King Abdel Aziz formally declared his massive territorial acquisition to be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on September 23, 1932 and it was recognized by the United States in 1933. In the same year, Socal (Standard Oil of California) won the Saudi oil concession. Arabia emerged from a disparate group of tribes backed by various world powers to a unified state under the command of King Abdel Aziz from 1902 until 1933. The King struggled to keep hold of his kingdom as financial hardship threatened to bankrupt his rule from 1933 until 1948. American oil companies, unlike their British counterparts, appeared willing to risk desert hardships to dig and search for oil and possibly make the King some money. Their business acumen, energy, and remarkable lack of interest in reconfiguring Saudi domestic politics attracted the King toward them.  

When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was created, the preservation of the Kingdom’s very existence was the central security concern of its founder and first ruler. The threats to the existence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia violently and suddenly moved from a combination of internal fragility and the hostility of the Hashmite rulers of Iraq and Transjordan (Jordan). Ibn Saud dispossessed them in their Hijaz patrimony. Ibn Saud with his shrewd strategy and policy was able to enlist the British to contain the Hashemite threat during the lean years when oil revenues did not start to flow and also the internal situation was precarious. When the British in Ibn Saud’s eyes became less able or willing to continue in that role, he tried to use his newly acquired oil wealth for the purposes of obtaining the security guarantee from the United States. Apart from this, diplomatic allies and friends among Arab leaders opposed to the Hashemites and for the purposes of internal and external deterrence,
built up armed forces and instruments of security. Ibn Saud had succeeded in gaining a security assurance from the United States by the end of his reign, but not the military alliance he sought. He had managed to prohibit the Hashemites’ moves in the Arab arena but not to stop them from achieving some real gains, especially in Palestine. By the use of traditional means, he had perhaps enhanced his hold on the country, but a suitable military deterrent of his own was build up by his little headway. Therefore, on balance, the original threatening combination to the existence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remained real: the Hashemites probably did not have the military capability to invade and occupy the Kingdom or large parts of it; but the Hashemites did have the means to slowly begin to cover more and more upon its borders and, to defeat Ibn Saud’s forces in a major encounter with their modern weapons. This could be enough to suddenly let strong internal forces hostile to the House of Saud – Hijazis, Shammaris, and others – which would in turn undo the not strong balance on which it rested and bring about its destruction.² The story of Kingdom relations with the United States of America is one of expanding dealings through private American individuals and companies. Official dealings were smallest and developed slowly:

The oldest stable nonofficial U.S. contact with Arabia was through the Persian Gulf missionaries sponsored since the 1890s by the Dutch Reformed Church. From their three centers at Muscat, Bahrain and Kuwait less than two dozen missionaries exercised an influence far beyond their numbers. Not that they made many changes, for their score move towards zero, but through their medical work they pay for the only association thousands of common society and their rulers had with Americans. It is perhaps not too much to say that they helped to prepare a suitable climate for the American oilmen who followed later.
Several of the medical missionaries established relations with King Ibn Saud due to their bases in the Persian Gulf. After that they were permitted to visit the Kingdom frequently to treat the ailing king and other patients, but they were not allowed to expand their effort for the passionate support of Christianity.

**Origin of U.S.-Saudi Relationship**

In the early 1930s, the most important successful contact was made by an American minister and a philanthropist whose name was Charles R. Crane. At that time, Saudi Arabia was severely hit by the world depression which had drastically decreased the number of pilgrims. Serious political and economic ties between Saudi Arabia and the United States were established in the 1930s. King Abd al-Aziz saw the United States of America as a natural political and economic equalizer to what was then de-facto British dominance of the Gulf, and as a way of achieving the technology and resources needed to explore the Saudi’s oil resources without the kind of Iraqi and Iranian dependence on British oil companies that threatened their political and financial independence. The first oil concession of the Saudi Arabia was granted to Standard Oil of California (Socal) on May 29, 1933. On March 4, 1938, the first major oil discovery took place and oil exports began that same year.

**Second World War Period**

Until World War II, this relationship did not develop a security dimension and even then the Gulf was seen by the United States as largely a zone of British strategies influence. In the late 1930s, the more favorable oil concession offers from Japan and Nazi Germany was, however, rejected by the King Abd al-Aziz and after the defeat of Britain and France, the King also rejected new German offers. All of this led the Axis to treat the Kingdom as a hostile power. In 1943 it helped force an end of all oil
exports, at a time when the war prohibited the Haji from being a basis of income. The result nearly bankrupted the Kingdom and in May 1943, it led to the start of a Lend-Lease Aid Program that provided the Kingdom with nearly $100 million in aid by 1947.\textsuperscript{4}

There was little oil production or shipping as World War II approached after the first significant oil discovery was made in 1938 at Dammam. But, Roosevelt and his administration in 1943 began to realize that oil was going to be very important in the future. So that, relationship started to develop. Roosevelt declared that the defense of the Kingdom is vital to the defense of the United States in order to provide economic and military aid to the Kingdom, which must have shocked the many Americans who had never even heard of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{5}

When the background history of U.S.-Saudi oil relationship is considered, then it is seen that due to the world slump, the main source of income of Ibn Saud i.e. the taxation of the Hajj had been undermined and Ibn Saud had to face a severe financial crisis in 1933. Because of this for £50,000 in gold Ibn Saud gave an oil concession to Standard Oil of California to explore and exploit potential petroleum finds over some 360,000 square miles for sixty years. Socal (Standard Oil of California) later merged with three other United States firms -Esso, Texaco, Mobil- to form the ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company). This began search in eastern Arabia and production of Saudi Arabian oil commenced in 1938.\textsuperscript{6}

On the foundation of the military, political and commercial understandings which were developed during and immediately following the Second World War, the Saudi-U.S. diplomatic relations were established. “From the early 1930s through 1945, U.S.-Saudi relations were shaped significantly by the awarding in 1933 of an oil
exploration concession to the California Arabian Standard Oil Company [CASOC, the forerunner of the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), itself the forerunner of today’s Saudi Aramco]. CASOC’S discovery in 1938 of substantial oil reserves in eastern Saudi Arabia and subsequent private and public U.S. efforts to manage and defend oil production operations during the war years led to a depending of bilateral relations.”

