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The Scandal of U.S.-Saudi Relations

Daniel Pipes

When it comes to the Saudi-American relationship, the White House should be called the 'White Tent.'

Mohammed Al-Khilewi, a Saudi diplomat who defected to the United States¹

CONSIDER TWO symbolic moments in the U.S.-Saudi relationship involving a visit by one leader to the other's country. In November 1990, President George H.W. Bush went to the Persian Gulf region with his wife and top congressional leaders at Thanksgiving time to visit the 400,000 troops gathered in Saudi Arabia, whom he sent there to protect that country from an Iraqi invasion. When the Saudi authorities learned that the President intended to say grace before a festive Thanksgiving dinner, they remonstrated; Saudi Arabia knows only one religion, they said, and that is Islam. Bush acceded, and he and his entourage instead celebrated the holiday on the U.S.S. *Durham*, an amphibious cargo ship sitting in international waters.

In April 2002, as Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, the country's effective ruler, was about to travel across Texas to visit President George W. Bush,

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an advance group talked to the airport manager in Waco (the airport serving the President's ranch in Crawford) "and told him they did not want any females on the ramp and also said there should not be any females talking to the airplane."² The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) at Waco complied with this request and passed it to three other FAA stations on the crown prince's route, which also complied. Then, when queried about this matter, both the FAA and the State Department joined the Saudi foreign minister in flat-out denying that there ever was a Saudi request for male-only controllers.

The import of these incidents is clear enough: Official Americans in Saudi Arabia bend to Saudi customs, and official Americans in the United States do so as well. And it's not just a matter of travel etiquette; one finds parallel American obsequiousness concerning such issues as energy, security, religion and personal status. The Saudis routinely set the terms of this bilateral relationship. For decades, U.S. government agencies have engaged in a consistent pattern of deference to

¹Quoted in "Statement by Patricia M. Roush before the Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives", June 12, 2002, p. 3.

²An executive engaged in running the Waco airport, quoted in the *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 2002.

Saudi wishes, making so many unwonted and unnecessary concessions that one gets the impression that a switch has taken place, with both sides forgetting which of them is the great power and which the minor one. I shall first document this claim, then offer an explanation for it, and conclude with a policy recommendation.

Small-Scale Obsequiousness

U.S. GOVERNMENT acceptance of Saudi norms is particularly evident as concerns the treatment of women, children, practicing Christians and Jews.

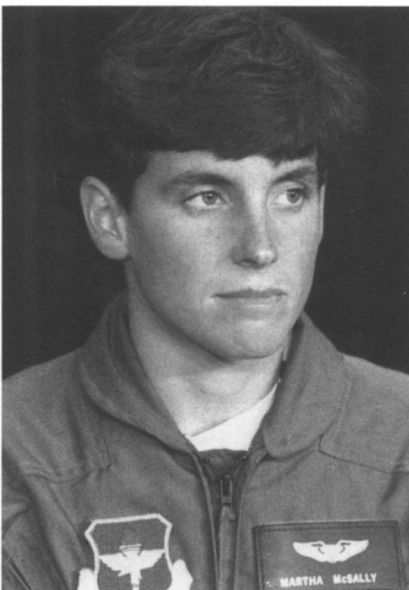
WOMEN

The U.S. government accepts the unequal treatment of women in connection with Saudi Arabia that it would otherwise never countenance. Two current examples tell the story.

Starting in 1991, the U.S. military required its female personnel based in Saudi Arabia to wear black, head-to-foot *abayas*. (This makes Saudi Arabia the only country in the world where U.S. military personnel are expected to wear a religiously-mandated garment.) Further, the women had to ride in the back seat of vehicles and be accompanied by a man when off base.

In 1995, Lt. Col. Martha McSally, the highest-ranking female fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force, initiated an effort within the system to end this discriminatory treatment. As she put it, "I'm able to be in leadership positions and fly combat sorties into enemy territory, yet when I leave the base, I hand over the keys to my sub-

ordinate men, sit in the back, and put on a Muslim outfit that is very demeaning and humiliating."³ Not succeeding within the system, McSally went public with a law suit in early 2002. Her complaint points to the violation of her free speech, the separation of church and state, and gender discrimination. (Male military personnel not only have no parallel requirements imposed on them but are specifically *forbidden* from wearing Saudi clothing, and non-military women working for the U.S. government in Saudi Arabia are not expected to wear an *abaya*.⁴)



Lt. Col. Martha E. McSally

After McSally filed her law suit, the Department of Defense responded by changing the requirement that women wear *abayas* off base; it then rescinded the policies on the other two issues (sitting in the back of a vehicle; having a male escort). Yet these were largely cosmetic changes, for women are still "strongly encouraged" to follow the old rules so as to take "host nation sensitivity" into account. The U.S. government continues to purchase and issue *abayas*. McSally has

argued that the military's "strongly encouraged" *abayas* effectively continue the old regimen, as women who do not wear the Saudi garb fear harm to their careers; so she has continued with her suit. Finally, the House of Representatives in May 2002 voted unanimously to prohibit the Pentagon from "formally or informally" urging servicewomen to wear *abayas* and forbade the Pentagon from

³Fox News, March 1, 2002.

