CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion
This research work is based on the hypothesis that the 9/11 incident was instrumental in shifting US policy towards Saudi Arabia. It has identified seven factors that largely shaped and influenced US-Saudi relations before the September 11 attacks. It goes on to analyse the significance of these factors in the post September 11 scenario while detailing the strategies used by both countries to strengthen relations amidst various challenges and concerns.

The Importance of Oil

Oil was the most important factor which led to the initiation of relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. US officials initially paid little attention by not sending a resident ambassador to the Kingdom until 1943. However, in the aftermath of the World War I and the Great Depression, the United States realised that oil was going to play a critical role in international affairs. As World War II progressed, Washington understood the strategic importance of Saudi oil and hence showed keen interest in the Kingdom. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia was also finding its feet as a nation. Securing a partner in the United States made perfect sense as it would provide the Kingdom access to sophisticated technology that would help extract oil and bring financial gains.

Oil continues to remain an important factor for both countries post September 11. The War on Afghanistan and Iraq has made the United States and the world at large realize the importance of Saudi oil. The US Department of Energy estimated recently that the global economy required Gulf oil production capacity to increase from 22.4 million barrels per day (mbd) in 2001 to 45.2 mbd by 2025. For this to happen, Saudi production alone had to increase from 10.2 mbd in 2001 to 23.8 mbd in 2025 - a huge increase of 133 percent. It was also estimated that Gulf OPEC states exported an average of 16.9 mbd or 30 percent of the world total of 56.3 mbd in 2002. The study has made projections that Gulf OPEC exports would reach 35.8 mbd by 2025 and reach 37 percent of the world total of 94.6 mbd. (US Department of Energy 2009)

Significantly, approximately, 70-80 percent of Saudi revenues come from petroleum exports and they make up some 90-95 percent of all Saudi exports. These exports require both security and a level of investment that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states
can no longer sustain without massive direct investment in both the petroleum sector and the rest of its economy.

Saudi Arabia’s population explosion is also having a major impact on its economy. US sources estimate that Saudi Arabia’s population has climbed from 6 million in 1970 to 22 million in 2004 and even if its birth rates decline significantly in future years, it is expected to rise to 55 million by 2030. The number of young Saudis between 15 and 24 years of age will also nearly double from 3.6 million in 2000 to 6.3 million in 2025. This is a society where the government estimates that unemployment for native Saudi males is as high as 12 percent and many experts privately estimate that real and disguised unemployment is in excess of 20 percent.

The doubling of its population and worldwide cuts in real oil prices reduced Saudi Arabia’s per capita earnings from petroleum exports from $24,000 in 1980 to $2,300 in 2002. Although Saudi Arabia had high oil earnings in 2003, it faced nearly two decades of major budget and trade deficits and its government’s debt was nearly 100% of its GNP in a few years. (US Department of Energy 2009) These pressures are so severe that Saudi Arabia is not considered “oil wealthy” in the sense that it can, no longer, provide social services, modernize and expand its infrastructure and diversify its economy without major economic reforms and foreign investments. Hence, such reforms and investments are critical to Saudi internal stability and this requires support from the United States.

The Threat of Communism

The beginning of the Cold War in 1945, which divided the world into two groups led by the United States and the Soviet Union, had a significant influence in increasing cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The United States was extremely sensitive to the spread of communist ideology around the world. It also realised that Saudi Arabia was located geographically at a vital position in the Middle East between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf shipping routes. The US - Saudi security relationship initially expanded steadily during the Cold War. This process was facilitated by the shared suspicions of Riyadh and Washington regarding the nature of the Soviet threat to the region and the necessity of containing its influence.
As early as 1947, the Truman administration, under the umbrella of the Truman Doctrine, formally assured King Abdul Aziz that support for Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity and political independence was a primary objective of the United States. This commitment became the basis for the 1951 Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement under which, the United States provided military equipment and training for the Saudi armed forces.