During this period, the United Kingdom which was the chief external political and economic supporter of the Saudi government was gradually replaced by the United States.  

Meeting Between Roosevelt and Saudi Monarch

The meeting which occurred between President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and King Abd al-Aziz on February 14, 1945 aboard the USS Quincy, a state-of-the-art military cruiser that was anchored in Egypt’s Great Bitter Lake, is identified by many observers of U.S.-Saudi relations as the starting point for the more robust U.S.-Saudi political relationship that developed thereafter and would set the tone for the next fifty years of United States-Saudi Arabia relations.

The issues which were raised in the meeting were the number of hard-headed security reasons, energy matters and the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. In terms of security reason, President Roosevelt wanted to meet the Saudi monarch whose oil was helpful to the war effort and whose territory was expected to become an important staging ground for the war in the Pacific. Even though officially neutral until March 1945, the King inclined toward the Allies. In terms of energy matters, a mere two weeks before President Roosevelt had summoned the cruiser’s captain and asked him to arrange a meeting with the King in regard to oil. America’s declining oil supply troubled the President and the Secretaries of State, War and the Interior. The
United States oil consumption during the war was increasing at a faster rate than new oil sources were being discovered. “The indomitable interior Secretary, Harold Ickes, told a radio audience,

‘We in the United States have been using up our oil reserves faster than we have been discovering new ones….. [We don’t have enough oil right now –tonight – so that we can supply the military and essential industry with all that they require, and still have enough left for normal civilian consumption”.  

9 American forces in Europe during World War II used one hundred times more gasoline than they had throughout World War I. When the Palestine problem was discussed then it was seen that the King who was the first Arab head of state in 1938 expressed his concern over the devolving situation by writing a letter directly to the President. In the State Department, his letter generated considerable attention and was passed up to the President with a note that –

“In view of the special position of the Arab states in respect of the Palestine question, and in view of the position of king Ibn Saud as the outstanding Arab ruler and as the person most qualified to speak on behalf of the Arab people, it would seem that something more than a perfunctory acknowledgement should be made of his present communications”.  

10 Prior to the meeting, when the President wrote to the King for trying to obtain his advice about how to reduce a short spell of fighting between Jews and Arabs over land purchases and immigration, the King replied that by preventing the ongoing Jewish immigration to Palestine. “According to king Abdel Aziz, if the Jews were ‘reinstall [ed., in Palestine]… the Heavens will split, the earth will be rent asunder, and mountains will tremble at what the Jews claim in Palestine, both materially and
The emerging dangerous situation between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was also discussed face to face in the meeting, but not resolved. President Roosevelt left the meeting by promising two things to the King Abdel Aziz. The first thing was that in the United States basic policy in Palestine, the U.S. government would make no change without full and prior consultation with both Jews and Arabs. The second thing was the promise made by President Roosevelt that he would never do anything that might prove hostile to the Arabs. President Roosevelt reconfirmed his pledge in writing one week before his death. The President told Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius Jr. shortly after meeting the Saudi Arabian King that “he must have a conference with congressional leaders and re-examine our entire policy on Palestine”. Edward R. Stettinius Jr. remembered that Roosevelt was convinced “that if nature took its course there would be bloodshed between the Arabs and Jews. Some formula, not yet discovered, would have to be evolved to prevent warfare”. But, Eleanor Roosevelt in a letter to her good friend Joseph P. Lash also reported that despite his (President Roosevelt) statements to the King and Stettinius, her husband said to her that “his one complete failure was with Ibn Saud on Palestine”. President Roosevelt had not been able to gain the support of the King toward a more compromising position. Three years later, King Abdel Aziz viewed the recognition of the State of Israel by the United States as a direct betrayal of Roosevelt’s pledge.

Thus, the meeting between President Roosevelt and King Abdel Aziz marked the beginning of political relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia, overshadowing the United State’s recognition of the Kingdom in 1933. Apart from this, the meeting also established a high level personal relationship between the leaders of the United States and Saudi Arabia. “A 2005 joint statement by President George W. Bush and Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Abdullah begins by referring to
the meeting and stating that ‘in six hours President Bush’s predecessor and the Crown
Prince’s father established a strong personal bond that set the tone for decades of
close relations between our two nations’. To this day, the U.S. embassy in Riyadh
showcases a glass enclosed replica of the USS Quincy on Special occasions’.15

Cold War Years

At the end of World War II, the U.S.-Saudi political relationship was born and
during the cold war grew up. The environment of Cold War informed everything
about the relationship, “from why oil was important to whom it was to be kept from,
whom it was to be directed toward, and how its profits were to be employed”.16 But
Saudi Arabia due to its strategic location and religiously inspired antipathy toward
communism became a particularly valuable U.S. Cold War partner. Saudi Arabia
viewed the Soviet Union’s official embrace of atheism as anathema to the teachings
of Muhammad and this was the one reason for the alignment of the Saudi Arabia with
the United States during the Cold War.17

The Export-Import Bank granted the Kingdom a $ 10 million loan in 1946.
Crown Prince Saud visited the United States during the next year. The order of the
Legion of Merit and a citation for meritorious services to the Allied powers during
World War II was presented to the Crown Prince by the President Truman. In 1948,
for the first time, the U.S. Navy entered the Persian Gulf and paid a courtesy call on
Dammam. In 1949, the U.S. legation at Jeddah was raised to embassy level. The
United States had helped link Dammam and Riyadh by rail in 1951. The Kingdom
was included in the United States Point Four Program of Technical Assistance in the
same year. A mutual defensive pact was signed between the United States and Saudi
Arabia in 1951. In this pact, the United States was committed to assist Riyadh, and
also the United States was allowed to maintain an airbase in Dhahran which was
firstly used during the Second World War. Thus, by signing the defensive pact under
which American usage right at the Dhahran airbase was extended by the Saudi Arabia
for five years in exchange for an expanded military training program which also
enabled the Kingdom to buy American arms under the Military Assistance Act, the
two countries moved still more closely together.18

