CHAPTER FOUR

The Saudi Link to International Terrorism:
US Perception and Response
Ideological Roots of Terrorism and Its Global Export

Before the outbreak of the Gulf crisis some features of the new international system had a significant impact on Arab politics and society. Most notable among these were, first, the end of the Cold War with the demise of the Soviet Union as a superpower and the resultant transformation of the United States as the only superpower in the World. The allies of the former Soviet Union in the region could not turn to its Russian successor for protection or support and sensing their vulnerability many of them in the region turned to the United States instead. (Agmon 1993)

A second was the international trend towards economic and religious identities. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe facilitated the expression of deep-rooted ethnic beliefs and religious feelings that had been suppressed for decades. For example, Serbs, Bosnians and Croats demonstrated their conflicting national aspirations in Yugoslavia, while Muslims in Azerbaijan and other Central Asian states sought to assert their religious identity. (Ali 1996: 123-134) There was also a surge in long suppressed feelings of transnational group identity such as that of the Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia.

A third development was that the revival of ethnic and religious aspirations led to the rise of radical political movements as an “antithesis” to the suppressive regimes of that time. A variety of Islamic groups with conservative, liberal and radical orientations emerged in the region seeking a political role. These groups became very popular among young Muslim Arabs whose problems or basic human needs were neither addressed nor satisfied by their regimes. (Fouar n.d: 6-11)

The Influence of Religion

In a series of articles appearing in the Egyptian weekly, Ruz al-Yousef, the magazine's deputy editor, attempted to grapple with the above developments. Interestingly, he drew a direct link between the rise of much of contemporary
terrorism and Saudi Arabia's main Islamic creed, Wahhabism and the financial involvement of the Kingdom's large charitable organizations. (Editorial 2003) This was seconded by Rachael Bronson, Senior Fellow and Director of Middle East Studies, Council on Foreign Relations who argued that the American strategy of using Saudi religiosity as an asset to fight the Soviet Union had contributed significantly to the rise of Islamic extremism in the post Cold War period. She explained that wherever Saudi money went in the region its religious proselytizing followed. Saudi Arabia used the excess profits from the spike in oil prices in 1979 to set up Islamic banks to fund local Islamist groups and support madrassas that taught the Wahabists' austere, intolerant and xenophobic brand of Islam. (Bronson 2006) Over time the Kingdom provided the ideological backdrop to the growth of radical fundamentalism in the region.

Hence, while some Western commentators sought to explain the roots of terrorism by focusing on the history of American policy in the Middle East or other external factors, a growing number of analysts in the Middle East began concentrating, instead, on internal Saudi factors including recent militant trends among Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi clerics and the role of large Saudi global charities in terrorist financing. (Davidson 1997: 173-188)

Religion played a vital role in the relations between both the countries. Significantly, the role of religion in the US-Saudi relationship had garnered little attention up until then. Furthermore, when religion was addressed, it tended to be addressed within the context of some other category such as institutions, organizations, society, civilization or terrorism. (Huntington 1993) First, all the Arab societies, including Saudi Arabia, were dominated by one religion, Islam, while the American society represented Christian values and ideals. Williams, a sociologist, had discussed at length fundamentalist social movements and described their belief systems as “frames” that were the “schemata of interpretation”, which people used to give meaning to events, organize experiences, and provide guides for actions. Similarly, the disparity in the religious thinking of both the countries also reflected in the foreign policies that were influenced by the religious views and beliefs of policy makers and constituents. (Bronson 2005)
Second, religion was often considered a source of legitimacy for both supporting and criticizing government behavior locally and internationally. This view was also echoed by another sociologist, Melford Spiro, who stated, “Every religious system consists... of a cognitive system.”

Third, many local religious issues and phenomena, including religious conflicts, spread across borders or otherwise became international issues. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge had made a pertinent observation that sociologists of religion assumed that people almost universally possessed a coherent, overarching and articulated ‘world view’, ‘perspective’, value orientations’ or ‘meaning system’ that was often based on religion.

Fourth, religion was often considered as part of people’s Worldviews and influenced their perception of events and their actions. (Fox 2001) Clifford Geertz had explained that not only did religion include a belief system, but most people also found religion necessary to interpret the world around them, especially when bad things happened.

Although oil and security remained enduring features of the US-Saudi relations, the utility of Saudi religious proselytizing changed dramatically and the United States grew increasingly wary of how Saudi Arabia used its religious power in the region. Saudi Arabia’s brand of religion, Wahhabi Islam, and its reputation for intense proselytizing had landed it in the global hot seat. Saudi Arabia’s religiosity, which the White House once considered an asset, had by now become a political liability. In the past, Saudi leaders did not have to choose between religious and political ends, yet since the September 11 attacks, the international spotlight focused on Saudi Arabia’s willingness and ability to rein in Islamic extremism, both at home and abroad. (Cornell and Spector 2002: 193-206)

**Wahhabism and its Influence on Religious Extremism**

Wahhabism emerged in the mid-eighteenth century in Central Arabia from the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. In retrospect, Wahhabism was significant for two reasons. First, it interestingly rejuvenated the idea of the militant jihad, or holy war, which had declined as a central Islamic value to be applied
universally. Second, Wahhabism became associated with a brutal history of political expansion that led to the massacre of Muslims who did not adhere to its tenets, the most famous of which occurred against the Shiite Muslims of Karbala in the early nineteenth century and against Sunni Muslims in Arabian cities like Taif during the early twentieth century. These Muslims were labeled as polytheists and thus did not deserve any protection. In fact, the highest spiritual authority of Islam during this period, the Sultan-Caliph of the Ottoman Empire regarded the Wahhabis as heretics and waged wars against them in defense of Islam. (Editorial 2001) Saudi-Wahhabi religious leaders cleverly used religious terminology and decrees to mobilize a mercenary movement to overcome the fierce nomadic opposition to their aggression. Much as Al-Qaeda does today, they recruited the desperate and poor to die for them in the name of God and Islam. Those who resisted “Hul Altawhid” were tortured and killed. The Saudi-Wahhabi soldiers moved throughout the Arabian Peninsula, invading and conquering villages and tribes wherever they went. While their declared objective was to purify and unite Muslims, their actions were clearly indicative of their real goal of achieving total hegemony over most of the Arabian Peninsula. (Huntington 2001)

In such a scenario, in the middle of the eighteenth century in the poverty-stricken and secluded Nejd region, the Saud family and Wahhabi religious extremists agreed to come together and support one another. The two groups had distinct agendas but shared a desire to rule and control. The people of Nejd were poor, restless and isolated. Wahhabism provided them with a perceived purpose, a sense of empowerment, social codes, and hope for a better life. (Arjomand 1984: 40-43)

