CHAPTER ONE

Introduction
This research work titled: "US - Saudi Arabia Relations after 9/11: Shifting perceptions and policies" is a modest attempt at identifying the different factors that have influenced relations between the world’s only super power, the United States and a regional power in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia. The United States considers this region as potentially the most volatile in the world. It is extremely apprehensive about the cluster of powerful dictators in the region who are suspected of tyranny and oppression of their people.

Saudi Arabia is located geographically at a vital position in the Middle East between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf shipping routes. The Kingdom is the home of the two most important holy places for Muslims and is hence considered as a leader of moderates in the region. Additionally, the presence in abundance of the world’s most precious and scare commodity, oil, makes it an important country for the United States.

The United States and Saudi Arabia are strategic partners with a record of close cooperation especially with respect to ensuring the stable supply and price of oil on the world market. As early as 1947, the administration of Harry S. Truman formally assured Abd al Aziz that support for Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity and political independence was a primary objective of the United States.

The US - Saudi relationship endured despite strains caused by differences over Israel. It has witnessed past periods of friction, as during the 1973 Arab oil embargo, but communication and cooperation have always resumed because of core common interests on both sides. Business has always been at the forefront of the U.S.-Saudi relations. For the past four decades, the United States has been Saudi Arabia’s largest trading partner, while the Kingdom is the largest market for American products in the Middle East.

The US - Saudi business partnership flourished because of the deep bonds of familiarity that have been established through decades of educational, cultural, economic and political cooperation and exchange. Many Americans lived and worked in the Kingdom, beginning with the oil exploration teams in the 1930s, whose work led to the discovery of the world’s largest reserves of petroleum and the creation of
the world's largest oil company, Aramco. Aramco played a major role in the
to the Kingdom's economic development as it laid the foundations for long-term US - Saudi business cooperation. Many Saudis, in turn, attended education and training programs in the United States, and a great many have gone on to assume leadership positions in the Saudi Government and private sectors. As a result, the United States and Saudi Arabia knew each other very well and continue to share a common belief in free enterprise that ensured lasting economic ties and strong bonds of friendship between the two countries.

During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia played a key role in meeting a number of US foreign policy objectives including assistance in the effort to expel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. 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.

This work assumes added importance since the Saudi link to the 15 hijackers involved in the September 11 2001 attacks was established. The September 11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath have, however, not altered Saudi Arabia's fundamental importance to the United States. Nonetheless, the attacks, unprecedented in myriad ways, have severely strained US - Saudi relations. The fact that Osama Bin Laden and 15 of the hijackers were of Saudi origin and that Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban government in Afghanistan created a climate of mistrust and placed a chill on economic relations.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance to a number of Arab Islamist groups. In hindsight, by supporting religious zealots in the battle against communism, the two countries contributed to the rise of radical Islamic movements. Post 9/11, in the face of immense pressure from the United States, the Kingdom clamped down on financial networks supporting these groups and took a number of other steps to counter Islamist extremism. The emergence of sub state actors in the region who resorted to using violent methods to address their grievances created a major concern for the United States and the world at large. Negating this threat became a necessity for the United States in its war on terrorism. Saudi Arabia was seen as a moderate and influential leader in the region and hence engaging the Kingdom in this war was of critical importance.
Simultaneously, the rise of anti-American feelings in the region is another cause of concern for the United States. The notion of the United States as an imperialistic power had spread rapidly around the Arab world causing widespread resentment post 9/11. The anger permeated all strata of society, especially among the educated who were tinged with disillusionment at their own long entrenched American-backed regimes. 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 superpower on the one hand and the increasing hatred of its people for American policies on the other.

Growing oil demand from China, India and the developing world meant that others are pursuing closer ties with the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia and China now have a "strategic relationship" because Saudi Arabia is the largest supplier of crude to China. There is a real possibility that growing oil demand elsewhere radically alters the options at Saudi Arabia’s disposal.

This work has also focused on influential factors that have influenced relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia such as oil, communism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, regional security concerns, terrorism, promoting democracy, regime change and political reforms. Although this work provides a comprehensive description of the relationship starting from its evolution, the emphasis is primarily on the developments since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001.