The first significant tension in the U.S.-Saudi relationship occurred due to the
Israel’s declaration of independence in 1948 and U.S. recognition of the State of
Israel.19 From the 1950s onward, Saudi Arabia and the United States pursued some
common national security objectives, in spite of recurring differences of opinion over
the most significant regional issue, the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The bilateral relations
between the United States and Saudi Arabia was severely tested by the Saudi and U.S.
governments’ divergent responses to Arab-Israeli Conflicts in 1948, 1967 and 1973.20

When Israel declared its independence on May 1948, Egypt, Syria, Jordan,
Lebanon, and Iraq went to war against the new state, but the better armed and better
organized Zionists, defend themselves from the attackers and acquired more territory
than had originally been allotted to them. In 1949, by the time armistices were
concluded, “some 750,000 Palestinians had fled or been driven from their homes;
most of them settled in squalid refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries”.21 The
armistice was abided by the Arab states and Israel, but peace between them was not
reached. Israel refused to give up the additional territories it had seized or to permit
large scale return of Palestinian refugees. As long as Israel held to these positions, the
Arab states refused to make peace with them.22
Tension began to increase between the United States and Saudi Arabia in the mid-1950s, especially with the encouragement of the United States to the British led regional security alliance, the Baghdad pact. The Baghdad pact was among Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and the Britain. While apparently anticommunist, the pact included Iran and Iraq, both of whom had difficult relations with the Kingdom.

The perfect case study regarding the relationship between realist interest and idealist values in the United States foreign policy was represented by the Saudi Arabia. One of the America’s most important allies and simultaneously one of the most oppressive authoritarian regimes in the world increasingly represented by the Saudi Arabia since the formal beginning of U.S.-Saudi relations in 1933. The Saudi regime has been a perfect example of the antithesis of American idealist values, yet Saudi Arabia’s oil reserves and strategic location have made the Kingdom immeasurably important to the U.S. and to the world. As, the realist interests and idealist values of the United States in the 21st century was attempted by the United States to reconcile, much can be learned from the United States policy toward Saudi Arabia during the Cold War. This analysis shows important lessons considering the relationship between realist interests and idealist values and will inform future United States policy decisions in the broader West Asia.

The Saudi regime throughout this period was an autocratic i.e. absolute monarchy that deprived its citizens of even the most basic political, religious and civil liberties. A nonpartisan organization i.e. Freedom House which promotes democratic government and civil liberty around the world gave the Kingdom the worst or second to worst ranking for political rights and civil liberty since 1972. The United States did not exhibit a perfect human rights record during the Cold War. One of the most authoritarian and oppressive regimes in the world was represented by the Kingdom.
Apart from this, political reform in Saudi Arabia was not pressurized by the United States in any assertive or consistent way because American leaders did not believe to reform politically as the Kingdom was of strategic interest for the United States during the Cold War. A top US diplomat in Saudi Arabia, in a then top-secret memorandum addressed to under Secretary of State Dean Acheson in January 1945 enumerated the main strategic interests of the United States in Saudi Arabia. “According to the memorandum, the United States sought a strong and independent Saudi Arabian government that would not be susceptible to political penetration. Second the United states sought continued control of and access to the vast oil resources of Saudi Arabia.”

Secretary of State Acheson, more than four years later in 1949 repeated these priorities in a top-secret telegram to the American consulate in Dhahran, writing that the United States of America, is vitally interested in the independence of Saudi Arabia, development of resources and try to prevent the spread of communist doctrine. Time and again throughout the Cold War the public and confidential primary sources demonstrate that the United States interests in the Kingdom were essentially anti-communism and oil. For unlimited access to Saudi oil, the US leaders believed that reliable access depended on a friendly Kingdom free of internal instability and communist influence.

The top-level US officials as early as January 1945 expressed concerns regarding the threat of communism in Saudi Arabia. While there was still fighting between Americans and Soviets as allies against Nazi Germany, US diplomats regarding the Soviet threat to Saudi Arabia expressed grave concerns. US officials worried about the political instability in Saudi Arabia because they thought that the Soviet Union would take the advantage of it to establish a presence in the Kingdom.
and potentially deny US access to Saudi oil. All the democrats and republicans of every US administration from Truman to Reagan sought to counter the aggressive and expansionist tendencies of the Soviets in the West Asia. The primary reason for the US fear of increased Soviet influence in the Kingdom which was largely unjustified relates to the character of the Saudi regime. The founder of modern Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud and his successors feared and hated communism. Soviet Union’s states expansionist goals and it’s i.e. communism’s sweets through the years in neighbouring counties such as South Yemen, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan feared the Saudi Arabia. Apart from this, communism was also hated by the Saudis because of its promotion of atheism and persecution of Muslims. Amir Faisal gave a statement to a British ambassador in 1948 which demonstrates the intensity of the Kingdom fear and hatred of communism. “Faisal expressed his concern that time is on the side of the communists and…if they are given ten years of peace they will become so strong as to be undefeatable.” 

Faisal reportedly suggested which was sounding more like George Patton or Douglas Mac Arthur that “the anti-communist powers should undertake a preventive war against the Soviet Union before it was too late.” In July 1955, one letter from King Saud demonstrates the sincerity and fervency of the Saudis anti-communist credentials: “Our very special attitude towards communism is well – known to [the] US government and to [the] world. It is our interest that communism not infiltrate into any area of the Middle East. In opposing communism, we do so on basic religious belief and Islamic principle, in which we believe with all of our heart, and not to please America or western states. My position, in particular, of Moslem Arab King Servant to Holy shrines, looked up to by 400 million Moslems in East and West, is extremely delicate and serious before God, my nation, and history.”