Interestingly, the Cold War also highlighted the various flip flops that took place which often led to a degree of ambivalence creeping into relations between the two countries. One such instance was during King Saud’s rule when the relations faced many obstacles related to the anti-communism strategy and policies. President Eisenhower’s new anti-Soviet alliance combined most of the Kingdom’s regional rivals and foes, which increased Saudi suspicions of US motivations. For this reason, King Saud joined hands with the pro-Soviet Egyptian president Gamel Abdal Nasser in October 1955. This act sparked a new and a large conflict in its relationship with Washington. However, during the Suez crisis, King Saud began to cooperate with the US again after Eisenhower’s opposition of the Israeli, British, and French plan to seize the canal in 1956. President Eisenhower had opposed the plan primarily because of fears of a conflict escalation with the Soviet Union but King Saud admired the act and decided to start cooperating with the US. Hence the King decided to renew the US base in Dhahran in 1957. (Pollack 2002: 143-147) Again, in less than a year, after the Egyptian-Syrian unification in 1958, Egypt’s pro-Soviet alliance had returned to power. King Saud once again joined the alliance, which led to a decline in the US-Saudi relationship, especially after he announced in 1961 that he had changed his mind on renewing the US base. However, when Egypt attacked Saudi Arabia from bases in Yemen because of the Kingdom’s anti-revolution propaganda during the Yemeni revolution in 1962, King Saud once again sought American support. President Eisenhower’s successor, President John F Kennedy, immediately responded to King Saud’s request by sending US war planes to the war zone in 1963 to repel the attack that also placed US interests in risk. At the end of the war, the detoriated relationship between Washington and Riyadh rebuilt itself to become friendly again.

Another interesting trend that emerged during the Cold War was American support to political Islam in the region as a measure to negate the threat of Communism. These
Islamic sub-state actors later went on to play a major role in fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with financial and military aid from the United States. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, they became a major threat by unleashing terror across the globe with their top target, ironically, being the United States.

The threat of Communism has become redundant today after the Soviet Union collapsed spectacularly in early 1990. The United States emerged as the sole superpower of the world after the Cold War. Saudi Arabia was also relieved with the end of decades of on and off threats to its security. Communism does not hold any significance in US-Saudi relations currently as there is no immediate threat to Saudi Arabia in the region.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The US - Saudi relationship endured despite strains caused by differences over Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict was an extremely significant concern for Saudi Arabia. This was primarily because the Kingdom enjoyed special importance in the region due to its unique association with the Islamic religion and the abundant presence of a scarce and precious commodity, oil, in the region. It was the custodian of Medina and Mecca, two of the holiest sites for Muslims around the World. This was a symbol of Islam, as well as Arab rule, to many people outside as well as inside the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia had not become reconciled to the 1948 establishment of Israel in the former Arab-dominated territory of Palestine and refused to extend Israel diplomatic recognition or to engage in any form of relations with Israel. Significantly, despite this position, the Kingdom acknowledged that its closest ally, the United States, had a special relationship with Israel. However, it was only after the 1967 war that Saudi Arabia was convinced that Israel opposed Riyadh's strong ties with Washington and wanted to weaken them.

During the 1970s and 1980s, periodic controversies over US arms sales to the Kingdom tended to reinforce Saudi concerns about the extent of political influence that supporters of Israel wielded in Washington. In several instances US Congressional leaders opposed American weapons sales on the grounds that the
Kingdom might use them against Israel. Despite assurances from Saudi officials that the weapons were only necessary for their country's defense, Congress reduced or canceled many proposed arms sales. Although the debates over Saudi weapons purchases were restricted to the legislature and the executive branch, these political contests embittered Saudi Arabia and had an adverse impact on overall relations. From a Saudi perspective, the public policy disputes among the major institutions of policy formulation seemed to symbolize a weakening of the American commitment to defend the Kingdom's security.

Saudi Arabia, encouraged by the United States, began playing a behind-the-scenes role in the Israeli - Palestinian peace negotiations in the 1990s and post September 2001. It organised the Madrid Conference where it made attempts to soften Syria's stance towards Israel in October 1991. It also played a crucial role in the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. The Kingdom provided financial support to the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Post 9/11, King Abdullah launched the Abdullah Peace Plan in 2002 and played an influential role in bringing both the warring factions, Fateh and Hamas, to sign the Mecca Agreement in 2007. Saudi Arabia also mediated the crisis in Lebanon with the active support of the United States in 2006. It also recently attempted to relaunch the Abdullah Peace Plan in a fresh effort to arrive at a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