Once the different tribes and groups were coerced into a precarious and unnatural statehood in 1932, the original pact between the followers of Ibn Abdul Wahhab and Ibn Saud dynasties was cemented and a division of power was finalized. The House of Saud was to oversee the economy, politics and security while the Wahhabis assumed religious, social, educational and judicial duties. Apart from imposing Wahhabism on all inhabitants of the conquered territories, the new rulers moved quickly to confiscate prime real estate for their private use, impose heavy taxes,
destroy some of the country’s most beautiful religious shrines and introduce a strict social and dress code, especially for women. This 263-year-old Saudi-Wahhabi arrangement remains the cornerstone of their total control over every aspect of Saudi citizens’ lives, movements, wealth and future even today. Hence people in the Islam dominated Arab societies had their own tradition, values and beliefs. (Report 2006)

King Faisal, who ruled from 1964 to 1975, created a host of domestic and international Islamic institutions that had both political and religious purposes. He helped establish the Islamic University of Medina in 1961 to spread Saudi-inspired Wahhabi Islam and, more instrumentally, to compete ideologically with Cairo’s prestigious al-Azhar University. The Islamic University eventually became a well-known recruiting ground for jihadi fighters. King Faisal helped found the Muslim World League in 1962, a worldwide charity to which the Saudi royal family has reportedly since donated more than a billion dollars. King Faisal also embarked on a nine-nation tour through Muslim countries to establish “Islamic solidarity” and check Gamal Abdul Nasser’s continued regional appeal in December 1965. Crucially, after Saudi Arabia triumphed over Egypt at the Khartoum summit in 1967 which put an end to the Egyptian-Saudi proxy war in Yemen and left Egypt dependent on Saudi aid, King Faisal did not disband the Islamic institutions or halt the creation of more. (Beling 1980: 123-128)

However, unlike his successor, the King worked to ensure that the most radical clerics did not assume society’s most powerful religious posts. He tried to block extremist clerics from gaining dominion over key religious institutions such as the Council of Senior Ulema, the Kingdom’s highest religious body and from rising to high religious positions such as grand mufti, a politically recognized senior expert charged with maintaining the whole system of Islamic law. Some of the King’s advisers however warned the King early on that, once religious zealots were encouraged, they would come back to haunt the kingdom. Ultimately King Faisal, who was assassinated in 1975, was unable to control the future direction of the institutions he created. These Saudi-based institutions became increasingly radicalized over the 1980s and 1990s. (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 2009)
However, in response to the dramatic events of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca by religious extremists and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, King Khaled\(^2\) and King Fahd\(^3\) subsequently allowed the unconstrained radicalisation of Saudi Arabia’s elaborate religious machinery. For two decades, it produced severe anti-Soviet and ultimately anti-US, anti-Zionist and anti-regime opponents who were willing to die for their beliefs. Harsh laws were imposed on women, and the King appeared in public with the most rabid preachers. (Ayoob 1981: 113-121) In the decade that followed, the confluence of US - Saudi anti-Communist interests was most obvious in Afghanistan.

The United States and Saudi Arabia spent no less than $3 billion each channeling assistance to armed anti-US Islamic fundamentalists. Their shared vitriol for communism spawned proselytizing that stretched from Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Pakistan and beyond which ironically became the epicenter of terrorist activities. The United States realised that it would be a mistake to focus solely on Wahhabism as the ideological fountainhead of the new global terrorism. Modern Saudi Arabia hosted other militant movements in the 1950s and 1960s that had an important impact as well. For reasons of regional geopolitics, the royal family had provided sanctuary to elements of the radical Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt, Sudan, Jordan and Syria and also provided Saudi stipends to them. They were also given positions in the Saudi educational system, including the universities or in the large Saudi charities like the Muslim World League which was created in 1962. For example, at the height of the Saudi - Egypt conflict, Egyptian President Abdul Nasser had the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyed Qutb executed in 1966 while his brother Muhammad Qutb fled to Saudi Arabia and taught at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. He was joined in the 1970s by one of the heads of the Muslim Brotherhood from Jordan, Abdullah Azzam. Significantly, both taught Osama bin Laden, who was a student at the university in 1979. (Macksood 1995)

Despite high level and unprecedented coordination between both countries which led to the Soviet Union’s demise and the end of the Cold War, American military facilities in Saudi Arabia were bombed in the mid 1990s. The first bombing occurred

\(^2\) Ruled from 1975 to 1982
\(^3\) Ruled from 1982 to 2005
at the headquarters of a US training program for the Saudi National Guard in the capital, Riyadh, in November 1995 killing seven persons⁴ and injuring 60 others⁵. (Kifner 1996) Three little-known fundamental groups called the “Tigers of the Gulf”, the “Movements of Islamic Change”, and the “Combatant Partisans of God” claimed responsibility. Several months later, four Saudi nationals, who confessed to being influenced by Islamic fundamentalist exiles, were convicted and executed in relation to this bombing. (US Department of State 2006) However, a second and more lethal bombing followed soon at Khobar Towers⁶ in June 1996 killing 19 US Air Force personnel, wounding many others and prompting the relocation of most American military personnel to more remote sites in Saudi Arabia to improve security. (Committee on International Relations 1997) These bomb attacks, one after the other, against several US and foreign operated installations in Saudi Arabia raised serious concerns about the security of US citizens amidst what appeared to be growing unrest within the Kingdom. The bombings were, according to US media reports, carried out by exiled Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden.

Following the Riyadh and Dhahran attacks, the United States felt that the Saudi law enforcement cooperation was too limited while Saudi Arabia chose to remain silent in the wake of the American missile attacks in Sudan in August 1996. (Curtin 2003) It also did not participate actively in the early phases of the United States pursuit of international terrorists in the Middle East. This led to a lot of mistrust and lack of coordination between the two countries which subsequently proved quite costly for both countries. When the United States succeeded in persuading the government of Sudan to expel Osama bin Laden from its territory in 1996, a defiant Riyadh, which refused to believe the al Qaeda role in the bombings, declined to request his extradition. However, in the wake of persistent pressure from the United States, the Kingdom grudgingly agreed to host the deployment of two batteries of US patriot missiles together with 150 additional US military personnel to monitor Iraq. In retrospect, both Bin Laden’s anti-Saudi, anti-American agenda and the seeming inability of Washington and Riyadh to work together smoothly against this threat

⁴ including five US citizens
⁵ including 37 US citizens
⁶ a housing facility for U.S. Air force personnel near Dhahran Air base
seemed to have sprung from a common source - the tensions attendant on the indefinite American military presence in Saudi Arabia. (Jehl 2001)

Afghanistan continued to receive continuous official Saudi attention even after the departure of the Soviet Union. This was mainly in the form of support for the Taliban, the rigidly Islamist militia that controlled most of Afghanistan after 1996. Saudi Arabia’s sponsorship of the Taliban continued even after Osama bin Laden, who had been stripped of Saudi citizenship two years before, accepted the Taliban’s hospitality. It was only after al-Qaeda simultaneously bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 did Saudi Arabia and the United States alike make serious, if not necessarily well-coordinated, efforts to pressure or bribe the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden. Saudi Arabia pressed on with the Taliban even after the United States had given up but they also abandoned their mission as fruitless after the failure of cruise missiles launched from American warships in the Indian Ocean to kill the terrorist leader. (Curtin 2003)

Setting aside the history of cooperation between both countries, there were other reasons why it was an advantage for the United States, in its self interest, to maintain a strong alliance with the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia’s geographic position in the Arabian Peninsula set it precisely at the halfway point of the world. Its resources were needed and due to its unique stature in the Arab and Islamic world, Saudi support was instrumental in legitimizing US regional and global political objectives in the Post Cold War Scenario. (Han 1994) Active threats from radical groups also forced enhanced cooperation between both the countries. This played a largely influential role in removing the distrust that had crept in during the two terms of the Clinton administration.