40
After the death of President Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, the responsibility to end the war and construct the peace was left to President Harry S. Truman. When the war ended, there was the great reduction in the need for oil and air routes, which reflects the lesser priority of Saudi Arabia for Washington.  

President Truman supported the creation of Israel against the advice of most of his foreign policy advisers. Truman showed his support, firstly by endorsing the partition plan and then by recognizing the newly proclaimed Jewish State. These actions had a gradual damaging effect on U.S.–Arab relations.

Several major international challenges were faced by President Truman during his presidency. “Although World War II had ended, the Cold War was beginning, and the Korean War was on.” Issues relating to the creation of Israel and Arab nationalism, according to the American public affairs officers in the Arab world were paramount among the concerns they had to deal with, while there was much less importance of the other events, which were outside the Middle East. Truman became increasingly concerned about the Soviet threat to United States interest during his first years, as his war time ally turned into an enemy. President Truman decided that international communism which was backed by the Soviets was a major threat to U.S interests and for the next forty five years this became the dominant theme in Washington. Truman announced in a speech on March 12, 1947 his determination to tackle the Soviet threat and protect democracy against totalitarianism, a policy that came to be known as Truman Doctrine.

In 1953 King Abdul Aziz died and was succeeded by Saud who was his eldest son and reigned for 11 years. After the death of King Abd al-Aziz in 1953, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States became complicated.
1954, when Saudi Arabia awarded an oil transport contract to the Late Greek shipping magnate i.e., Aristotle Onassis, a dispute over the transport of oil broke out. Aramco (Arabian American Oil Company) claimed the use of its tankers was part of the concession and won the case four years later. The Kingdom requested that the U.S. stop its technical assistance program under the Point Four Agreement. Saudi Arabia requested because the American allocation to the Saudi Arabia was small in comparison with that to Israel. In June 1956, the Dhahran air-base agreement expired and it was extended on a monthly basis.33

There were some critical threats to the survival of the Kingdom which was witnessed by the King Saud in his formal reign. These warnings were the result of interplay between external developments and internal structural changes which stemmed mainly from the end of Ibn Saud as the definite master of the realm he had created. The method in which these warning were dealt with had a formative influence on subsequent Kingdom positions and behavior in the sphere of security and defence. With two interrelated external developments that undermined key elements of Ibn Saud’s basic strategy, the problem began. One was the adoption by the Britain and United States of America of major new initiatives regarding the West Asia; the other was the division of the Arab countries in reaction to these initiatives by a neutralist versus Pro-Western axis, which kindled a fight between rival versions of Pan-Arabism. To cultivate the American connection and seek to preserve his understanding with Britain, Ibn Saud had been successful. At the same time, Ibn Saud also cooperated with Egypt in seeking to check the Hashemites. Though, the pursuit of that strategy made problematic by the emergence of Egypt under Nasser as the champion of neutralism and anti-imperialism by injecting an element of contradiction between cooperation with both Egypt and the West. “The problem was further
complicated by two additional factors: (1) Nasser’s position became ever more radical, with the result that the Saudis found it increasingly difficult to withstand the contradiction on domestic as well as external grounds; and (2) within Saudi Arabia itself, unrest among newly mobilized social sectors and rivalries among members of the ruling family impinged on whatever courses were pursued.34

Saud in his formal reign pursued some actual courses which fell into two broad stages: (i) the Saudis tried to muddle through the contradiction from 1953 to early 1958, (ii) the Saudis confronted the contradiction and made clear policy decisions from early 1958 to 1964 and beyond. In turn, each of these stages had two phases: (1) the Saudis stressed their anti-Hashemite alliance with Egypt much more than their connections with the West, until about the end of 1956 and (2) they sharply reversed their priorities from then until 1958. The Saudis almost completely suppressed their Western connections in an attempt to appease Egypt; early in the second stage, but they unequivocally strove to revive and cultivate their Western connections in 1962 and these were alone in a context of total confrontation with Egypt. The substantial, sometimes drastic, changes in the allocation of resources to the various instruments of defence and security were accompanied by all these shifts.35

Saudi Arabia initially supported Egypt’s seizure of the Suez Canal. When Israel, France and the United Kingdom attacked the Egyptians, Saudi Arabian refused to send military. The radical socialism and Arab nationalism which was promoted by Egypt’s Nasser increasingly disturbed the Kingdom by the late 1950s. Saudi Arabia signed defensive agreements with the conservative Hashemite monarchies of Jordan and Iraq in 1957, despite past struggles to control Arabia which had longstanding enmity. The Saudis also began to finance internal and external propaganda campaigns
against communism during this period. Serious threats to the survival of the monarchy were the Arab nationalism and socialism. Apart from this, the Kingdom also reversed its tentative distancing of itself from the United States. King Saud visited President Eisenhower in February 1957 and agreed to extend American use of the Dhahran air base in exchange for U.S. military aid and training for five years. In much of the Arab world, especially soon after the 1956 Suez crisis and war, this visit and these concessions were becoming unpopular, but the U.S. alliance was viewed by the Saudis as vital for survival.36

In other words, while visiting in February 1957 to Washington, King Saud recommended the Eisenhower Doctrine and granted to a five-year renewal of the airbase agreement in exchange for continued United States arms aid. The United States of America decided to train the 15,000 man Saudi army and to double its strength in numbers.37