**Regional Security Concerns**

Saudi Arabia's insecurity and a perceived lack of ability to defend itself was a key factor that influenced the Kingdom's decision to strengthen relations with the United States. Riyadh was always aware that events that took place in the region had a significant impact on its security. It was, initially, concerned by the threat posed by its neighbouring countries of Iraq and Iran. Following the US policy of anointing Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two pillars in the region during the 1950s, the competition between both these countries to gain regional supremacy increased over the next two decades. The Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 effectively ended the competition as Iran got embroiled in a long war with Iraq through the 1980s. As time progressed Saudi Arabia became a wealthy economy due to its oil resources in the 1970s.
Subsequently, it began spending large amounts of its oil wealth in infrastructure development and arms purchases.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 proved to be a stern test to the US - Saudi security relationship. Washington promptly dispatched troops to the Kingdom to ward off any potential aggression against it. The presence of American and other foreign forces prior to and during the Persian Gulf War was of an unprecedented magnitude. Saudi Arabia, for its part, provided active logistical and financial support to the United States during the war. Despite the size of these contingents, the military operations ran relatively smoothly. The absence of major logistical problems was largely due to the vast sums that Saudi Arabia had invested over the years to acquire weapons and equipment, construct modern military facilities and train personnel with the assistance of the United States.

After the war, Saudi Arabia again faced the prospect of US Congressional opposition to its requests for weapons. The Kingdom now believed that its cooperation in the war against Iraq had demonstrated the legitimacy of its defense requirements. It was left disappointed as the Congress with significant Jewish pressure continued to offer stiff opposition to the US administration’s plan of selling arms. These incidents eroded the positive feelings created during the war and revived Saudi resentments about being treated as a less than equal ally. However, both countries understood the continuing need for security cooperation. Negating Saddam Hussein may have helped reduce the security risks in the Gulf, but it had scarcely eliminated them. The stability of Iraq was in question and the United States did not leave Saudi Arabia during the 1990s.

The attacks of September 2001 in the United States and the terror attacks inside Saudi Arabia over the last decade demonstrated the need for both countries to actively engage each other. US-Saudi relations deterioted considerably as investigations reveled the Saudi origin of 11 out of the 15 hijackers involved in the September 11 attacks. The Bush administration put intense pressure on the Kingdom to root out terrorists and cut off its financial links to these groups. It also voiced its concerns on the human rights condition within the Kingdom and strongly urged Saudi Arabia to initiate a set of political and social reforms. Saudi Arabia was stunned by the aggressiveness of the American response. It initially denied any such links it was
accused of and questioned the logic behind the distrust and suspicions of the United States. However, after the terror attacks inside the Kingdom in May 2003 by the al Qaeda, it realised the need to engage actively with the United States in its war on terror.

Saudi Arabia was caught in a difficult position when the United States launched its war on terrorism. The royal family was forced to choose between supporting the United States on the one hand and appeasing its citizens who had opposed the use of unilateral force on the other. It clamped down on the financial links to terrorist groups by shutting off charities to organisations around the globe. Subsequently, King Abdullah initiated a series of political reforms through a national dialogue that saw municipal elections held for the first time in the Kingdom’s history in 2003. Additionally, women were also given the right to contest and vote in elections.

**Terrorism**

The United States, critically, overlooked Saudi Arabia's increasingly rigid interpretations of Islam, including the segregation and veiling of women, since it appreciated the Kingdom's support in fighting Soviet Union and countering Ayatollah Khomeini's rising power during the 1980s. (Grimmett 1994) Saudi Arabia too recognized that fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and opposing the emergence of a Shiite political ideology in Iran were opportunities to prove its Islamic credentials. Hence, it sent billions of dollars, military equipments, humanitarian aid and more importantly, a large number of young Saudis, imbied with radical Wahhabi Islam to support the jihadist fight in Afghanistan during the 1980s.

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. This 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.
The most critical development in the US-Saudi relationship, compounding traditional ambivalence, came in the wake of the global war on terror which the United States unleashed in response to the 9/11 incidents. There was a lot of anger and antagonism between the United States and Saudi Arabia post 9/11. Although, Saudi Arabia was slow to recognize the seriousness of this threat, the frequent terrorist attacks in the Kingdom made it clear that it was as real for Riyadh as it was for Washington. The September 11 incidents made both nations realize the necessity to have clear and flexible perspectives on how to counter the forces of Islamic extremism.

Terrorism posed a big challenge to both the countries. Both countries, post 9/11, began identifying reasons that provided them the basis for a more positive and vibrant relationship. The cycle of ‘Saudi bashing’ by the US Congress and the media and its mirror image in the form of ‘US bashing’ by Saudi religious leaders and its media became largely destructive in character. Exaggerated reporting and biased conspiracy sources hurt both countries and helped extremists like Bin Laden instead. Hence both countries began making efforts to provide constructive criticism which was vital in creating mutual understanding.