September 11 Attacks

The global threat of terrorism was highlighted by the spectacular attacks of September 11, 2001. The United States was stunned by the apparently well-financed and coordinated attack in which hijackers rammed two jetliners into the towers of the world trade center in New York, considered the nerve of the US financial system, to
bring them down. A third hijacked airliner plowed into the Pentagon, the nerve of the US defense system while a fourth hijacked airliner aimed at the capitol, the nerve of the US political system, missed its target by crashing near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Prados and Blanchard 2007) A single day’s event touched all facets of American life.

The significance of this attack was apparent in the following statistics. Between 1997 and 2002, 17,928 people had died in terrorist incidents around the globe. Significantly, of the 4,098 killed in North America during this period, most perished on a single day in the September 11 terrorist attacks. The American homeland had been attacked for the first time after the 1812 war with Britain in almost 200 years. The deadly strikes and the subsequent anthrax scare was also the culmination of a decade, post Cold War, of anti-American terror attacks that included the bombing of USS Cole, Oklahoma City, the World Trade Center in 1993 and the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. These terror activities, supported by sophisticated planning, logistics and with possible access to chemical, biological or nuclear weapons created immense concern for the United States. (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs 2006)

**Reactions within the United States**

The popular reactions, by the United States and the world at large, provided both hope and despair. There was hope as it dramatically re-energized the American focus and resolve to fight a global menace. Additionally it also brought terrorism to the forefront of American public concern. On the other hand, it provided despair because rare were the voices that were prepared to say that the United States must not seek revenge by force or engage in activities that would itself amount to terrorism i.e. killing the civilians of other countries. There were far and few voices that pointed out that the US Government’s actions abroad had also contributed significantly towards creating the breeding ground from which terrorists had emerged. (Taecker 2003)

What the September 11 attacks did was to raise a host of new issues. Ironically, the critical question that preoccupied the Bush administration, initially, was how such a catastrophic event occurred and not why or what factors led to such an attack. The perpetrators were considered as mindless terrorists or religious fanatics who hated the United States and for all the good things it stood for - decency, democracy and
freedom. The Bush administration seemed insensitive to the problems caused by their foreign policy. Interestingly, the public desire for revenge was so strong that the Bush administration was also forced to act quickly. (Atkins 2002: 51-54)

The Initial Steps

Henry Kissinger, while commenting in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks observed pertinently: “It is above all, to protect an extraordinary opportunity that has come about to recast the international system”. It became clear that the United States was looking to seize this opportunity to launch an attack against all sub-state armed groups, which were considered unacceptable to American interests then. President George Bush threatened that: “The September 11th attacks had awakened a sleeping giant”. The speed with which ‘long range thinking’ was put into place was remarkable. (Vanaik 2001)

As the United States began its hunt for the perpetrators of the crime, it realised that a comprehensive review of domestic policies, organizational mechanisms and domestic preparedness to respond to terrorism in the future became necessary and urgent issues to investigate. Accordingly, it began to rework all its notions, plans and strategies about war and peace, safety and defense, individual and society and economy and polity. First, the Bush administration realised that to negate the threat from radical Islamic fundamentalist groups to American interests and its allies like Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia required the creation of an informal ‘watch-list’ of nations. (Perl 2001:1-2) Accordingly, President Bush, in his State of the Union address in 2002 controversially branded Iran, North Korea and Syria as the ‘axis of evil’ nations. Second, the Bush government, ironically, gave more power to the Central Intelligence Agency7, the organisation that had a major influence in nurturing those elements, like Osama bin laden, who had come back to haunt the United States now. Third, a Terrorist Threat Integration Centre, led by the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, was formed after merging the Counter Terrorism Units of the CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation8, the Defense Department9 and the Department of

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7 CIA
8 FBI
9 DOD
Homeland Security in January 2002. (McInnis: 2005) Fourth, President Bush sought to build an international coalition to fight this new threat. With the United States realizing that any anti-terror coalition must consist of Muslim countries for global acceptability, President Bush ordered the Arab countries to wrap up and prosecute terrorists on their soil. (Sharma 2001)

The Arab World’s Response

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Lebanon, the four countries whose citizens were named as suspects in the September 11 attacks, were particularly in a delicate situation because many of their citizens felt that the United States was itself to blame for the September 11 attacks. The popular opinion within these societies was that there would not have been such a devastating onslaught if the United States had adopted an even handed approach in the Israel - Palestine dispute, agreed to the lifting of the punitive sanctions regime on Iraq, pulled its forces out of the Gulf and pressed allied Arab leaders to reform their inefficient and corrupt administration. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States Report 2004)

The Arab governments, led by Saudi Arabia, countered the United States efforts to form a coalition to fight the war on terror, with a collection of their stated conditions for active cooperation. The conditions were, first, Israel had to be kept out of any such coalitions while a concrete proof of guilt had to be offered before they would respond positively to the United States. (Sours 2003) Second, there would be no unilateral military operation by the United States and instead a concerted international campaign mounted under the auspices of the United Nations. Third, the United States must have prior consultations with them on any action whether military, economic, political or diplomatic and the focus of the campaign had to only be on the Islamic groups and networks associated with Osama Bin Laden. Fourth, they rejected, in particular, any attempt by the United States to broaden the anti-terror campaign into offensive against Iran, Iraq, Sudan or Libya, Washington’s traditional antagonists in the Muslim World. Fifth, they insisted that resistance groups involved in the struggle against Israel must not be targeted. (Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy Report 2003) General Ahmad Abdul Halim, an analyst with the Cairo Center for Middle East, explained that the
Arabs had to condition their participation because the September 11 circumstances were very different from those in 1991 when the international community was dealing with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