The U.S. Point Four mission was expelled by the King Saud on the ground that $6.4 million in aid was a pointless token compared to the aid given to Israel by the United States. In August 1955, however, he did, maintain the Kingdom’s reliance on the U.S. military and refused Soviet offers of modern arms. Yet, United States supporters of Israel successfully pressured the United States government to stop the sale of modern arms to the Kingdom (18 medium tanks and a handful of F-86s). In February 1956, President Eisenhower, overruled these efforts, however, in part because Nasser was more of a threat to Saudi Arabia than Arab socialism. King Saud visited Washington in February 1957 because of the President Eisenhower’s pressure on Britain and France to leave Suez, and the Eisenhower Doctrine which was announced by the President in January 1957. In April 1957, King Saud turned to the United States for a new military agreement and renewed the United States lease on
Dhahran for five years. During 1957 and 1958, this shift was reinforced by growing
Saudi fears of Egypt following the creation of the United Arab Republic with Syria
and Yemen, and by more general fears of Socialism, Pan-Arabism, and Marxism
following the fall of the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq on July 14, 1958.\(^{38}\) Saudi Arabia
informed the United States in March 1961 that it would not renew the airbase
agreement which was to expire within one year. The reason behind this non-renewal
by the Saudi government was U.S. aid to Israel. The United States relinquished its
usage rights to the airbase on April 2, 1962 and turned it over to Saudi authority.

Over the Buraimi Qasis Dispute and the recognition of the Republican regime
in Yemen, the Saudi-American relations suffered further decline. When the United
States refused to supply Saudi Arabia with weapons during the revolution in Yemen
in 1962, the Kingdom turned to the Eastern bloc for arms. However, by these
developments, the close relations between the two countries were not completely
impaired. Faisal visited Washington and met with President Kennedy shortly after the
Republican coup in Yemen. In January 1963, when the Egyptian forces bombed
Nairam, a Saudi town, the support of the United States to the integrity of Saudi Arabia
was reaffirmed by U.S. and the training programme of the Saudi armed forces was
renewed by the Pentagon.\(^{39}\)

**June 1967 Arab-Israeli War**

It was said that when Israel became a state in 1948, the U.S.-Saudi differences
over Israel began to develop. But, only after the 1967 War when Israel according to
the United Nations to be an act of self-defence, attacked Arab states that appeared
calm, and confident to launch war, these differences clearly expanded. The West
Bank and Gaza Strip was controlled and gained by Israel and the relationship between
the U.S. and Israel would soon become a de facto alliance.
The Saudi regime on June 6, the second day of that war, asserted that it would cut off oil supplies to any state that aided Israel, and this announcement by Saudi regime was done partly in response to popular demonstrations. The Kingdom stopped oil shipments to the United States and Britain. But, the boycott was undermined by a market glut which was given up completely by early September when it becomes too burdensome on oil producers. Until the 1973 oil embargo, the United States and Saudi Arabia managed their differences over Israel fairly well.40

In the opposition of the creation of the State of Israel, Saudi Arabia did not send more than token forces to fight in the Arab-Israeli Wars. In 1967, the Saudi state preferring not to support what it saw as Nasser’s conflict against the Israelis, even declared neutrality in the Six Day War. Apart from this, Saudis calculated to gain prestige for the Egyptian leader. Although it remained military removed from these wars, its major contribution to these attempts was financial, in the form of oil embargoes and organized boycotts against Western Nations seen as supportive of Israel. The Kingdom’s stature among the developing world and other Arab states was slowly raised by King Faisal and humanitarian aid and diplomatic support to Islamic courses was also extended by him. By this, he was trying to avoid being seen as too radical by Saudi Arabia’s western commercial partners, especially the United States.41

The June 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict was used by King Faisal as a political weapon against Nasser. As he was initially forced to support the declaration of an Arab oil embargo and send a team to Jordan, the King in July 1967 broke the embargo and Saudi forces never fought in the war. Faisal confronted Nasser at the Arab summit in Khartoum in August 1967 and essentially forced Nasser to withdraw from Yemen in return for limited Kingdom aid – most of which was never paid.42
The external pressures generated by Saudi-Egyptian differences over Yemen were seen by the mid-1960s. When Civil War between Yemeni Royalists and Republicans broke out in 1962, the new Republican government was supported by the Egyptian forces, while the Kingdom backed the Royalists. Only after 1967, when Egypt withdrew its troops from Yemen, the tensions subsided. In the Six Day (Arab-Israeli) War of June 1967, Saudi forces did not participate, but annual subsidies to Egypt, Jordan and Syria were later provided by the government to support their economies.\textsuperscript{43} “The June 1967 Arab-Israeli war was a second period of stress in U.S.-Saudi relations. It was not the war itself, nor the Arab defeat, that most concerned the Saudis, though they fully supported the Arab position”.\textsuperscript{44} As East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel had major religious implications. The silver domed Aqsa Mosque (not the gold-domed Mosque of Omar) to the hundreds of millions of Sunni Muslims around the world is the third holiest site in Islam. For this site to be under non-Muslim occupation was to Saudi’s as intolerable as foreign occupation of the Western Wall was for Israelis. The United States began to waver over its stated policy when Israel unilaterally declared a reunited Israeli Jerusalem to be its capital. The United States stated that the future of Jerusalem should be settled in a negotiated Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Saudi fears that the United States would again break its word was raised by this. The United States did not formally abandon its policy on Jerusalem in the end.\textsuperscript{45}

OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), which had been founded in 1960, was a powerful intergovernmental organization by the early 1970s with a controlling interest in global oil production. Member states of OPEC which were committed to production quotas ensured that global oil prices would not fall too low. In 1967’s Six Day War, after the Arab defeat and the occupation of the West
Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Jerusalem by the Israel, the use of one of the Arab state’s only remaining assets—oil was begin to be considered by many Arab states as a political weapon against the United States, the most important ally of Israel. In 1967, the Arab states in OPEC had attempted to impose an embargo, but this effort caused by the global oil glut had to fail. The United States was also by the early 1970s much more dependent on foreign oil, and global demand had grown.46