⁴CNN, April 25, 2002.

buying *abayas* for servicewomen. (The Senate has not yet acted on this measure.)

The Executive Branch's weak policy *vis-à-vis* women's rights has an impact on private institutions, as well, which also discriminate against women. U.S. businessmen and diplomats in Riyadh

say the biggest U.S. companies in Saudi Arabia—ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and Boeing—do not employ any women. Several other U.S. companies, including Citibank, Saks Fifth Avenue, Philip Morris and Procter & Gamble, have women on their payroll, but they work in offices segregated from men, as is the [Saudi] custom. The Saudis do not disclose employment practices of the more than 100 U.S. companies operating in Saudi Arabia, but American businessmen say that to their knowledge, all the companies follow Saudi mores so they don't jeopardize their investments.

One Western diplomat complains that American businessmen use empty excuses, such as the demands of local laws, there being no place for the women to sit or go to the toilet, and concludes that, "It's just like it was in South Africa."⁵

CHILDREN

The pattern of Saudi fathers abducting children from the United States to Saudi Arabia, and then keeping them there with the full agreement of the Saudi authorities, affects at least 92 children of U.S. mothers and Saudi fathers, perhaps many more. In each of these heartbreaking cases, the State Department has behaved with weakness bordering on sycophancy. To be specific, it has accepted the Saudi law that gives the father near-absolute control over the movement and activities of his children and wife (or wives). The department has made no real efforts to signal its displeasure to the Saudi authorities over these cases, much less made vigorous efforts to free the children held against their American families' wishes.

Here are three cases featured at a June 2002 hearing in the House of Representatives, organized by Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN):

Alia (b. 1979) and Aisha (b. 1982) al-Gheshayan, are two girls born in the United States and abducted to Saudi Arabia in 1986 by their father, Khalid al-Gheshayan, in defiance of a U.S. court order. Until this past August, they were not allowed to leave Saudi Arabia and their mother, Pat Roush, has had only a few minutes to visit them over the many years. Both children have now reached adulthood and both have been married off; but as females, they cannot leave the country without their male guardian's protection—first their father, now their husbands.⁶ One U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia (Walter Cutler) tried to get the children released, only to be instructed by the State Department to "maintain

⁵*USA Today*, May 13, 2002.

⁶The State Department's unwillingness to stand up for U.S. citizens held in Saudi Arabia was highlighted in August 2002: at the precise moment when Rep. Burton was leading a congressional delegation to Riyadh to seek the release of abducted Americans, the Gheshayan sisters surfaced in London "on vacation" and met with an American consular official—not in the U.S. embassy, but in a luxury hotel overflowing with high-powered Saudis and their American employees. There they ostensibly renounced the United States and their mother, even as they praised Osama bin Laden. The State Department rejected accusations that the sisters were coerced or under duress during this meeting, or at any time during their stay in London. This was despite the questionable role of the translator, a strong possibility that Saudis were listening in on the conversation (and the likelihood that the sisters knew it), and the failure of U.S. diplomats to inform the two of their rights as American citizens to travel freely, without exit visas or prior permission from anyone.

impartiality” in this dispute, after which his efforts to assist came to an end.⁷ A second ambassador (Hume Horan) brought the matter up with a ranking Saudi official but soon after found himself recalled due to Saudi complaints. A third ambassador (Roy Mabus) devised a plan to put pressure on the Gheshayan family to spring the children but, after his departure, the steps he took were all reversed.

Rasheed (b. 1976) and Amjad (b. 1983) Radwan are a boy and girl born in the United States who moved with their parents to Saudi Arabia in 1985. After their father, Nizar Radwan, divorced their mother, Monica Stowers, in 1986, he refused to permit the children to leave the country with her. Stowers left for four years, then returned to take back her children in 1990. In December of that year, she did get them and all three took refuge in the American Embassy, where Stowers desperately sought help to take her children out of the country. Instead, the consul general ordered the Marines to evict mother and children from the premises. Shortly after, the children were taken back to the father and their mother was jailed. Rasheed, being male, could leave Saudi Arabia, which he did in 1996; his sister remains confined there as she enters adulthood.

