its 110,000-man Rapid Deployment Force, the U.S. has two other sources of military contingency forces which could be injected into a Gulf crisis: a U.S. Air Force "bare base" program of airlifting food, fuel, workshops and C³ facilities to any available airstrip; and a Marine Corps program dating from the mid-1970s for executing seaborne landings in the Middle East. See Drew Middleton, "Oil Price Rise Stirs Review of U.S. War Moves in Crisis," *New York Times*, 5 July 1979, p. A 3. In February 1980, former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense Robert W. Komer stated that an American brigade of 4,000 paratroopers could be placed in the Gulf in less than a week, and that the entire 82nd Airborne unit out of Fort Bragg, N.C., could be lifted in within two weeks, if local governments cooperated by permitting use of landing areas. "U.S. Aide Notes Ability to Fly Units to Mideast," *New York Times*, 7 February 1980. Gen. Volney Warner, head of the Rapid Deployment Force's Readiness Command, has said that a war game exercise showed that it would take 169 days to place the entire RDF in the Middle East, including equipment and support units. Richard Halloran, "Gaps in Training and Equipment Hinder Rapid Deployment Force," *New York Times*, 26 September 1980, p. 24.

detering or repelling a well-planned oil disruption by properly armed and trained insurgents from the Gulf region itself — a more likely scenario, and one which would serve Moscow's purposes more effectively than a Red Army attack.

Saudi Arabia is a weak country with a powerful asset: money. Rial diplomacy has been skillfully employed to oppose Soviet encroachment in the Middle East, to support forces for moderation in the Palestinian movement, to promote harmony and unity among Islamic countries, to protect Saudi economic interests, and to help settle some thorny disputes. After years of using economic power as a "carrot," Riyadh showed a new willingness in 1980 to brandish it as a "stick": first after Israel formally annexed Jerusalem in July; and then after the PLO was denied observer status prior to the annual IMF/World Bank meeting in September. So long as the royal family reigns in Riyadh, the Al Hasa oil wealth will continue to serve these causes. But how long will that be?

The House of Saud rests on old values in a time of radical political, economic and social change in the Gulf. Oil, which has boosted the Saudi monarchy to unprecedented heights of international prestige and influence, has also made the kingdom a principal target for military contingency plans in Moscow, Washington, Jerusalem, Aden, Teheran, and who knows how many other foreign capitals. It is only prudent for American leaders to anticipate the possibility of a change of regime, by foreign takeover, military coup, fundamentalist revolt or democratic evolution.

If the United States can reduce the vulnerability of its own interests to the consequences of an unfavorable change in Riyadh, it will enjoy greater flexibility to advance those interests in the day-to-day conduct of U.S. policy in the Middle East. In this sense, American energy autonomy, by producing policy strength, would give new confidence to our friends in the region and thereby improve the chances that the process and the direction of change will be favorable.