This work has attempted to provide insight on the critical questions that have plagued both countries. What are the changing trends in US-Saudi relations after the September 11 attacks? Has the relationship continued to be ambivalent with its share of highs and lows like the pre-September 2001 period or has there been a monumental shift in terms of consistent engagement post-September 2001?

A second critical question is which are the factors responsible for the rise of anti-Americanism in Saudi Arabia? Is it primarily due to the perceived imperialist policies followed by the United States in the region or is it an outpour of the frustrations and resentment among Saudi citizens against regimes that had oppressed individual freedom for long?

A third question is how the American strategy to tackle terrorism and anti-Americanism has evolved in the region post 9/11? Was the American strategy of
using force rather than winning the battle of the hearts and minds effective in combating terrorism or is the United States now relying on the use of public diplomacy and track -2 initiatives to combat anti-American feelings in the Kingdom?

A fourth question is what has been the impact of the US military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq on US-Saudi relations? Did the Saudi royal family support the American decision to attack both the countries or were they apprehensive about a severe backlash from their public and the al Qaeda which had gained a strong foothold in the Kingdom during this period?

A fifth and final question is how has the US – Iran nuclear standoff influenced US-Saudi Relations? Has the standoff impacted the Saudi policy of having friendly relations with Iran or has the Saudi royal family, like before, supported the US efforts to negate Tehran’s growing ambitions to be a nuclear power?

This research work has evolved around the primary assumption that the 9/11 incident was instrumental in shifting US policy towards Saudi Arabia. An attempt has been made to analyse data from the perspective of neo realism and liberal internationalism wherever applicable. This work is based on primary source materials consisting of official documents, policy briefs, congressional papers and hearings. This has been supplemented by secondary sources such as books by well known experts on the subject, journal-articles from reputed journals and well researched newspaper reports. Various case studies researched previously has been analysed to get a comprehensive outlook of the issues involved in order to generate substantial data and make a credible analysis. The researcher has also made an attempt to interview and interact with experts, academicians and bureaucrats on the subject to a feasible extent. The researcher has made use of the resources available at the American Centre Library, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, the Sapru House Library, the Teen Murti Library, the IDSA Library, Saudi Embassy and the American Embassy in New Delhi and other online sources while doing research on the subject.

Chapter Two: “Evolution of US-Saudi Relations: The Cold War Years” introduces the factors that were influential in the evolution of relations between the two countries at a time when the economic depression and Hitler’s Nazis were threatening world stability and peace. Tracing the rise and rule of the Saud dynasty in the Kingdom, the chapter describes how the American strategic need for oil and the looming threat of
Communism forced both countries to seek each other. The economic depression made the United States realised the importance of having access to oil resources which was available in abundance in the Kingdom. Simultaneously, the exit of the British from the region and the simultaneous arrival of the Soviet Union created a security threat so serious that Saudi Arabia was forced to seek the help of the United States.

While describing the relations between the two countries during the cold war, the chapter also highlights the various obstacles that confronted them. The rise of Aramco, the subsequent tussle between private companies and the oil producing countries for the control of oil resources, the two oil crises which catapulted Saudi Arabia into a regional power and the use of the oil weapon by the Kingdom during the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973 have been described elaborately. It also outlines the US - Saudi relations during the Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iraq-Iran War. The chapter also highlights how the first Gulf War despite presenting a big challenge actually strengthened the relationship due to close cooperation between both the allies.

Chapter Three: “Regional Security Concerns and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Impact on Bilateral Ties” describes factors that played an influential role in expanding the relations between the two countries. The birth of Israel as a new nation in 1948 and its protracted conflict with the Arabs led the United States and Saudi Arabia into two opposing camps for the first time since they established relations. The United States, on the one hand, pushed by a strong domestic Jewish lobby, supported Israel both diplomatically and militarily while Saudi Arabia supported the Arabs on the other hand. The Arab - Israeli conflict was largely responsible for a sense of ambivalence creeping into the US - Saudi relationship.