The Egyptian radio broadcast on June 6, the second day of the war claims that American and British carrier based aircraft had attacked the airfields of Egypt. With this, Egypt and five other Arab states broke relations with America and Britain. A series of demonstrations broke out in Saudi Arabia on the next day and at a rally in Riyadh King Faisal bin Abd al-Aziz proclaimed that Saudi Arabia would cut off oil supplies to anyone who aided Israel. Aramco’s operations were shut down by the combination of labor actions and mob violence, and Aramco official were informed that no shipments to the U.S. or Britain would be allowed. American, Venezuelan, Iranian, and Indonesian oil production surged to fill the gap over the next two months and the Arab producers gave up the embargo by early September. Thus, we can say that in U.S.-Saudi relations, June 1967 Arab-Israeli War became a second period of stress.47

The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War

When we focus on the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, it was observed that the war brought latent tensions in U.S.-Saudi relations to the surface. The war also altered the prevailing political and economic dynamics of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.48 It is said that the 1973 October War sparked a new development in the world of oil. Oil was used as a political weapon for the first time and an oil embargo
was declared by the Arab members of OPEC against the United States, Holland, and other countries in October 1973.\textsuperscript{49}

Saudi Arabia had reluctantly joined the Arab effort during the 1967 Arab Israeli War to withhold oil only after extensive pressure from Nasser, but soon after its imposition, lifted the embargo. It joined with other Arab oil producing nations in 1973 in imposing the oil embargo. Instead, the Kingdom foreshadowed its major role in the October War when on 4 September, 1973, King Faisal via U.S. television told the Americans that American support of Israel “makes it extremely difficult for us to continue to supply the United States’ petroleum needs and even to maintain our friendly relations”.\textsuperscript{50} Saudi Arabia, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, participated in the Arab oil boycott of the United States and Netherlands. Saudi Arabia, a member of the OPEC had joined other member countries in moderate oil price increases beginning in 1971. The price of oil rose substantially after the 1973 War and dramatically increasing the Kingdom’s wealth and political influence.\textsuperscript{51}

Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel on October 6, 1973. To end the war, the United States asked King Faisal to encourage the Arab states, but the King refused, hoping the conflict would end in an Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territory which was occupied by it. Despite American promises of neutrality in the conflict, President Nixon granted over $2 billion in aid to Israel. Due to this, Faisal resolved to take action and the King declared a unilateral embargo on oil shipments to the United States and the Netherlands, Netherlands had also supported the Israelis.\textsuperscript{52}

In response to U.S. support for Israel during the war, the Saudi leaders instituted an oil embargo and oil production cuts. The oil shocks produced inflation in the United States and also new concern about foreign investment from oil producing
countries. In addition, it also produced in the United States an open speculation about the advisability and feasibility of militarily seizing oil fields in the Kingdom or other countries. Both Saudi and U.S. officials in the wake of the embargo worked to re-anchor the bilateral relationship on the basis of shared opposition to communism, renewed military cooperation and through economic initiatives. The recycling of Saudi petrodollars to the United States via Saudi investment in industrial expansion, infrastructure and U.S. securities had been promoted by this economic initiatives.\(^5^3\)

King Faisal’s decision to reduce oil production, on October 18, 1973, by 10 per cent was announced over Radio Riyadh. President Nixon asked Congress on the next day to supply Israel with $ 2.2 billion in military assistance. In response, King Faisal imposed a total embargo on shipment of oil to the United States and the Netherlands and by 26 per cent slashes oil production. It is remarkable to note how Aramco operated the oil embargo for the Kingdom. The oil companies for a long time considered as instruments of American foreign policy toward the oil producing nations were actually used during the embargo as instruments of Arab policy. “U.S. Senator Frank Church, Chairman of a Senate subcommittee investigating multinational corporations, made public certain U.S. Department of State documents, hitherto classified, which revealed that the oil companies were indeed used for a long time as arms of American foreign policy”.\(^5^4\) But, Aramco took a small symbolic step in 1973 by cutting off oil supplies to its own homeland the moment King Faisal desired it. Clearly, Aramco accepted the instructions of King Faisal; fearing punishment for failure to fulfill with the monarch’s order.\(^5^5\) In other words, the Arab states within OPEC voted to support the Kingdom on October 19, 1973 and imposed an oil embargo on the countries which had supported Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The West which had relied on a steady supply of cheap oil from the Middle East
since World War II becomes shocked with this action. This action was also supported
by Saudi Arabia which was not an active participant in the 1973 War. “Gas prices
doubled, then tripled, as OPEC nations limited and then cut off, sales to the United
States, which was already in the midst of an economic downturn”. The price of
crude oil in international commodity markets by January 1974 was increased from $ 3
to $ 11 per barrel.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries i.e. OPEC ended the embargo
in March 1974 because it believed that the embargo was not achieving its goal of
ending U.S. support to Israel and also hoped that the U.S. might encourage the Israelis
to withdraw from its occupied territories. With the lost patience due to the U.S.-
Israeli alliance, King Faisal had supported the embargo. The King had stated several
months before the 1973 War that he did not believe a strong relationship with the U.S.
could continue to exist alongside American support to Israel. In public speeches and
private meetings, the King linked Zionism to communism and he only reluctantly
allowed American Jews, including Henry Kissinger who was the U.S. Secretary of
State to visit Saudi Arabia. 

**Consequences of the October 1973 War**

In other words, after five months, on March 1974, the embargo was lifted. The
United States worked seriously for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied land and the
King was satisfied. After that, the Kingdom returned to its pre-embargo production of
8.5 million barrels a day and promised to meet oil needs of the United States.

The United States, in return promised to help industrialize the Saudi Kingdom.
On June 8, 1974, a set of broad economic cooperation agreements between the United
States and Saudi Arabia was signed in Washington. “The agreement, signed by
Secretary of State Kissinger and Saudi Arabia’s Prince Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz al Saud,
provided for the establishment of a Joint Economic Cooperation Commission and a Joint Security Cooperation Commission. As an initial step the United States sold several squadrons of F-5E and F-5F jet fighters in a $756 million package deal to Saudi Arabia.”