“The Gulf War was about restoring the sovereignty of a country which had been stricken from the map by another... But now, the Arabs cannot join a coalition whose goals were unclear at a time Israel is trying to include Palestinian organization... a list of terrorist groups... Before there is any anti-terrorist coalition there must be a clear definition of terrorism which does not confuse terrorist groups and resistance movements.” (Naqvi 2001)

Saudi Arabia’s Financial Links to Terrorism

Post 9/11, the United States, as part of its efforts to secure the homeland against future attacks, focused intensely on the sources of financing used by terrorist groups operating abroad. Its attempts to examine and thwart overseas terrorist financing also led to complicated questions about how best to approach this global problem. The 2003 US Money Laundering Strategy listed a couple of difficulties: First, terrorism financing tended to involve small amounts of money that were both hard to detect and not necessarily dependent on an underlying crime. Second, a more daunting systemic factor was the natural tendency for all nations to devote more resources towards disrupting finances of overseas groups targeting their homeland rather than applying equal muscle to domestic networks funding terror abroad. (Prados 2003)

Global Charity Organisations

Saudi Arabia had erected a large number of global charities in the 1960s and 1970s, whose original purpose was to spread Wahhabi Islam, but were later increasingly penetrated by prominent individuals from al-Qaeda’s global jihadi network. The three most prominent of these charities were the International Islamic Relief Organization\(^{10}\), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth\(^{11}\), and the Charitable Foundations of al-Haramain. All three organisations were suspected of terrorist funding by US intelligence organizations. For example, the interrogation of an al-Qaeda operative by the CIA revealed that al-Haramain was used as a conduit for

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\(^{10}\) IIRO was an offshoot of the Muslim World League

\(^{11}\) WAMY
funding al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia. The Russian Federal Security Service also suspected that al-Haramain was wiring funds to Chechen militants in 1999. (Prados and Blanchard 2004) The earliest documented links between one of these charities and terrorists was found in Bosnia. It was a handwritten account on IIRO stationery from the late 1980s of a meeting attended by the secretary-general of the Muslim World League and bin Laden representatives indicating the IIRO's readiness to have its offices used in support of militant actions. IIRO had already been also suspected of terrorist funding in the Philippines, Russia, East Africa, Bosnia, and India. (Al Farsy, 1990)

Saudi Arabia's global charities, like the Muslim World League, permitted the spread of this new militancy forged from the cooperation between the Wahhabi clerics and the Muslim Brotherhood refugees. After 1973, these charities benefited from the huge petrodollar resources, dispensed by the Saudi government, which undoubtedly helped them achieve a global reach. The United States suspected that Osama Bin Laden's brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, ran the offices of the International Islamic Relief Organization, a Muslim World League offshoot, in the Philippines. Local intelligence agencies suspected that it served as a financial conduit to the Abu Sayyaf organization. Muhammad al-Zawahiri, brother of bin Laden's Egyptian partner, Ayman al-Zawahiri, also eventually worked for IIRO in Albania. (US Department of State 2005) An IIRO employee from Bangladesh, Sayed Abu Nasir, led a cell broken up by Indian Intelligence that intended to strike at the US consulates in Chennai and Kolkatta. Abu Nasir later revealed that his superiors had informed him that 40 to 50% of IIRO charitable funds were being diverted to finance terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Former CIA operative Robert Baer summarised IIRO's role: "When Saudi Arabia decided to fund the Afghan mujahidin in the early 1980s, the IIRO proved a perfect fit, a money conduit and plausible denial rolled into one." (Gold 2003) The pattern in the charity donated by the International Islamic Relief Organisation was the same as the one with Hamas.

The United States felt that it was incorrect to view these charities as purely non-governmental organizations or private charities, as they were called. What was

\[12\text{ NGOs}\]
interesting to them was that at the apex of each organization's board was a top Saudi official. For Example, the Saudi Grand Mufti, who was also a Saudi cabinet member, chaired the Constituent Council of the Muslim World League while the Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs chaired the secretariat of WAMY and the administrative council of al-Haramain. (Kagan and Kristol 2002) All three organizations had received large charitable contributions from the Saudi royal family that was detailed in Saudi periodicals. According to legal documents submitted, subsequently, on behalf of Saudi Arabia by their legal team in the 9/11 lawsuit, Prince Sultan had contributed $266,000 a year to the IIRO for sixteen years. He had also contributed a much smaller sum to WAMY. All these revelation made the United States to firmly believe that these Saudi charities were full-fledged governmental organizations. In general Al-Qaeda operatives had become accustomed to receiving financial support from Saudi citizens. (Prados 2005)

The strongest documented cases that demonstrated the ties between Saudi Arabia's global charities and international terrorism were related to Hamas. These ties were, allegedly, already in place in the mid-1990s when a Hamas funding group received instructions to write letters thanking executives of IIRO and WAMY for funds it had received. (Aufhauser et al 2003) In fact, President Clinton made a brief stop-over in Saudi Arabia in 1994 where he complained about Saudi funding of Hamas. Interestingly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation\(^{13}\) agents had half heartedly pursued an enquiry into alleged terrorist financing in 1998 much before the 9/11 incidents. They ran across a money trail of a Chicago firm that was suspected of laundering money for Hamas. Subsequently, some of the funding was even traced to the Saudi Embassy in Washington. (Gold, 2003)

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation also suspected that millions of dollars that were donated by the Saudi royal family and wealthy Saudi citizens had been diverted to terrorist groups. In some cases, they believed that Saudi funds had bank rolled specific terrorist acts including the 1998 bombings of two American Embassies in Africa. (Engelberg 1993) A US Congressional inquiry into the investigations of September 11, released in July 2003, contained among other things, ‘explosive’

\(^{13}\) FBI
information, confirming the Saudi link to the 9/11 terrorists and funding of terrorists in general. The US media also repeatedly claimed that thousands of dollars in charitable gifts had found its way to friends of two of the hijackers and the al-Qaeda organisation. Richard Perle, the advisor to US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, observed in an interview on CNN in January 2004: "The Saudis qualify for their own membership in the axis of evil." Around the same time, the Bush administration controversially withheld parts of an inquiry on Saudi Arabia from public scrutiny. The Bush administration did not make these issues public as it was apprehensive that any inquiry into the operations of Saudi Arabia in financing terror networks at that time would jeopardize whatever little cooperation it was receiving from the Kingdom. (Heard 2003)

The United States increasingly began to focus on Saudi Arabia amidst reports that the Saudi oligarchy had assisted and financed the religious schools and Mujahedeen training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It also suspected that Saudi citizens were providing support to Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda. US intelligence believed that, Bin Laden still maintained close contact with key Saudi figures and intelligence even after turning against the United States in the 1990s. Several Intercepts by the US National Security Agency had revealed Saudi financial links to Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda and other extremist groups in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Yemen and Central Asia. An intelligence official confirmed American suspicions:

"1996 is the key year. Bin Laden hooked up to all the bad guys - it was like the grand alliance - and had a capability for conducting large scale operations... The Saudi regime had gone to the dark side." (Blank 2003)

If the past was an indication, the US - Saudi relationship appeared veritably plump with potential and opportunities at the turn of the 21st century. However, the September 11 incidents changed decades of mutual understanding of the Saudi-American alliance over security and oil. It seriously threatened to compromise the close relationship between both the countries. (Taibbott 2001) The relations came under considerable strain, for the first time, since the oil crisis of 1973. The overwhelming feeling among US policy makers was that the events of September 2001 demonstrated that the international community’s indifference to Saudi Arabia’s policies could no longer be tolerated. According to them, the Saudi ruling family’s
oppressive policies, religious intolerance and educational curriculum were at the root of international religious terrorism and the subsequent loss of innocent lives. They believed that terrorist attacks had underscored this point and exposed to the international community, a deadly and unremitting enemy, one that owed its creation and continued existence to extremist Saudi policies and practices. (Doran 2004)

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, many concerns and questions were also raised about whether there was Saudi state or citizen sponsored support for terrorist groups. Some critics of Saudi Arabia even went on to suggest that the United States had invaded the wrong country and seized the wrong oil wells. Class action lawsuits filed on behalf of survivors of the victims of 9/11 raised allegations against hundreds of Saudi individuals and institutions and called into question the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's financial system and other official and private institutions. The US justice system initially agreed by dismissing claims for a US $1 trillion lawsuit brought by the families of the victims of 9/11 against Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz14 and Prince Turki al-Faisal15. The Judiciary ruled in November 2003 that there was no compelling evidence that either acted as an individual or “state sponsor” to cause the terrorist attacks. Saudi Arabia did not appear to have any obvious motive to fund terrorist attacks on a long time ally. However it felt that more controls should have been enacted prior to 9/11 to cut off potential terrorist funding in Saudi Arabia and the United States. (Advisory Panel Report 2003)

The September 11 incidents took its toll especially on US-Saudi commercial relations which shrunk to its lowest. US exports to the Kingdom dropped by 55 percent or more than $5 billion per year since 1998. The drop was striking because during the same time the dollar had weakened16 and Saudi Arabia's internal demand for consumer and capital goods had risen rapidly. Moreover, the United States' new security-related requirements17 were cutting deeply into Saudi travel to the United States for business, tourism, or education. At the grassroots level, the numbers of Saudis who faced difficulties with their business dealings or investments in the United States increased. (Taecker 2003)

14 Saudi Defense Minister and leader of Islamic Affairs
15 Director of the Saudi Department of General Intelligence
16 making US goods more attractive
17 visas, entry interviews and registrations
The Dual Monarchy

The global focus on the Saudi society led by the United States also encouraged a section of Saudi citizens to demand democratic reforms. The United States strongly felt that the conditions faced by Saudi citizens would continue to deteriorate without political reforms and instability in the Kingdom. It felt that the time for a peaceful democratic transition with empowerment of all citizens including women and minorities, religious freedom and responsible economic management was not only long overdue but had become an urgent necessity in Saudi Arabia. (Report 2006) Hence the Bush administration encouraged a number of Saudis to sign petitions requesting a constitutional government, equality for women and religious freedom.

The United States also realized that it had to closely analyse the domestic politics of Saudi Arabia to figure out why one of its staunchest allies was incubating anti-Americanism. The Kingdom, by now, was in the throes of a crisis as the economy was unable to keep pace with the population growth while the welfare state was rapidly detoriating leading to rising regional and sectarian resentments. These problems had been exacerbated by an upsurge in radical Islamic activism. Many Saudis agreed that the Kingdom’s political system had to evolve but a profound cultural schizophrenia prevented the elite from agreeing on the specifics of reform. (Thomas 2001)

Interestingly, by the turn of the 21st century, the Kingdom became a fragmented entity divided between the fiefdoms of the royal family. Among the four of five most powerful princes, two stood out - Crown Prince Abdullah and his half brother Prince Nayef, the interior minister. The relationship between these two leaders had been visibly tense during this period. In the United States, Abdullah cut a higher profile but at home, in Saudi Arabia, Nayef, who controlled the secret police, cast a longer and darker shadow. (Macmillan et al 2002) The Saudi monarchy functioned as the intermediary between two distinct political communities: westernized elite that looked to Europe and the United States as models of political development and a Wahhabi religious establishment that held up its interpretation of Islam’s golden age as a guide. Its two powerful princes took opposing sides in this debate - Abdullah tilted towards the liberal reformers and sought a rapprochement with the United States where as
Nayef sided with the clerics and took direction from an anti-American religious establishment that shared many goals with Al Qaeda. (Dawisha 2002: 146-163)

The two camps were also divided over the question of whether the state should reduce the power of the religious establishment. On the right side of the political spectrum, the religious clerics and Nayef took their stand on the principle of Tawhid or “monotheism”, as defined by Muhammad Ibn Abdal-Wahhab. In their view, Christians, Jews and insufficiently devout Sunni Muslims were enemies out to destroy true Islam. Tawhid was closely connected to Jihad and hence it was not just an intolerant religious doctrine but also a political principle that legitimized the repressiveness of the Saudi State. In foreign policy, Tawhid translated into support for Jihad and so it was Nayef, not Abdullah, who presided over the Saudi fund for the support of fundamentalist groups.

If Tawhid was the right pole of the Saudi political spectrum, then the doctrine of Taqarub which stood for rapprochement between Muslims and non-Muslims marked the left. It promoted the notion of peaceful coexistence with non-believers, downplayed the importance of Jihad and stood in opposition to the siege mentality fostered by Tawhid. (Viorst 1996) Crown Prince Abdullah clearly associated himself with Taqarub and he advocated relaxing restrictions on public debate, promoted democratic reform and supported a reduction in the power of clerics.

**Human Rights Concerns**

The United States also began to publicly express its concerns about human rights conditions in Saudi Arabia around this time. Although these concerns were present much earlier, the United States began to push for active addressal of these concerns only after the September 11 attacks. According to the US State Department in May 2003, the overall human rights environment in Saudi Arabia was a cause for concern. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2006)

The prohibitions or severe restrictions on the freedoms of speech, press, peaceful assembly and religion were also major problems identified by the United States. No representative institutions or political parties existed and there was no freedom of
assembly or speech. Independent organizations, political parties and labour unions were also prohibited. All media outlets were directly and indirectly controlled by the Saudi ruling family. Magazines, books and newspapers that suggested criticism of the Saudi rulers or Wahhabism were strictly banned from the Kingdom. Saudi exposure to the outside world was also among the lowest in the world.