Yasmine Shalhoub (b. 1986), a girl born in the United States, was abducted by her father to Saudi Arabia in 1997. As her mother, Miriam Hernandez, developed plans to extricate Yasmine from her captivity, the American Embassy made it clear that it would provide no help against the father’s wishes. Left on her own, Hernandez did find a way to smuggle Yasmine out in 1999, and she is now back in the United States—no thanks to her diplomatic representatives.

In all three of these cases—and in the many others like them—the U.S. government has singularly failed to stand up for the rights of its most vulnerable citizens.

CHRISTIANS

In Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government submits to restrictions on Christian practices that it would find totally unacceptable anywhere else in the world—starting with the U.S. president’s not celebrating Thanksgiving in the Kingdom, as mentioned above. The hundreds of thousands of American troops in Saudi Arabia in December 1990 were not permitted to hold formal Christmas services at their bases on Saudi soil; all that was allowed to them were “C-word morale services” held in places where they would be invisible to the outside world, such as tents and mess halls. The goal was for no Saudi to be made to suffer the knowledge that Christians were at prayer.⁸

At least the soldiers in 1990–91 could hold services, a privilege not normally accorded Americans in Saudi Arabia on official business. Timothy Hunter, a State Department employee based in Saudi Arabia during 1992–95 (a rare source of information from inside the U.S. establishment in Saudi Arabia, and one subjected to reprisals for his whistle-blowing activities), had the job of “monitoring and coordinating the ‘Tuesday Lecture’ at the Jeddah consulate general—really the Catholic cata-

⁷Quoted in “Statement by Patricia M. Roush”, p. 17.

⁸The State Department remembers the Operation Desert Storm era quite differently—as a time of “U.S.-Saudi cooperation in the areas of cultural accommodation.” Here is its idea of balance: “The United States military issued general orders prohibiting the consumption of alcohol and setting guidelines for off-duty behavior and attire. Saudi Arabia accommodated U.S. culture and its military procedures by allowing U.S. servicewomen to serve in their varied roles throughout the Kingdom—a major step for a highly patriarchal society.” See “Background Note: Saudi Arabia” at <http://www.state.gov>.

comb.”⁹ (Services in Jeddah, he explains, took place on Tuesday, not Sunday, due to the paucity of clergy and their need to be in other locations on Sundays.) In an article in the *Middle East Quarterly*, Hunter details the methods he was told to use to discourage Catholic worshippers and the even worse options faced by Protestants:

When Catholic Americans sought permission to worship, I was to receive their telephone inquiries and deflect them by pretending not to know about the ‘Tuesday Lecture.’ Only if a person kept calling back and insisting that such a group existed was I to meet with him and get a sense of his trustworthiness. . . . In my time, we never actually admitted anyone. . . . My personal dealings were limited to Catholics. I later learned that others—Protestants, Mormons, and Jews—were denied any sanctuary on the consulate grounds. . . . Non-Catholic Americans were directed to the British Consulate, which both sponsored other religious services and admitted much larger numbers of Catholics. But the U.K. services were full, leaving most American worshippers only the option of holding services on Saudi territory, thereby exposing themselves to potentially violent attack from the *Mutawa* [the much-feared Saudi religious police].¹⁰

JEWS

With Jews, the issue is not freedom of religious practice in Saudi Arabia; it is simply gaining entry to the Kingdom. In several instances over many years, agencies of the U.S. government have excluded Jewish Americans from positions in Saudi Arabia. Hunter explains that a protocol prohibiting Jews being assigned to the Kingdom was signed by the U.S. Embassy in Jeddah and the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a result of which the State Department avoids sending Jewish employees to reside in Saudi Arabia.¹¹ Select senior diplomats

of Jewish origin may briefly visit the country on official business but “no low or mid-level Jewish-American diplomat was permitted to be stationed/reside in Kingdom” during Hunter’s three-year experience. He writes:

When [in 1993] I worked in the Washington, DC State Department administrative office of the ‘Near East and South Asia Bureau’, it was the duty of the foreign service director of personnel to screen all Foreign Service officers applying for service in KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] and to ‘tick’ Jewish officers’ names using the letter ‘J’ next to the names so that selection panels would not select Jewish diplomats for service in KSA.