**Saudi Arabia and United States Relations under President Carter**

A nephew at the monarch’s weekly public audience assassinated King Faisal on March 25, 1975. “Crown Prince Khalid became king, and appointed Prince Fahd as his successor.” As King Khalid was not an active King, he preferred to leave the daily operations of government in the hands of Fahd. A time of unprecedented wealth in Saudi Arabia was the late 1970s and characterized by massive public investments in health, agriculture and infrastructure calculation. Khalid, who was a pious and private man generally popular and benefited from the prosperity which was unparalleled in his Kingdom. After a series of heart problems, in 1982, King Khalid died and crown Prince Fahd was allowed to take the throne. Now Fahd ruled in his own name, as he had been doing on behalf of Khalid since 1975.

The importance of Saudi Arabia during the 1970s and 1980s, both as an oil producer and as a defensive bulwark in the Gulf War reflected in a strong United States desire to be responsive to the Kingdom requests for arms, even when American officials had doubts about the wisdom of providing them. Whether the Saudi military would be able to make effective use of all the weapons it purchased was always not cleared and some officials feared that instability inside the Kingdom could be contributed by the excessive arms sales, as they arguably had in Iran. However, the potential threat was one particular concern in those decades which the growing Saudi arsenal of advanced weapons posed to Israel. As a result, a major political battle in
Washington was triggered by a Saudi arms request on at least three occasions. Most of the political obstacles that the Saudis had faced in obtaining sophisticated United States arms was removed by the tightened alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia resulting from the Gulf War and diminished Israeli concerns which were not until the 1990s.

Over 1977 Saudi request to purchase sixty F-15 fighters caused the first controversy. The Carter administration, despite its policy of limiting arms sales to non-allies, was strongly inclined to honor the request. Saudi air defenses were not only enhanced by the F-15s but the Kingdom leadership also attacked considerable political importance to the sale. Indeed, the sale of the F-15s for the Saudis became a litmus test of their relationship with the United States to the security of the Gulf. “Thus, as national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski later acknowledged, the sale of the jets was absolutely necessary to retain U.S. credibility with the Saudis.”

After the oil shocks of 1973-75 and 1978-80, the U.S. became painfully aware of the need for a new oil policy. A per barrel price of Saudi light crude in 1973 was $2.41 and rose to $10.73 with the Arab oil embargo. The price of a barrel of crude shot up from $ 13.34 to $ 32.81 in the beginning of 1978.

President Carter brought with him when he assumed office an intense personal belief that the American interests were countered by the authoritarian governments. Carter announced after a short time in office that, “We are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.” With respect to the Kingdom, however, that the Carter administration applied its human rights principles specifically or assertively there was little evidence to demonstrate. On 30 April 1977 in a major policy speech at the University of Georgia,
Cyrus Vance who was Secretary of State laid out the details of humanitarian based foreign policy of President Carter. By saying, “I speak today about the resolve of this Administration to make the advancement of human rights a central part of our foreign policy,” Secretary Vance began his speech. “Vance went on to define human rights violations as torture, arbitrary arrest or imprisonment, or the denial of basic civil and political liberties such as freedom of thought, of religion, of assembly; freedom of speech, freedom of the press; (and) freedom of movement.” It was interesting that Saudi Arabia violated every one of these human rights precepts. One would have expected by this fact and Secretary Vance’s statement that human rights would be a central part of the Carter foreign policy and to enjoy a central place in US-Saudi dialogue during the Carter Administration. However, the Carter Administration despite this idealist emphasis evidently never attempted to assertively promote human rights or democracy in the Kingdom. Crown Prince Fahd visited President Carter in Washington D.C. less than one month after Vance’s speech on 24 May, 1977 at the White House. Carter welcomed the Crown Prince, saying, “I don’t believe there is any other nation with whom we’ve had better friendship and a deeper sense of cooperation than we’ve found in Saudi Arabia.”

To mention anything regarding the Kingdom’s political oppression or numerous human rights violations, President Carter throughout his lengthy remarks failed to do this. President Carter on the next day responded to a press question by saying, “And so far as I know, between ourselves and Saudi Arabia there are no disturbing differences at all.” President Carter met with the Saudi Arabia foreign minister almost five months later and in the details of the statement, there is no mention of domestic reform in the Kingdom among the topics which were discussed. The words ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ were completely absent. “Admittedly, it
may be possible that the Carter Administration chose to emphasize human rights more discretely with Saudi Arabia." One finds an uncomfortable dissonance between American idealist values and actual US policy toward the Kingdom even during the Carter Administration. One must ask why the policies that American idealist values demanded were never implemented as there was given the oppressive and authoritarian nature of the Saudi regime throughout the Cold War.

U.S. Saudi Relations under President Reagan

The Saudi Arabian government supported anticommunist causes around the world in efforts during the Carter and Reagan administrations that often ran parallel to or that were coordinated with U.S. policy. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the 1979 Iranian revolution helped fuel a decade of collaborative Saudi-U.S. foreign policy efforts, including shared support for Saddam Hussein’s war against Iran and for anti-Soviet Mujahiddin fighters in Afghanistan. Much of President Ronald Reagan’s focus during his presidency was on the American relationship with the Soviet Union and he had four summit meetings from 1985 to 1988 with Gorbachev. President Reagan, therefore, had to deal with problems both in the Arab-Israeli arena and in the Persian Gulf and the context for public diplomacy in the Reagan presidency had been defined by these problems.

A central tenet of Reagan’s policy in the Persian Gulf was the support for the independence of Saudi Arabia. The commitment which was done by Reagan was based on oil and Saudi stability. “In October 1981, at a press conference, he said, ‘There is no way….that we could stand by and see [Saudi Arabia] taken over by anyone who would shut off the oil’. Later, after years of the Iran-Iraq War, he recalled the 1973 oil embargo ‘that shook the economy to its foundations’, adding: I’m
determined that our economy will never again be held captive, that we will not return to the days of gas lines, shortages, economic dislocation and international humiliation. Mark this point well: the use of the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf will not be dictated by the Iranians. These lanes will not be allowed to come under the control of the Soviet Union. The Persian Gulf will remain open to navigation by the nations of the world.”