Saudi Arabia was also insecure of its capabilities to defend itself against immediate threats. Amidst dangerous threats from Nasser’s Egypt in the 1950s, Yemen in the 1960s, Iran in the 1970s and Iraq in the 1980s, it was forced to actively engage the United States in its quest for security. Simultaneously, the United States realised the importance of Saudi Arabia as a leader who had an influential standing in the Islamic World. The chapter describes the close cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War which was fought primarily to protect Saudi
Arabia and its oil resources. An offshoot of the active cooperation during the Gulf War was that Saudi Arabia became an emerging arms market for the United States in the 1990s. Describing how despite robust cooperation in military affairs, the chapter highlights how the importance assigned to political relations, ironically, declined substantially during the Clinton years. Saudi Arabia felt neglected with the emergence of Egypt and Jordan as primary negotiators of the Israel-Palestine dispute. It also discusses relations between both the countries during the Iranian nuclear crisis and the recent efforts to revive the Gulf Security Dialogue and boost military sales. The various organisational elements established to strengthen the security partnership has been analysed in the concluding stages of this chapter.

Chapter Four: "The Saudi Link to International Terrorism: US Perception and Response" elucidates the influence of religion and its role in creating an ideological base for terrorism. It describes how the terror network spread with the active support of sub state actors and was exported globally. The chapter investigates the role of Wahhabism and its influence on religious extremism in Saudi Arabia. Crucially, 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.

The Chapter goes on to explain the reactions of the United States and the Arab world to the September 11 attacks and the investigations that led to the unearthing of Saudi financial links to terror networks. Subsequently, the United States demanded Saudi Arabia to shut off its financial links as relations between the two countries detoriated to its lowest since the 1970s. The United States also realised that the Saudi state was a fragmented entity divided between the fiefdoms of the royal family. 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.

Around this time, the Bush administration was also particularly concerned about the human rights condition and the rise of anti-American feelings in the Kingdom. Simultaneously the US Congress began to get actively involved in monitoring relations between both countries after the September 11 attacks. This led to several confrontations with the Bush administration over proposed sales of arms to the Kingdom.

Chapter Five: "US Policy of Promoting Democracy and Political Reforms in Saudi Arabia" details the response of the United States to the September 11 attacks. Describing the influence of the neocons in the Bush administration on its policy formulation, the chapter traces relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia during the war on Afghanistan and Iraq. It describes how Saudi Arabia was caught in a dilemma between supporting the United States on the one hand and appeasing the rising anger of its public towards US policies on the other.

The royal family was unable to convince its public on the logic behind the United States attacking the Taliban in the pretext of capturing Osama bin Laden and subsequently Saddam Hussein and Iraq in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Initially, it aggressively denied all accusations regarding its active involvement in helping terror groups financially. However, after immense pressure from the Bush administration, the Kingdom began making efforts to combat terrorism with the active assistance of the United States. The crackdown interestingly revealed the presence of al Qaeda in the Kingdom. What also followed the crackdown was an increasing surge of violence in the form of al Qaeda attacks. Subsequently both countries realised the need to cooperate closely and created a number of institutional mechanisms to combat the menace of terrorism which had created the biggest obstacle to their relationship.

Saudi Arabia subsequently also initiated a series of political and social reforms within its society aimed at a limited move towards democracy. Saudi Arabia held three rounds of municipal elections from February to April 2005 in a three-stage process in which male Saudi citizens cast votes for half the members of 178 municipal councils in the country's first nation-wide elections. The royal court, in an effort to structure future succession, released a royal decree to amend the Basic Law and create a Bayah
Council to fill the positions of King and Crown Prince using defined procedures and criteria in October 2007. Simultaneously, Saudi women were allowed to vote and run for 12 elected seats for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in elections held in November 2005.

Chapter Six concludes this work by highlighting seven important factors that have played an influential role in the relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia since its evolution. The chapter also identifies trends that emerged in the relations between both countries during the pre September 2001 period and how they have evolved post September 2001. It briefly touches upon the initial efforts of the Obama administration while addressing the relevancy of these factors currently. Both countries, post 9/11, have created new forms of cooperation where it is clearly in both their interests. They are also making serious efforts to reforge the relationship on the basis of mutual self interest that will also serve the true interests of the Western and Islamic worlds.