I was instructed that there was a diplomatic protocol between the USA and KSA going back ‘many years’ in which the two governments agreed that no Jewish-American U.S. diplomats would be allowed to be stationed in KSA. The KSA government had expressed its opposition to the stationing of U.S. diplomats who were Jewish because it believed all Jewish people, irrespective of nationality, can be considered Israeli spies. I was told that the U.S. government had not disputed the KSA government’s assertion. I explained to the State Department’s Office of the Inspector General that the existence of such a protocol was an indication of illegal activity since no treaty provision may be executed without the concurrence of the U.S. Senate.¹²

The consequences of the U.S. government’s boycott of Jews has on occasion come to light. Congressional hearings in 1975 exposed the fact that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its

⁹On Hunter, see Martin Edwin Andersen, “Whistle-blowers keep the faith”, *Insight*, February 11, 2002.

¹⁰Hunter, “Appeasing the Saudis”, *Middle East Quarterly*, (March 1996).

¹¹Letters to the author, June 24 and 25, 2002.

¹²Letter to the author, June 9, 2002.

subcontractors excluded Jewish (and black) personnel from projects in Saudi Arabia.¹³ The Treasury Department issued guidelines in 1976 to help U.S. businesses get around anti-boycott provisions just signed into law. More recently, to prepare its defense in a case brought against it by the Boeing Corporation, the U.S. government hired a Virginia-based contractor, CACI Inc.-Commercial, to send a team to microfilm documents in Saudi Arabia, a task that would take several months. At a November 1991 meeting called by the Air Force, Col. Michael J. Hoover, the chief trial attorney for the Air Force Materiel Command, informed representatives of the Justice Department and CACI Inc.-Commercial that Jews or people with Jewish surnames could not go to Saudi Arabia as part of the microfilming team. On this basis, David Andrew (the senior CACI Inc.-Commercial employee involved in the microfilming project) drafted and Jane Hadden Alperson (Office of Litigation Support, Civil Division, Justice Department, the case manager involved in the microfilming project) edited an "operations plan" in which the "Screening/Selection Process" included the following text:

No Jews or Jewish surnamed personnel will be sent as part of the Document Acquisition Team because of the cultural differences between Moslems and Jews in the Region. . . . No Israeli stamped passport, as per Saudi rules.

As the Justice Department and CACI Inc.-Commercial hired the team to go to Saudi Arabia, "At least one U.S. person was refused a place on the team based on religion or national origin."

After hearing a complaint from the Anti-Defamation League, the Office of Antiboycott Compliance at the Department of Commerce conducted a probe lasting (the unusually long period

of) one and a half years. The office reached a settlement on February 27, 1997, in which CACI Inc.-Commercial and the key individuals in each institution (Hoover, Alperson, Andrew) agreed to settle the allegations against them. The individuals were assessed suspended fines and CACI INC.-Commercial paid \$15,000. Hoover also received a letter of reprimand. For their part, the Air Force and the Department of Justice "agreed to institute measures to prevent a similar event from happening again."¹⁴ To all this, the *New York Daily News* acerbically commented, "The Air Force and Justice apologized and promised to abide by the law. That's comforting, since Justice is supposed to uphold the law."¹⁵

As in the case of women, where the government leads, private organizations follow. Excluding Jews may be in contravention of U.S. law, which states that "U.S. companies cannot rely on a country's customs or local preferences and stereotypes to justify discrimination against U.S. citizens", but it occurs nonetheless.¹⁶ Until

¹³Steven Emerson, *The American House of Saud: The Secret Petrodollar Connection* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1985), p. 70.

¹⁴Office of Antiboycott Compliance, Department of Commerce, "CACI/USAF/DOJ/Hoover/Alperson/Andrew." For another case that was not litigated, see *Journal of Commerce*, March 7, 1997.

¹⁵*New York Daily News*, March 10, 1997.

¹⁶Jordan W. Cowman, "U.S. companies doing business abroad must follow U.S. and host country labor and employment laws", *New Jersey Law Journal*, August 4, 1997. Of course, such cases arise in other countries, too. "A subsidiary of the Manitoba Telephone System, MTS, became embroiled in a controversy in the 1980s when it became known one contract stipulation for upgrading the Saudi telephone system required the exclusion of Jewish MTS employees." *The Gazette* (Montreal), February 7, 2001.