Both countries also understood that the events of 9/11 could not be forgotten easily and there was no way to go back to correct the past. However, the attacks made them realise that forces threatening to unleash violence had to be negated in an effective manner. It was also clear to them that dealing with this menace required close cooperation. There was a strong feeling within the Bush administration that extremism and terrorism could not by themselves either defeat the US or bring down moderate Arab regimes. The success of hate mongering extremists like Bin Laden was ultimately dependent on provoking a conflict between the West and Islam and between nations like the United States and Saudi Arabia. However, they could only succeed if they provoked hatred and bigotry on both sides that would make effective cooperation impossible. Hence it became a necessity that to succeed in this long term objective, both countries have to overcome immediate tensions.
Regime Change

The September 11 attacks were the first time, after the war with Great Britain in 1812, when the American homeland was attacked in such spectacular fashion. The United States was shocked by the damage that the attacks caused especially to American morale. The investigations into the attacks revealed links to the Taliban, which was in power in Afghanistan and sheltering Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda. The United States realised that many of the nations in the Arab World were also harbouring terrorists and providing them with logistical and financial assistance. The Bush administration felt that the presence of a large number of dictators who ruled with an iron hand suppressing their people’s demand for freedom in the region increased resentment and frustrations.

As part of its agenda in the War on Terror, the United States decided to force regime changes in the nations that had a link to the September 2001 attacks. It attacked Afghanistan in pursuit of Osama bin Laden and subsequently, attacked Iraq to displace Saddam Hussein and unearth the Weapons of Mass Destruction he had amassed. Although both missions were unsuccessful as far as their initial objectives were concerned, the Bush administration did succeed in displacing the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Saddam Hussein led Baath Party in Iraq from power.

Saudi Arabia was caught in a dilemma when the United States launched both the wars. The Kingdom had close links with the Taliban in Afghanistan while its citizens opposed the US attack on Iraq. Riyadh felt that the United States went to war with Iraq with the idea of a regime change that was perhaps aimed subsequently at forcing changes in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Saudi Arabia was also reeling under terror attacks launched within the Kingdom by the al Qaeda. Consequently, it did not want to antagonize extremist elements within its society by openly supporting the United States in its war on terror.

The United States, however, was irritated by what it regarded as indecisiveness on the part of Saudi Arabia. It put immense pressure on the Kingdom to provide logistical support for both the Wars just as it had done a decade earlier during the first Gulf War. This further increased Saudi uneasiness and reluctance for providing any support.
to such aggressive postures. These developments nonetheless created tensions in relations between the two countries.

**Promoting Democracy and Reforms**

The United States and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in the long-term internal stability of Saudi Arabia and this requires more than just countering terrorism. This common interest extends to initiating political reform within the Kingdom. The present mix of leaders in the royal family, Saudi technocrats, Saudi businessmen, and Western educated Saudi intellectuals are probably the most progressive elite that the United States can hope for in a country that is deeply conservative and vulnerable to Islamic extremism.

The Bush administration put pressure on Saudi Arabia to initiate political reforms after the September 11 attacks. It wanted these reforms to be evolutionary and not revolutionary. The United States realized that American pressure for reforms coupled with the support of Saudi reformers working at a Saudi pace was a better alternative to any regime that could arise in a crisis or on some revolutionary basis. Severe American pressure was deeply counterproductive as it would arouse Saudi anger over interferences from an external country and allow Saudi conservatives and extremists to charge that reforms were taking place only as a concession to the United States and not because of an internal need for change. Neither the United States nor Saudi Arabia would benefit if the Kingdom did not initiate reforms at its own pace and quietly encouraging Saudi reformers and reform was generally far more productive than demands for such change. There was a realization for active cooperation between the two countries to facilitate social reforms as well.

Saudi Arabia had already moved a long way from the social structure it had in the 1950s yet the United States urged it to make further social reforms to allow economic growth to take place and maintain its internal security. Social reform, however, was an even more difficult problem for two such different cultures to deal with and the Bush administration recognised that Saudi Arabia and many other countries will never evolve social structures that match those of the United States. Multiculturalism, tolerance, and human rights did not mean universal standards in the sense of mirror
imaging. The United States assisted by pushing for progress in human rights, educational reforms and maintaining the flow of US educated Saudis that have been so critical to the Kingdom's past modernization. Both the countries were aware that influence came though communication and not antagonism.