All forms of entertainment were forbidden under the Saudi-Wahhabi social codes. There were no movie houses, theaters or stages for performances in Saudi Arabia. Saudi artists had to travel abroad to record their music because no recording studios were allowed in the country. Birthdays, weddings and anniversaries could not be celebrated publicly, as they were considered inventions of the infidels and therefore not tolerated. Those who violated these government sanctioned social norms faced imprisonment, public flogging, job termination and general social ostracism. Only traditional rituals founded in Wahhabi-Islam were accepted, reinforced and praised. This was done in the name of God and Islam when in truth such measures were designed to prevent a public exchange of ideas. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2003)

According to the United States, the Saudi government also did not allow the practice of any religion other than the state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. All children received compulsory religious education that depicted other peoples and their faiths as nothing more than deviant and corrupt, bent on destroying Muslims and their faith, and turning Muslims against God and their entrusted rulers. Saudi religious and educational institutions taught distrust and hatred of the infidels in their midst, namely Christians and Jews and other religious minorities. (US State Department 2001)

The United States noted that, despite Saudi Arabia’s dependence on their labour and expertise, foreign workers in the country were treated very poorly. Upon entry to the country, the passports of non-diplomats were confiscated by their employers or sponsors and the foreign workers became virtual hostages of their sponsors until departing the country. Foreign workers often faced abusive conditions in the workplace being denied breaks and meals while working unreasonably long hours and sometimes not being paid for a year. There were numerous reports of serious verbal and physical abuse especially for foreign women working as domestic servants in
Saudi households. There were no agencies set up to hear their grievances and they could not access the justice system. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour)

There was systematic discrimination against women who were subjected to a stringent code of conduct by the men governing the country. Women were excluded from all decision-making processes, forbidden from driving, and were strictly segregated from men in restaurants, hospital waiting rooms, buses—where women rode in the back—and, in some cases, within their own homes. Women could not receive medical attention or deliver their babies in hospitals without the permission of their male guardian. Women could also attend segregated and relatively underfunded higher education institutions but could choose only from a limited selection of majors. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2005) According to the United States, these discriminatory policies prevented them from completely participating in the Saudi society and deprived the country of the skills and contributions of one-half of its population.

Interestingly, it also noted that the flexibility Saudi Arabia showed in its active participation during the first Gulf War was not shown in the sensitive issue of women soldiers. Although, they were accepted purely out of pragmatic consideration and with reluctance, no mention of American women in combat dress and the presence of Jewish soldiers found a place in the Saudi coverage of the war. The denial of the right to citizens to change their government and the abuse of prisoners were also major concerns that the US government highlighted repeatedly as tensions between both the allies increased post 9/11. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2004)

The State Department’s 2004 Report on International Religious Freedom designated Saudi Arabia for the first time as a ‘country of particular concern’. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2004) The Internet, with its expanding access among the Saudi population, had become an increasingly important factor in assessing Saudi Arabia’s record in freedom of information. Both the 2005 and 2006 human rights reports estimated that roughly one million Internet subscribers were in the Kingdom and according to human rights reports, Saudi Arabia had sometimes restricted access, monitored e-mails, chat rooms, and blocked access to websites.
Saudi Arabia was again designated the same in the annual report published in September 2006. Of particular concern to the United States were pervasive restrictions on women’s activities and an injunction against the practice of other religions throughout the Kingdom. This injunction was applied not only against non-Islamic faiths but also at times against the Shiite Muslim community in Saudi Arabia, estimated at 500,000 or more persons mainly in the Eastern Province. Discrimination against the mystic-oriented Sufi sects, long opposed by the Saudi regime was active although it had reportedly eased in the last few years. Additionally, despite high level Saudi officials claims that the Kingdom allowed for private non-Muslim worship, for example, in private homes or secluded compounds, the US State Department noted that Saudi officials did not always follow these guidelines in practice and had also not provided specific guidelines to determine what constituted private worship. The 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices observed that members of the autonomous agency known as the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice continued on some occasions to intimidate, mistreat, or detain citizens and foreigners for alleged infractions of the country’s conservative religious norms. (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour 2006)

The Rise of Anti-Americanism

Anti Americanism had set the stage for the vicious attacks of September 11. Hence, it was hardly surprising that Anti-American sentiments grew further in the Arab World especially after the September 11 attacks. (Jones and Smith 2001) The notion of the United States as an imperialistic power had spread rapidly around the Arab world causing wide spread resentment post 9/11. Anti-American demonstrations by students in Egypt ending in the deaths of several of them, the killing of two Americans in a rare incident of violence in Kuwait, the gunning of an American diplomat in Lebanon, the murder of an American nurse in Jordan and sermons by preachers instigating Jihad across Yemen, Syria and Qatar were developments that took place in rapid succession after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Rubin 2002: 45). Similarly, sermon broadcasts on the official television station in Saudi Arabia showed impassioned clerics lambasting the United States for its imperialist policies.

18 also known as the Religious Police or the ‘Mutawwa’
The growth of radical fundamentalist groups in the region like Fateh in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Hizbollah in Lebanon, Society of Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, Popular Struggle Front in Syria and the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia targeting the United States and Israel had a huge influence on the growing anti American sentiments in the region. (Al-Youm 2001) Interestingly such Arab enmity and hatred was not directed against the American people. It was not a racist feeling against the Americans simply because they were Americans. It was a reaction against the American policies in the region. The great historian and political scientist, P.J. Vatikotis, aptly described this: “...why? Because everybody hates any country that has power and uses it”. (Ajami 2003: 55) This hatred, which initially developed among a minority, had spread its tentacles among a majority of the population in the Kingdom within a short period of time.

The Saudi royal family was caught in a difficult position as it had to make a choice between the benefit of good standing with the world’s only super power on the one hand and the increasing hatred of its people for American policies on the other. More than previous bouts of anti-Americanism in the region, the anger had now permeated all strata of society, especially among the educated who were tinged with disillusionment at their own long entrenched American-backed regimes. All though most of these regimes had solid relations with the United States, it was no secret that pro American Arab leaders rather than the common people promoted these relations. (Curtin 2003) As C.W. Freeman Junior, a former U.S. ambassador to Riyadh observed:

“...for the first time since 1973, we actually have a situation in which the United States is so unpopular among the Saudi public that the royal family now thinks its security is best served by publicly distancing itself from the United States”. (Crawford 2003)

Several past and present American officials indicated that the increasing anti-American sentiments in the Saudi society presented a big problem for the United States. This was because Washington was now forced to make a hard choice between exposing the suspected dubious Saudi links to terror groups and taking care of the sensitivity of the bilateral relationship. As Benjamin A. Gilman observed:
“The United States today is facing an ideological enemy that may turn out to be harder to defeat than Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. It creates a culture of hatred directed at the United States and its allies.” (Rushdie 2002)