1959, the Arabian American Oil Co. (ARAMCO) had an exemption from New York State's anti-discrimination laws and was permitted to ask prospective employees if they were Jews, on the grounds that Saudi Arabia refused to admit Jews into the country. When this arrangement was challenged in 1959, the New York State Supreme Court derisively condemned this practice. It told ARAMCO, "Go elsewhere to serve your Arab master—but not in New York State", and instructed the State Commission against Discrimination to enforce the ruling against ARAMCO.¹⁷

World Airways, which boasts of having "pilgrims from more Muslim countries to the Islamic Holy Land than any other airline in the world", was charged in 1975 with demanding a "letter from a church showing membership, or proof of baptism or marriage in a church" from staff traveling to Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ About that same time, Vinnel Corporation excluded personnel with any "contact or interest" in countries not recognized by the Kingdom.¹⁹

In 1982, two cardiovascular anesthesiologists (Lawrence Abrams and Stewart Linde) brought charges of discrimination against their employer, the Baylor College of Medicine, for excluding them from an exchange program with the King Faisal Hospital in Saudi Arabia due to their being Jewish. The case went to court, and in 1986 the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit agreed with the doctors, finding that "the college intentionally excluded Jews from its beneficial and educational rotation program at Faisal Hospital." The court surmised that Baylor's actions were motivated, at least in part, "by its desire not to 'rock the boat' of its lucrative Saudi contributors."²⁰

OTHER ISSUES

The Federal government appeases Riyadh when it "meticulously cooperate[s] with Saudi censorship" of mail going to

Americans living in the Kingdom:

Mail to U.S. military and official government personnel enters the Kingdom on U.S. military craft, and American officials in Saudi Arabia follow Saudi wishes by seizing and disposing of Christmas trees and decorations and other symbols of the holiday. They seize and destroy Christmas cards sent to (the mostly non-official) Americans who receive their mail through a Saudi postal box, and even tear from the envelope U.S. stamps portraying religious scenes.

It hardly comes as a surprise, then, to hear from Ron Mayfield, Jr., who worked in Saudi Arabia for eight years with the Army Corps of Engineers, ARAMCO and Raytheon Corp, that while he was working at Raytheon, the mail censors confiscated a photo of his grandmother on her 95th birthday, given that this picture contravenes the (episodic) Saudi prohibition of representations of women. More broadly, Mayfield recounts:

On my first tour of Saudi Arabia, working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Americans were ordered to remove all decals and photos of the American flag. . . . With my last employer, providing defensive missiles to the Saudis, officers came through on an inspection and ordered removal of all family photos picturing wives and female children. . . . Customs went through a friend's wallet, confiscating a photo of his wife in hot pants.²¹

The Jeddah office of what used to be called the U.S. Information Service, an agency charged with presenting the offi-

¹⁷19 Misc. 2d 205; 190 N.Y.S.2d 218; 1959 N.Y. Misc.

¹⁸Emerson, *The American House of Saud*, p. 69.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰805 F.2d 528; 1986 U.S. App.

²¹*Roanoke Times*, February 17, 2002.

cial American point of view and refuting hostile accounts, was “almost completely staffed by non-U.S. citizens from the Middle East, many of them not friendly to American values and policies”, according to Hunter. It “made no effort to counter the systematic, widespread falsehoods in the Saudi media about American society. In some instances, in fact, the USIS actually provided misinformation about U.S. society.”²² The public library at USIS did not stock books critical of the Kingdom or other volumes considered “too sensitive” for Saudi society (such as family health issues). The only books touching on Jews, he reports, were “a small Jewish cookbook” and a great number of anti-Semitic tomes, including the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.²³

The U.S. government’s weak policy can be seen in yet other areas: It does not fight for U.S. scholars or media to get access to the Kingdom; it does not challenge the Saudi refusal to allow American researchers to engage in archaeological excavations; and it provides scant assistance to those unfortunate Americans who get caught up in the Saudi legal system (for something as minor as a fender-bender).

In contrast—and this is a rich subject in its own right—the State Department and other agencies bend over backwards for the Kingdom, for example, going to great lengths to keep secret the specifics of its investments in the United States. And when Saudi nationals living in the United States get in trouble with the law (common charges include various forms of rowdiness, sexual harassment and keeping slaves), they are often granted diplomatic immunity to avoid prosecution, then whisked out of the country. For example, a former U.S. ambassador to Riyadh was dispatched by his Saudi bosses to Miami in April 1982 to keep a Saudi prince from being jailed for an altercation with the

police by winning him retroactive diplomatic immunity. After Princess Buniah al-Saud, a niece of King Fahd, faced charges of battery for having pushed her Indonesian maid down a flight of stairs in her Orlando, Florida house, the maid was conveniently denied a visa by the State Department to return to the United States to testify against the princess. More spectacular was the planeload of bin Ladens permitted to leave the United States immediately after September 11, 2001, before U.S. law enforcement officials could question them.