None of these reasons, however, influenced the United States to ease its efforts in encouraging Saudi Arabia to conduct a fully effective campaign to fight terrorism. Nor have any of these reasons meant that the Bush administration was passive in supporting Saudi political, economic and social reforms and not encourage Saudi reformers in ways that do not cause a backlash.

The Rise of Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism, along with terrorism, are currently the two significantly difficult challenges for both the countries. Anti-American feelings in the region, especially in Saudi Arabia, have increased since the September 11 attacks. There are three factors that have influenced the rise of such anti-American feelings in the Kingdom. First, the notion of the United States as an imperialist power that had bombed Afghanistan and Iraq into rambles killing innocent civilians angered Saudi citizens within the Kingdom. The reasons given by the United States for such aggression, post the September 11 attacks, defied logic for them. According to them, there was no clear evidence that linked the Taliban to the September 11 attacks while the absence of Weapons of Mass Destoructions in Iraq infuriated them. Additionally, the presence of American forces in Saudi Arabia was considered as an invasion into the sovereignty of their country. The perceived biasness of American policies in favour of Israel in its conflict with Palestine also escalated tensions.

Saudi citizens had long questioned the royal family's close association with the United States. They did not understand the reasons or the logic behind the strong relations between both countries. This was primarily because information, especially related to policy formulation, was not freely available in a closed society like Saudi Arabia. Hence policy decisions, such as the necessities for close cooperation with a country like the United States, were often beyond the understanding of common Saudi citizens.
Second, the absence of a participatory process in Saudi Arabia frustrated its citizens. Saudi Arabia’s exposure to the outside world was one of the lowest and when this combined with relatively more exposure for other countries in the region, it increased frustrations within the society. The restrictions of fundamental rights like the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, the absence of a free press, the lack of representative institutions or independent organisations, the absence of entertainment in any form and the fear of horrendous punishments, if any of the above were violated, prevented a public exchange of ideas. All this led to rising resentment among citizens within the Kingdom. The religious Ulemas within the society took advantage of these opportunities to deliver sermons lambasting the United States for its imperialist policies. Saudi citizens were also curious about Western culture defined by its liberal attitudes. Sections of the youth were attracted by this culture which in turn led to cultural conflicts with the conservative sections consisting of the elderly.

Third, the presence of sub state actors and groups, which had initially emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, targeting the United States and Israel had a huge influence on the youth which in turn led to growing anti American sentiments in the region. These groups used violent methods to convey their grievances. Saudi citizens, especially the youth who were restricted for years within the Saudi society, were attracted to the extremist methods of these groups. Their anger, over American policies and a western culture that represented freedom that they desired, led to increasing hatred against the United States.

The Obama administration

As President Obama occupied the White House, both countries have reaffirmed their security ties. The United States is continuing to push Saudi Arabia to completely cut off the network of financing extremism. It is closely monitor the Kingdom’s links to the al Qaeda in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia is also closely watching the escalating tensions between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq and the now on and off tensions between Israel and Palestine. The Kingdom is also worried about the after effects of the US - Iran nuclear standoff in the region. Further, American training and support is critical to all of Saudi Arabia’s military services and it’s National Guard. The emphasis during the Obama visit was on building a military
relationship built around American military assistance to Saudi Arabia, largely in aid of internal security and efforts to strengthen cooperation in the South Gulf and Gulf Cooperation Council has begun evolving.

Both countries realise the need to restructure their relationship in a far more positive manner. They also understand that it is necessary to cooperate to develop information campaigns to build understanding, rather than create anger and fear. Saudi Arabia needs American assistance in modernizing many aspects of its internal security operations while the United States, in turn, needs Saudi cooperation in shutting off the flow of money to terrorists and for their ability to manipulate Islamic causes due to its standing in the region. If Saudi Arabia shifts its Islamic assistance overseas to support moderate and progressive Islam, it would have a major impact in the region. Domestically, the Obama administration is evolving a strategy of using hearts and minds rather than force to win over terror.