Oil prices were at an unprecedented high when Reagan assumed office in 1981. “Between 1972 and 1980 prices had skyrocketed from $1.90 to $37.96 per barrel, a nearly 2,000 percent increase in real terms.”

In addition to contain the Soviet Union, Ronald Reagan also wanted to reverse the expansion of the control and military presence of Soviet Union throughout the world. Ronald Reagan’s approach which came to be known as the Reagan Doctrine, aimed that by championing democracy, supporting anti-Soviet insurgencies in the developing world and escalating defense spending the cost of Moscow’s expansionist foreign policy was to increase. In Reagan administration, the key figures viewed Saudi Arabia as a useful partner in carrying out this doctrine, which the Kingdom for its part eagerly supported. Fahd sent to Washington in 1981 a group of young representatives not tainted by refusing to change their positions vis-à-vis Israel and representing the grandsons of Abdel Aziz i.e., the next generation of Saudi leaders. At that time, the regular visitors to the United States would be the Turki al-Faisal, Saud al-Faisal and Bandar bin Sultan and there was a sense of excitement that this new breed of Saudis would bring good things to the Saudi Arabia. The most important figures in U.S.-Saudi relations in particular were Prince Bandar, the son of the defense minister, Prince Sultan.

By selling sophisticated American weaponry to Saudi Arabia, President Reagan faced the first challenge. A significant portion of his time would be occupied
by the bruising political battle, the fight over AWACS and F-15 upgrade. Saudi Arabia’s AWACS and F-15 enhancement request was by and large supported by the incoming Reagan administration like the outgoing Carter administration. An early lead was taken by the Secretary of Defense Weinberger arguing hard for the sale. Weinberger had been a senior executive at Bechtel Corporation that was an infrastructure development company with deep ties to the Kingdom, before his appointment to Reagan’s cabinet. Weinberger had travelled often to Saudi Arabia; and had strong ties with the Kingdom’s royal family. Therefore it was no surprise that in the Reagan administration, he was among the strongest pro-Saudi voices. “Two and a half weeks after Reagan took office, Weinberger declared that ‘we want to do everything we can to assist [the Saudis] in providing the additional security that they need.’”

The part and parcel of the changing strategies environment in the Persian Gulf and around the world was the sale of the AWACS and the F-15 add-ons and signaled a tightening relationship between the United States and the Kingdom. There was concern that America’s support for Israel was slipping as a result for those more focused on the U.S.-Israel partnership, although this was not the case as regularly asserted by the President.

In U.S.-Saudi relations the Iran-Iraq War gave the fight over arms particular salience. Four months before Reagan assumed the presidency; on September 22, 1980 Iraq invaded Iran to reclaim the Shatt Oil-Arab (the border between the two states), and overran Iranian-held Khuzestan (an oil-rich area along the northern reaches of the Persian Gulf). The flow of oil out of the Gulf which was threatened by the Iran-Iraq war presented a serious ideological challenge to Saudi Arabia and provided opportunities for Soviet adventurism. For eight grinding years, the two sides
struggled, which resulted in shocking massacre. A strategic interest was shared by both Riyadh and Washington in preventing an Iranian victory.

On August 20, 1988, Iraq and Iran declared a cease fire. As the war had spawned the bruising arms battles between Riyadh and Washington, the fabric of U.S.-Saudi relations was strained by this. The Public Squabbles led the Saudi King and defense minister to question the steadfastness of America’s long-standing commitment to the Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity. At the same time others in the region and inside Saudi Arabia were encouraged by the debates about the long-term stability of the House of Saudi to ask similar questions. Even King Fahd’s trip in early 1985 to Washington did not help to facilitate arms requests of Saudi Arabia. However, in newspapers, talk shows and radio programs, all this was on the surface.

A set of top secret operations in which the United States and Saudi Arabia worked in tandem as never before, was hidden from most citizens on both sides and from those inside the government except at the highest level. During the Iran-Iraq War, the 1981 US sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia was one of several developments which served to build U.S.-Saudi mutual trust. Several U.S. officials implied that the U.S. interest in the AWACS sale was related to the Soviet threat from Afghanistan. Apart from this, the Iranian threat motivated the Saudi interest in cooperating with America. However, at the same time, both Riyadh and Washington were equally concerned at the regional and global level with security challenges. The Saudi security and US intelligence was improved by the AWACS sale and reconnaissance reach, and mutual cooperation.

For building huge underground strategic facilities, the AWACS sale was related to the Saudi agreement and these were intended to support a massive U.S.
deployment in the event of a major Soviet or Iranian threat. They were used oddly enough not against Moscow or Iran but against Iraq in 1990. For mounting Operation Desert Shield and Storm in 1990-91, such forces were a sine qua non. Against real and perceived threats from Iran, Washington also reacted for its part favourably to Saudi requests for US arms and military backup support. While the U.S.-Saudi security relations were to some extent improved by the AWACS package, the RDF which enhanced U.S. regional credibility was in 1983 transformed into CENTCOM, the U.S. defence efforts as did throughout the 1980s, such as in 1987 the reflagging of Kuwait tankers. In U.S.-Saudi relations, the problems did not disappear, but by the Iran-Iraq Conflict the cooperation which was catalyzed contrasted unpleasantly with the less than cooperative relations that existed prior to it.75

“The relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is, and always has been, strategic in nature.”76 The United States viewed Saudi Arabia for long as a country of significant strategic importance— one that the U.S.is willing to go to support and protect by great lengths. However, this is not to say that there have not been fluctuations or shifts in the relationship.77
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