It bears noting, too, that although these examples are limited to individuals and do not touch directly on high policy, they have more than symbolic importance because they set a tone with potentially large implications. In effect, the U.S. government is abetting a profound challenge to American ways by the Islamic mores of Saudi Arabia. McSally, the fighter pilot, explains that putting her in an *abaya*, requiring that she be escorted and placed in the back seat, has a real psychological effect on military life at U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia, implying that women are inferior and subservient to men.²⁴

Large-Scale Obsequiousness

THE SAME obsequiousness that exists on the level of the small-bore and the personal also holds on the grander scale of international politics. Some examples:

- *Oil production and embargo*: Saudi energy policies in 1973–74 helped cause the worst economic decline since the Great Depression; it was met with appeasement and conciliation, without so

²²Hunter, “Appeasing the Saudis.”

²³Letter to the author, June 24, 2002.

²⁴*Washington Post*, January 1, 2002.

much as a whisper of bolder action.

•*Lack of cooperation in finding killers of Americans*: American officials meekly accepted in 1995 that the Kingdom executed the (dubious) suspects accused of killing five Americans in Riyadh before U.S. law enforcement officials could interrogate them. A year later, the response was similarly mild about the lack of Saudi cooperation in investigating the murder of American troops at Khobar Towers. After 9/11, it was even worse; as one observer puts it, “The Saudis’ cooperation with our efforts to track down the financing of Al-Qaeda appears to be somewhere between minimal and zero.”²⁵

•*The spread of militant Islam*: “Saudi money—official or not—is behind much of the Islamic-extremist rhetoric and action in the world today”, notes Rep. Ben Gilman (R-NY), then chairman of the House International Relations Committee.²⁶ The assault on September 11, 2001 was basically Saudi in ideology, personnel, organization and funding—but the U.S. government did not signal a reassessment of policy toward Riyadh, much less raise the idea of suing the Saudis for punitive damages.

•*Militant Islamic institutions in the United States*: U.S. authorities have been lax about the funding of these organizations. Only in March 2002, for example, did Federal agents finally get around to raiding 16 innocuous-looking Saudi-funded institutions, such as the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences of Leesburg, Virginia. This problem is widespread and unredressed, as a newspaper editorial from Canada suggests:

[M]any terrorists and terror recruits get their first taste of death-to-the-West Islamic extremism from a Wahhabi imam or centre director in Virginia or London or, presum-

ably, Hamilton or Markham [towns in Canada], whose paycheque is drawn in the Saudi Kingdom. It may not be necessary to add Saudi Arabia to the Axis of Evil, or to invade it. But it will be necessary to engage the Saudi spread of extremism if the war on terrorism is to be won.²⁷

•*Arab-Israeli conflict*: The Bush Administration has pretended that the Abdallah Plan for solving this conflict is a serious proposition, when it is not just patently ridiculous (demanding that Israel retreat to its 1967 borders) but also offensive (clearly envisioning the demographic overwhelming of Israel). Instead of playing unconvincing diplomatic games with Riyadh, the administration should emphasize that the hateful rhetoric and subsidies for suicide bombers must come to an immediate end.

•*Human rights and democracy*: The usual U.S. commitment to these goals seems to wither when Saudi Arabia is involved. The Kingdom’s signed commitments to protect the rights of its subjects are virtually ignored, as are such questions as the rule of law, freedom of speech and assembly, the right to travel, women’s rights and religious liberties.

•*Absorbing insults and threats*: A famous case, dating from the 1970s, when Henry Kissinger attended a state dinner in his honor hosted by King Faisal, set the tone. Kissinger recounts how the king informed him that

Jews and Communists were working now in parallel, now together, to undermine the civilized world as we knew it. Oblivious to my [Jewish] ancestry—or delicately putting me

²⁵Michael Barone, *U.S. News & World Report*, June 3, 2002.

²⁶Associated Press, May 22, 2002.

²⁷*Edmonton Journal*, May 31, 2002.

into a special category—Faisal insisted that an end be put once and for all to the dual conspiracy of Jews and Communists. The Middle East outpost of that plot was the State of Israel, put there by Bolshevism for the principal purpose of dividing America from the Arabs.