It was obvious that the United States had tried to pursue a foreign policy that accorded with its own interests in the region. First, its ambiguous stance towards the Palestinian cause combined with its active support of Israel angered the Arab countries. Second, the numerous monarchies and dictators also influenced American wariness towards the region. Its perception of despotism and tyranny was often linked to such regimes and it considered a revolution impending in these societies. Third, its criticism of dictators like Muammar Qadhafi (Libya), Saddam Hussein (Iraq) and Prince Abdullah (Saudi Arabia) was also based on stifled opposition and political disarray. Fourth, the sanctions on Libya and Iraq, naming Lebanon as a key “safe haven” for terrorists and identifying Iraq and Iran as “axis of evil” powers clearly confirmed such a consistent pattern of thinking in the Bush administration. (Hasham 2001)

Simultaneously, the attractions of the western culture with its liberal attitudes spread by globalization and liberalization of markets especially among the Muslim youth created a cultural conflict with the conservative sections of the society in the region. The political decay affected by lack of freedom to express views and the strict religious laws perpetuated into a cultural decay with the invasion of westernization which in turn led to a social decay in the way people lived life. (Gelb 2007) The unequal status of women, public executions, sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni Muslims created further social and cultural schisms. As Fareed Zakaria, editor of news week international put it:

“You are free in the Arab world to demonstrate as long as what you want to demonstrate is some vast abstract cause like anti-Americanism…. you are absolutely not free to demonstrate against your rulers”. (Schmitt 2001)

The religious leaders or ulemas in the Muslim societies took advantage of this conflict for their personal gains by strengthening their positions in the society. Rather than pushing for equality for women, democracy, civil society, freedom of speech and due process of law, which were sorely needed in the Arab world, the ulemas ensured that the public instead focused on hating the United States. As Lawrence Davidson explained:
“When the average Arab citizen tries to reconcile his desire for domestic freedom, his feelings of frustrations at home, cautious American support for his government and the increasing presence of western culture in clothes, food or even music, he is caught in the middle. It is easier (and, in a very human way, more logical) to lash out at a distant America than to risk raising one’s voice against the local hegemony. Popular Arab support for America will be hard to muster until Arabs are able to live as they wish, without oppression and without restrictions. Once Arabs are able to voice concerns about their own Government without fear of reprisals, their focus will turn inward...” (Naim 2001)

Barry Rubin added

“Even remarkable pro-Arab and pro-Muslim policies over the years have not reduced the hatred. Such animus is also a product of self interested manipulation by various groups within the Arab society and it has been used as an excuse for political, social oppression and economic stagnation”. (Rubin 2002: 47)

Arab Americans in the United States

Interestingly, if such anti-American feelings were a product of frustrations of oppressed societies, then the discriminations of Arab Americans in democratic America, post September 11, was an alarming development. This was first revealed in a poll conducted by Zogby international and commissioned by the Arab-American Institute Foundation in May 2002, significantly almost a year after the terror attacks. The poll revealed that 78 percent of Arab Americans felt more profiling of their community after the September 11 attacks in the United States. 30 percent of them personally experienced discrimination while another 40 percent knew someone else who had been discriminated and 63 percent were worried about long-term discriminations. (Arab American Institute Report 2002)

Shockingly, roughly, 1 out of 5 Arab Americans felt less comfortable speaking Arabic in public while every 4 out of 5 Muslim Arabs felt the same and 2 in 5 Arab Americans changed their habits since the September 11 attacks. Interestingly, 63 percent of them were Muslims, 70 percent in the 18-24 age bracket and nearly 50 percent were born outside the United States. Since September 11, Arab Americans born elsewhere (27 percent) had been more discriminated than those born in the United States (17 percent). (Zogby 2001: 1-5)
A second survey conducted by Time/CNN enlisted the American public's opinion on Saudi Arabia. The results were as indicated in the table below.

Table 6
TIME/CNN Poll on Saudi Arabia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>October 1982</th>
<th>September 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think Saudi Arabia is a country the US can trust as an ally?</td>
<td>Cannot trust - 63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can trust – 37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Saudi Arabia cooperating with U.S. as much as it can in the war against terrorism?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have your impression of Saudi Arabia become more favorable recently or stayed the same or got worse?</td>
<td>More Favorable 4%</td>
<td>Stayed the same 50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: From telephone poll of 1,003 adult Americans taken for TIME/CNN, on Sept. 3rd & 4th, 2002 by Harris Interactive. Margin of error is ±3.1%. “Not sures” omitted (Time Magazine Report 2003: 40)

A third survey, by the Institute of International Education (IIE), of the top Ten American Universities which were popular destination for international students again revealed a disturbing trend in February 2003. Twenty-four percent of surveyed universities indicated that their Saudi student base had declined significantly. Eighty-three percent indicated that international students who were expected to arrive for the fall 2002 semester were uncertain. The survey also revealed worries that further deteriorating foreign enrollments could not be ruled out. Obstacles to Saudi study in the United States identified in the IIE report included visa approval delays, political concerns, financial problems and students choosing more attractive opportunities to study elsewhere. (Takeyh 2001)
The disturbing trends in the three surveys compounded the damage to a critical nexus that was forged between both the countries over the course of many decades. Many current members of the Saudi royal family and professional ranks had been educated in the United States. This massive investment in "intellectual capital" had peaked at 30,000 Saudi students studying in the United States in the early 1990s, significantly after the first Gulf War, when relations were at its strongest. 65 percent of the 16 million Saudi nationals were under the age of 25 and if this new generation of students became unwilling or unable to attend an American University, it would cause permanent damage to the US - Saudi relations. (Hollis 2001) Although many believed that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were the cause of diminishing Saudi enrollment, according to the Saudi Embassy, there were only 5,800 Saudi students studying in the United States in 2001 which revealed that the rot had set in much before the September attacks. Only 300 students left the United States between September and December 2001 after the attacks.

The Saudi news media also actively covered incidents of hate crimes against Muslims and the return of Saudi students, who no longer felt welcome or comfortable continuing studies in the United States. This unprecedented environment of fear towards the United States also deeply harmed the simultaneously growing number of Saudi women who wished to study abroad. Over the same period, interest in US study opportunities in this segment had skyrocketed but showed signs of decline as female students attempted to mitigate risks to their own personal safety by entirely avoiding studies in the United States. (Smith 2003)

**Congressional Interest in Saudi Arabia Post September 11**

An atmosphere of skepticism, about the future of US-Saudi relations, characterized much of the legislative discourse on Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks during the 107th and 108th Congresses. However, in the 109th Congress, perspectives evolved to reflect a degree of solidarity with the Kingdom in the face of Al Qaeda terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia despite persistent concerns about Saudi counterterrorism policies, reform efforts, and positions toward Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the 110th Congress, issues of mutual interest to members

108.
of Congress and Saudi Arabian officials and citizens included the conflict in Iraq, Iran’s nuclear technology development efforts, political and economic reform, and the potential revival of dormant Israeli-Arab peace processes. (Sharp 2007)