The Obama administration has the onerous task of finding a way out of both Afghanistan and Iraq. It is currently in the process of drawing up plans for troop withdrawal from both countries. While actively Saudi Arabia to shut off its financial links to Islamic extremism, the Obama administration is clearly aware of the growing anti-American feelings within the Kingdom largely due to the policies such as regime change which was introduced by the previous Bush administration. Hence, the Obama administration has communicated clearly to Saudi Arabia and the region at large that it is not interested in forcefully changing regimes.

The Obama administration is presently beginning to look hard within to identify those flaws that has made the world at large look at it as an imperialist power. A critical dialogue at the political level between both the sides has begun to reform relations. For Americans, respect for a different Saudi culture in no way means that the United States will not demand Saudi tolerance of other faiths and encourage human rights and educational reform. At the same time, for the Saudis, it also means that the United States should have a far better understanding of Saudi history and culture which seeks to develop a dialogue in dealing with Islamic extremism.
Domestically, the Obama administration has announced its intentions to change Saudi and Arab perception of the United States being a biased mediator in the Arab-Israeli peace process. It is attempting to remove biased policies favouring Israel in order to win the confidence of the Saudis and the Arabs. In fact, President Obama said in a January 2009 interview with Al-Arabiya television network that: "My job is to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world, that the language we use has to be a language of respect" (Report 2009) Both countries have realised that if there is ever to be an Arab-Israeli peace settlement or if the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to be contained, they need to work together as much as possible to push the peace process forward and reduce support for violent extremism.

The United States is concerned about the growing anti-American feelings in the Middle East. President Obama in his recent trip to the region indicated that the United States was reviewing the policies the previous Bush administration has pursued in an effort to remove the notion of it being an imperialist power. Additionally, the Obama administration is employing the tool of public diplomacy to improve relations with countries like Saudi Arabia. The Broadcasting Board of Governors¹, which is responsible for all of the US Government’s international broadcasting, cancelled the Voice of America’s Arabic Service that had been operating successfully since World War II, and substituted “Radio Sawa,” that broadcast mostly popular music for young listeners in March 2002. In order to fill the gap created by absence of the Voice of America’s Arabic Service, the BBG established a new Arabic language television channel, al-Hurra, to compete with al-Jazeera and other Arabic news channels. Such outreach has been effective and there are encouraging indications that Barack Obama understands this. In his first week as President, he gave an exclusive interview to al-Arabiya Television, one of the leading regional Arab TV channels, in which he spoke directly to Arabs and Muslims in a way that was sensitive to their concerns. (Rugh 2009)

¹ BBG
Emerging Trends in the Post 9/11 Scenario

Post September 2001, there have been shifts in three significant trends that emerged in relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia pre September 2001. First, there has always been a constant undercurrent of ambivalence that has permeated the relationship as a whole and each of its component parts. Saudi Arabia was a monarchy, which in many ways was an antithesis of the United States, the World’s oldest democracy. The differences inherent between both countries over the Arab - Israeli dispute; between the World’s leading Oil consumer and the World’s leading Oil producer; between the more detailed and global focus of the United States compared to the predominantly regional focus of Saudi Arabia and between the secular political orientation of the United States in contrast to the religious political orientation of Saudi Arabia were key underlying factors that influenced a degree of ambiguity in their relations. Perhaps the greatest irony of all was how two countries with such total cultural disparities got along well for so long as they did.

Post September 2001, the Bush administration realised that there had to be concentrated efforts towards addressing the inherent differences with Saudi Arabia. It resorted to active engagement at a political level with the royal family on the one hand while pursuing public diplomacy through the media to reach out to the Saudi citizens directly on the other hand. These efforts were made to provide communicate precisely the rationale behind US actions globally and specifically in the region. The Obama administration has expressed its concern about reducing the American dependency for Middle East oil supplies. President Obama is quite hopeful of tapping into domestic oil reserves called the oil shale. According to US estimates, the oil shale could yield up to 800 billion barrels of oil in the future. The president is also planning a $150 billion spending on renewable energy and efficiency which, if successful, can quickly and drastically reduce America’s dependence on petroleum products.

Second, despite, changing perceptions and conditions, the common interests and differences of the US - Saudi relations remarkably remained constant in the pre-September 2001 period. Tracing the relationship revealed a degree of continuity and pragmatism. On the one hand, the importance of oil, forced the United States to show active interest towards Saudi Arabia while on the other hand, the need for Security
ensured that Saudi Arabia reciprocated eagerly. With both countries clearly defining their areas of interest for engaging with each other, the relationship was formalized based on necessities rather than on a strong foundation of trust and mutual respect.