Kissinger did not confront Faisal but did his best to avoid the whole issue by responding with a question to the king about the palace artwork.²⁸

More recently, Crown Prince Abdallah wrote to President Bush in August 2001 stating that

a time comes when peoples and nations part. We are at a crossroads. It is time for the United States and Saudi Arabia to look at their separate interests. Those governments that don't feel the pulse of the people and respond to it will suffer the fate of the Shah of Iran.²⁹

This aggressive statement was met not with reproach but with appeasement. And in April 2002, a leading Saudi figure warned that to survive, the Kingdom would contemplate joining with America's worst enemies: If reason of state requires that "we move to the right of bin Laden, so be it; to the left of [Libya's ruler Muammar] Qaddafi, so be it; or fly to Baghdad and embrace Saddam like a brother, so be it."³⁰ The statement appeared prominently in the U.S. press but had no apparent repercussions on policy. More striking yet are the reports from the summit meeting that followed indicating that Abdallah warned Bush that if he won nothing substantive regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, "our two countries will go their separate ways."³¹

A Matter of Give and Take

WHAT LIES behind this pattern of obsequiousness? Where is the normally robust pursuit of U.S. interests? It is one thing when private companies bend

over backwards to please the Saudis (Starbucks in Saudi Arabia does not show the female figure that normally graces its logo), but why does the U.S. government defer to the Kingdom in so many and unique ways?

"Oil" is likely to be the most common explanation proffered, but it does not hold. First, the U.S. government has never cringed before any other major oil supplier as it does to Saudi Arabia. Second, U.S.-Saudi ties have been premised since 1945, when a dying Franklin D. Roosevelt met an aging King Ibn Saud, on an enduring bargain in which Riyadh provides oil and gas to the United States and the world and Washington provides security to Saudi Arabia. Because this deal has even more importance for Saudis than Americans—survival versus energy supplies—oil cannot explain why the U.S. side has consistently acted as a supplicant.

Another possible factor is the proclivity of many Americans to strive to tolerate other people's customs and religious beliefs, which in the Saudi case involves such matters as the total covering of women, public executions and the absence of any pretense of democratic rule. But the lack of reciprocity from the Saudi side, decade after decade, suggests that something else besides an open spirit is at work; no matter how liberal, no one can endure such a one-sided relationship for so long unless there is a payoff.

A hint of that payoff lies in the preemptive quality of some U.S. government measures. Note two cases: The requirement that female military personnel wear the *abaya* was imposed by Americans, not Saudis; the latter did not even raise the

²⁸Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 661.

²⁹*Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 2001.

³⁰*New York Times*, April 25, 2002.

³¹Confidential sources, April 2002.

subject. Saudi law only requires Westerners to dress conservatively, not to wear Saudi garb. Likewise, the investigation of the Air Force-Justice-CACI directive excluding Jews from Saudi Arabia found “no evidence that the restriction was specifically requested by, was required by, or was even known by the Government of Saudi Arabia.”³²

The same behavior exists among private institutions. Again, note two cases: In the 1959 ARAMCO case, it turned out that the oil company was not compelled by the Saudi government to exclude Jews, but did so anyway as a result of what the court termed “informal statements of State Department underlings.”³³ Similarly, the judgment regarding the Baylor College of Medicine found that while college officials informed the two Jewish doctors of problems securing visas for Jews, “Baylor never attempted to substantiate that ‘problem’”, leading the court to doubt “the veracity of those assertions.” The court also found no evidence supporting the college’s contention that the aversion to Jewish doctors in Saudi Arabia “represented the actual position of the Saudi government.” To the contrary, it concluded that Michael E. DeBakey, the school’s renowned chancellor, failed to obtain “an authoritative statement of the position of the Saudis” until 1983, more than a year after the doctors had initially filed suit. The court observed that there was “no evidence that Baylor even attempted to ascertain the official position of the Saudi government on this issue.”³⁴

In all four cases, an American in a position of authority overeagerly imposed regulations he imagined the Saudis would be pleased with—but without checking with them, much less being required to take these particular steps. Why does such a pattern of behavior exist? What could prompt government or hospital staff to run out ahead of the Saudis themselves?

The Saudi ambassador to the United

States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, helpfully hinted at an answer in a statement boasting of his success cultivating powerful Americans. “If the reputation then builds that the Saudis take care of friends when they leave office”, Bandar once observed, “you’d be surprised how much better friends you have who are just coming into office.”³⁵ This effective admission of bribery goes far to explain why the usual laws, regulations and rights do not apply when Saudi Arabia is involved. Hume Horan, himself a former U.S. ambassador to the Kingdom, is the great and noble exception to this pattern. He says this of his former colleagues:

There have been some people who really do go on the Saudi payroll, and they work as advisers and consultants. Prince Bandar is very good about massaging and promoting relationships like that. Money works wonders, and if you’ve got an awful lot of it, and a royal title—well, it’s amusing to see how some Americans liquefy in front of a foreign potentate, just because he’s called a prince.