**Joint Congressional Report 2003**

On July 24, 2003, the House and Senate Intelligence Committees released part of a 900 page report entitled “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Actions before and after the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001” which created major concerns for both countries. Subsequently, the Bush Administration controversially refused to allow the release of an approximately 28 page section of the report. According to the media the still-classified section of the report revealed Saudi links with individuals involved in the September 11 attacks. Reportedly, the classified section, specifically, stated that senior Saudi officials channeled hundreds of millions of dollars to charitable groups that helped fund the attacks. (Committee on International Relations 2002)

Saudi officials, including the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, denounced the report, maintaining that Al Qaeda was a cult that was seeking to destroy Saudi Arabia as well as the United States and questioned the logic by which Saudi Arabia would support a cult that was trying to kill them. On July 29, 2003, in response to an urgent request from Saudi Arabia, President Bush met with Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal, who called for the release of the still-classified section of the report to enable Saudi Arabia to rebut the allegations contained therein. (Blanchard 2009) President Bush refused to do so, on the grounds, that such a disclosure would have revealed intelligence sources and methods to enemies of the United States and compromised the ongoing investigations of the September 11 attacks.

**Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act 2004**

The United States passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act in 2004. Relevant sections of this Act captured many of the concerns reflected in the 9/11 Commission report regarding Saudi Arabia. Section 7105(a) contained findings that reviewed problems in the bilateral relationship but noted improvements in
counterterrorism cooperation between the two countries since mid-2003. Section 7105(b) expressed the sense of Congress that “there should be a more robust dialogue between the people and Government of the United States and the people and Government of Saudi Arabia.” Section 7120(b) required the President to submit to Congress, within 180 days, a strategy for collaboration with Saudi Arabia, as part of a larger report on US government activities to implement the provisions of the act. The report was submitted in classified form in September 2005. (Prados and Blanchard 2007)

The 109th Congress continued to show concern over Saudi Arabia’s role in the war against terrorism and encouraged Saudi leaders to increase their efforts against terrorist financing. The Saudi Arabia Accountability Act of 2005, proposed but not enacted, was similar to the original version introduced in the 108th Congress. Like the earlier bills, the 2005 legislation would have prohibited export or issuance of an export license to Saudi Arabia for any US defense articles or defense services on the US munitions list or dual use items and would have restricted travel of Saudi diplomats in the United States. Similarly, section 810 of S. 600, the proposed State Department authorization bill for FY2006-2007, expressed the sense of Congress that the municipal elections held in Saudi Arabia in early 2005 constituted a “positive initial step”. The bill also encouraged Saudi Arabia to permit women to vote and run for office in future elections. (Perl 2007)

Aid to Saudi Arabia and Congressional Prohibitions

US foreign assistance programs for Saudi Arabia always remained a point of contention between some members of the Congress and the Bush Administration since the 107th Congress. Some members criticized the programs by arguing that Saudi Arabian oil revenues made US assistance unnecessary and also cited security and terrorism concerns about the Kingdom’s policies. The Bush Administration argued that security related support for the Saudi Arabia was important as it would help the Kingdom confront the threat of terrorism and secure its support for US counterterrorism priorities overseas. (Best 2003)
A small IMET appropriation of approximately $24,000 per year to help defray the expenses of sending Saudi officers to US military service schools was resumed in FY 2002 as a means of supporting reform, interoperability, and professionalism in the Saudi Arabian National Guard and other military services. The Administration requested $24,000 in FY 2006 IMET funds and $20,000 for FY2007. These amounts permitted Saudi Arabia to purchase additional US training equipments at a lower cost than what was charged to countries not eligible for IMET. The United States also provided export control and related border security funds\(^{19}\) to Saudi Arabia as assistance for a program to improve Saudi export laws and enforcement procedures from FY2001 through FY2003. Anti-terrorism assistance\(^{20}\) was provided in the form of VIP protection courses for Saudi security officers along with counter-terrorism financing assistance\(^{21}\) in FY2005. The Administration also requested $400,000 in NADR-ATA funding for Saudi Arabia for FY2007 and $100,000 for FY2008. (Blanchard 2009)

Since 2004, several proposals to prohibit the extension of US foreign assistance to Saudi Arabia were also considered and adopted by the Congress. As the total amount of US aid to Saudi Arabia had been relatively minuscule in recent years, the practical effect of the prohibitions was to rescind Saudi Arabia’s eligibility to purchase US military and counterterrorism training at a reduced cost. The proposals differed in their cited reasons for prohibiting aid as well as whether or not they provide national security waiver authority for the President.

The H.R. 505, the Prohibit Aid to Saudi Arabia Act of 2005, imposed a ban on US aid to Saudi Arabia outright and contained no waiver authority. The Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2005 contained a ban on US assistance to Saudi Arabia but provided for a presidential waiver if the President certified that Saudi Arabia was cooperating in the war against terrorism. Hence, anti-terrorism assistance was provided in FY2005 and FY2006 without a waiver based on “notwithstanding” language in Section 571 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended. On June

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\(^{19}\) NADR-EXBS

\(^{20}\) NADR-ATA

\(^{21}\) NADR-CTF
28, 2005, the House adopted H.Amdt 379 to H.R. 3057. This amendment added a Section 588 to H.R. 3057 prohibiting US assistance to Saudi Arabia and containing no provision for a presidential waiver. The Senate version of H.R. 3057 which was passed on July 20, 2005, did not contain this ban. The conference report retained the ban (renumbered Section 582) but contained waiver authority if the President certified that Saudi Arabia was cooperating with efforts to combat international terrorism and that the proposed assistance would have facilitated that effort. President Bush signed the bill on November 14, 2005. According to the State Department, President Bush did not issue a waiver for FY2006 aid to Saudi Arabia because no FY2006 funds were obligated. On June 9, 2006, the House again adopted H.Amdt 997 to H.R. 5522. The amendment prohibited US assistance to Saudi Arabia during FY2007 and again contained no presidential waiver provision. (Perl 2006)

Political differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia had been widening ever since Crown Prince Abdullah had become the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia in the mid 1990s. Prince Abdullah, considered a pragmatic ruler, was widely respected in the Islamic nations for his support to the Palestinian cause. He believed that the Bush administration did not maintain neutrality in the West Asian conflict. There were also serious differences on the common policy to be adopted against Iraq and Iran. President Bush had labeled both the nations part of an “axis of evil” demanding a change in their regimes. This conflicted with Saudi Arabia’s policy that wanted to mend fences with its two neighbours. The relationship deteriorated further when Prince Abdullah unilaterally initiated the move to bring back Iraq into the Arab fold on the condition that it would implement all the United Nations resolutions concerning the Gulf War.

22 The Foreign Operations Appropriations bill for FY2006
23 Foreign Operations Appropriations, FY2007