However, post September 2001, the United States has realised the significance of actively engaging with Saudi Arabia in an effort to reign in Islamic extremism. Terrorism and rising anti-Americanism has replaced oil and regional security concerns as the top most priorities in the post 9/11 scenario. Both the United States and Saudi Arabia have been hit by terror attacks in the recent past. Saudi Arabia’s financial links to the terror network have made it imperative for both countries to cooperate closely to fight this faceless menace. Similarly, the United States is concerned about the growing anti-American sentiments within Saudi Arabia. The Obama administration is looking into the various reasons which have led to anti-Americanism. Hence analysing the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States is crucial as it will significantly impact the future ownership of Oil and the American image in the Muslim World.

Third, in the pre-September 2001 period, there was a stable community of interests between the two countries which was characterized by the relatively independent set of dynamics that guided each of its three major components - Energy, Security and Politics. Generally, both countries attempted to keep these component set of relations separate but for most part they failed. Linkages among the three always existed and interestingly, in times of crisis, they tended to become more pronounced. For example: The ‘Oil Weapon’ used by Saudi Arabia against the United States in the 1970s linked Energy and Politics. The Arab oil embargo, US anti boycott tax and trade legislation in the 1980s linked Politics and Economics. The US Congressional debates over the sale of F-15s and AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and the tensions that followed the September 11 attacks on the United States linked Security and Politics. Hence the significance of examining the developments of Economic, Security and Political ties between both countries became crucial as events in each of these spheres had a significant impact on the other. Interestingly each sphere had sufficient independent characteristics and independent dynamics to warrant being examined separately. Unfortunately, with so much emphasis on Energy and Security, Political Relations between the two countries suffered and took a back
seat. This proved to be a big mistake as the subsequent events of the 1970s and 1980s as described above and, more importantly, the September 11, 2001 attacks proved. Furthermore, it became clear that political, social, and economic issues would influence the amount of cooperation between both countries.

In the post September 2001 period, both countries are looking to keep as much distance as possible between all the three major components. The United States has laid clear emphasis on building political relations through a string of high profile visits to the Kingdom. There have been 19 meetings between the officials of the Bush administration including President Bush and members of the Saudi Royal family including King Abdullah in the last 6 years. The Obama administration has continued this active political engagement with the recent visits of two high profile officials to Saudi Arabia. State Department Special Advisor for the Gulf and Southwest Asia, Dennis Ross, was in Saudi Arabia in April 2009 and the Presidential special envoy for the Middle East, George Mitchell, followed this visit in May 2009. This was followed by President Obama's visit to Riyadh in June 2009. (Clemons, 2009)

The US - Saudi relationship lies at the nexus of many key issues in the region ranging from the solvency of King Abdullah's Arab peace initiative, given trends in Israel and Palestine, to potential opportunities with Syria, to dealing with Iran's transnational meddling in the affairs inside other countries in the region, to Iraq's stability and perhaps most vitally in figuring out a stabilization scheme for Pakistan and Afghanistan, where Saudi Arabia has significant influence.

The relationship with Saudi Arabia is vital to the geostrategic and geoeconomic interests of the United States today. Both countries are looking to define the relationship as a strategic partnership based on common interests rather than as a friendship based on common values. The focus of the partnership will be on common security interests and other tangible issues like the war on terror. An effort is being made to strike a balance between exhorting Saudi authorities to institute political reforms (i.e. to democratize) and making efforts to change the anti American feelings that have engulfed the region. A continuous dialogue on oil price levels and price stability is also being maintained at the political level. The United States is urging Saudi Arabia to be financially transparent so as to track the activities of social and
charitable organizations outside the country and develop, in consultation, a revised policy towards Iraq.

Both countries are aware that the last thing either need is to hand Bin Laden and his inevitable successors a victory by paralyzing effective cooperation through continued tension or pass up the opportunity to create new forms of cooperation where they are so clearly in both nations' interests. Amidst criticizing each other, both nations are asking themselves - what is the real alternative to reforging this relationship? Or is there any practical alternative to the present Saudi regime that is really going to serve the interests of the United States? Or is an absence of American support and cooperation really going to help Saudi Arabia? The answer, as both countries realize, does not lie in making the problem worse. It lies in serious efforts to reforg the relationship on the basis of mutual self interest that will also serve the true interests of the Western and Islamic worlds.