Over-the-top support of Saudi interests by former Ambassador James E. Akins (who has criticized Arab governments for not being tougher with Washington and despaired that Arabs did not withdraw their money from U.S. banks) has caused him to be described as occasionally appearing “more pro-Arab than the Arab officials.”³⁶

Several surveys of the post-government careers of ex-U.S. ambassadors to Riyadh all raise eyebrows. Steven Emerson characterizes their behavior as

³²Office of Antiboycott Compliance, Department of Commerce.

³³19 Misc. 2d 205; 190 N.Y.S.2d 218; 1959 N.Y. Misc.

³⁴805 F.2d 528; 1986 U.S. App.

³⁵*Washington Post*, February 11, 2002.

³⁶Emerson, *The American House of Saud*, p. 250.

“visceral, overt self-interested sycophancy.”³⁷ *National Review* finds that the number of them “who now push a pro-Saudi line is startling” and concludes that “no other posting pays such rich dividends once one has left it, provided one is willing to become a public and private advocate of Saudi interests.”³⁸ A *National Post* analysis looked at five former ambassadors and found that “they have carved out a fine living insulting their own countrymen while shilling for one of the most corrupt regimes on Earth.” If you closed your eyes while listening to their apologies, “you would think the person talking held a Saudi passport.”³⁹

A *Washington Post* account gives some idea of the nature of the “rich dividends” reaped by former officials:

Americans who have worked with the Saudis in official capacities often remain connected to them when they leave public office, from former president George H.W. Bush, who has given speeches for cash in Saudi Arabia since leaving office, to many previous ambassadors and military officers stationed in the Kingdom. In some cases, these connections have been lucrative. Walter Cutler, who served two tours as the U.S. ambassador in Saudi Arabia, now runs Meridian International Center in Washington, an organization that promotes international understanding through education and exchanges. Saudi donors have been “very supportive” of the center, Cutler said. [Edward] Walker, the former assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, is president of the Middle East Institute in Washington, which promotes understanding with the Arab world. Its board chairman is former senator Wyche Fowler, ambassador to Riyadh in the second Clinton administration. Saudi contributions covered \$200,000 of the institute’s \$1.5 million budget last year, Walker said.⁴⁰

Nor is this a new problem. Many ex-

Washington hands have been paid off by the Kingdom, including not only a bevy of former ambassadors but also such figures as Spiro T. Agnew, Jimmy Carter, Clark Clifford, John B. Connally and William E. Simon.⁴¹

The heart of the problem is an all-too-human one, then: Americans in positions of authority bend the rules and break with standard policy out of personal greed. In this light, Hunter’s report on the three main U.S. government goals in Saudi Arabia begins to make sense: strengthen the Saudi regime, cater to the Saud royal family, and facilitate U.S. exports. All of these fit the rubric of enhancing one’s own appeal to the Saudis. So, too, does Hunter’s comment that “the U.S. mission is so preoccupied with extraneous duties—entertainment packages for high-level visitors, liquor sales, and handling baggage for VIP visitors”—that it has scant time to devote to the proper concerns of an embassy. Likewise, his long list of high-profile ex-officials who visited Saudi Arabia during his sojourn (Jimmy Carter, George McGovern, Colin Powell, Mack McLarty, Richard Murphy) and “who were feted and presented with medals and gifts at closed ceremonies with the Saudi monarch” also fits the pattern.⁴²

This culture of corruption in the Executive Branch renders it quite incapable of dealing with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the farsighted and disinterested manner that U.S. foreign policy

³⁷Ibid., p. 263.

³⁸Rod Dreher, “Their Men in Riyadh”, *National Review*, June 17, 2002.

³⁹Matt Welch, “Shilling for the House of Saud”, *The National Post*, August 24, 2002.

⁴⁰*Washington Post*, February 11, 2002.

⁴¹Emerson, *The American House of Saud*, chaps. 7, 13, 19.

⁴²Hunter, “Appeasing the Saudis.”

requires. That leaves Congress with the responsibility to fix things. The massive pre-emptive bribing of American officials requires urgent attention. Steps need to be taken to ensure that the Saudi revolving-door syndrome documented here be made illegal. That might mean that for

ten years or more after having extensive contacts with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an official may not receive funds from that source. Only this way can U.S. citizens regain confidence in those of their officials who deal with one of the world's more important states. □

A Poet's Pessimism

The city won for Allah from the Giaour,
The Giaour from Ottoman's race again may wrest;
And the Serai's impenetrable tower
Receive the fiery Frank, her former guest;
Or Wahab's rebel brood who dared divest
The prophet's tomb of all its pious spoil,
May wind their path of blood along the West;
But ne'er will freedom seek this fated soil,
But slave succeed to slave through years of endless toil.

—George Gordon, Lord Byron,
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, II.lxxvii



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