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U.S Foreign Policy and Saudi Arabia



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Introduction

Saudi Arabia is the product of a mid-eighteenth century alliance between Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and the emir of al-Diriyah, Mohammed bin Saud. With a lot of intrigues in-between, including what is now known as the rise and fall of the first two Saudi/Wahhabi states. However, the year 1902 witnessed the rebirth of the kingdom starting with the recapture of Riyadh by Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman Al Saud and its consequent unification. Prior to this time, the al-Saud family had been conquered in a war against the Ottomans, and had gone into hiding.

Before the unification of Saudi Arabia, in the period of the war (WWI), the Sharif of Mecca fought alongside the British against the Ottoman Empire, leading to a Pan-Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, and consequently, its fall. The Sharif had hoped that the victory over the Ottoman Empire will fast-track the unification of the Arab region, this didn't quite play out the way he had imagined. Rather, a majority of the territory belonging to the collapsed Ottoman Empire were quickly brought under a League of Nations mandate under the control of the French and British.

As the war ensued, ibn Saud had not participated in the revolt, rather, he took the period as an opportunity to consolidate on his power, consequently unifying the two Gulf regions of Hejaz and Nejd into what would now be known as Saudi Arabia.

Further discovery of massive amounts of oil deposits further led to the transformation of the country while maintaining and upholding the values and traditions which make it an orthodox Islamic society.

With no formal written constitution, the leaders of the country still manage to retain



absolute control by ensuring that the Kingdom stays as the absolute monarchy it has been right from inception. The country strictly prohibits political parties and elections, and defer to the Koran

and sharia law for day-to-day running of its affairs. This leaves the politics of the country strictly revolving around the rather large Saudi Royal family with the princes of the older generation heading all key government ministries.

According to the laws of the land, the king, as the absolute ruler is saddled with the responsibilities of performing key executive, legislative and judicial functions as it pertains to the state. For advice regarding matters of state, the king relies on advice from his council of learned religious scholars.

Holding up to 20% of the world's known petroleum reserve, Saudi Arabia relies almost entirely on its oil and proceeds accruing to run its economy.

History (Over 70 Years of Relations)

The United States through its foreign policy established strong ties with founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz ibn Saud, and those that took over after him. And since then, The United States have maintained cordial bilateral relations with



its new found partner basically through government contacts as well as its oil industry, although, not necessarily without a few skirmishes here and there.

In 1933, the United States of America entered into full bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia. This saw the coming together of two societies with albeit, different social, political and religious orientations.

In the same year, a U.S. company, Standard Oil Company of California, now Chevron, landed its first contact involving a concession to explore Eastern Saudi Arabia for a period of sixty years, consequently making its first oil discovery in 1938. Today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have become one of the world's top producer of oil, with its daily oil production hitting 10.7 million barrels a day and exporting almost two-third of the same. The country also played a major role in the establishment of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and has since gained large influence of member nations as well as play roles including stabilizing global oil prices simply by adjusting its oil production. Thus, one of the primary objectives of

the U.S. foreign policy, over the years, has remained that of protecting Saudi Arabia as well as a host of others in the Gulf.

One would argue however, the U.S. – Saudi relationship isn't entirely built on all the right reasons. In fact, there are many who assert that the bilateral ties between both countries over the past decades is centered essentially on the resources of the oil rich region. On the other hand, the Saudis would find gain militarily.

Recent events over the years show increased distrust between people of both regions owing to series of events that have continued to challenge this historic relationship. Among such is the 1973 oil embargo, in which members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting countries (OAPEC), placed restrictions on the sale of its oil to countries including Canada and the United States for its supposed backing of Israel during the Yom Kippur war. The embargo was however lifted in 1974, however, the damage had already been done with characteristic repercussions on the global prices of oil which saw an increase from US\$3 to over US\$12. This rise in global oil prices also had ripple effects in global economy as well as politics, thus, it was termed the "oil shock".

Another event which has greatly affected the U.S.- Saudi relations is the case of the 9/11 bombings, of which 15 out of the 19 terrorists involved in the hijacking were citizens of Saudi Arabia. These events have put a lot of strain in the relationship between the two nations, but they have somehow managed to overcome it all. And while it may be easy to assume the worst is past, no one can really tell what the future holds for the two.

U.S Economic and Financial Interest in Saudi Arabia

The United States and Saudi Arabia relations have come a long way. Going all the way back to the era of the war and beyond, as well the wake of Arab oil embargo. Over time, relations between the two countries have grown cordial with political and economic cooperation.

The U.S. realized how valuable the oil from the region is, and also saw opportunities for trade and investment. The United States soon set up its companies in the country for oil exploration, industrialization and even security. The relations also saw increased inflow of American goods, services as well as technologies into the country.

The United States over the years has continued to work with the Saudis in areas of infrastructure development, technology, security and even policy development. Since 1945, with the start of formal relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia, the United States has consequently resorted to turning the blind eye and overlooking perhaps, the controversial traits of the Kingdom in a view to safeguarding its interest in the region, including ensure continuous flow of the oil, stable prices as well as support for its national security policies.



Economically, the United States considers Saudi Arabia to be a viable trade partner, with oil being the biggest commodity traded between the two regions. On the other hand, constant tensions and conflicts in the Middle East has notoriously increased the Saudi Arabian demand for weapons, reinforcement as well as arms.

Today, imports to Saudi Arabia from the United States range from goods including but not limited to aircrafts, luxury cars, electronics, as well as arms and ammunitions. Today, it won't be wrong to say that the United States -Saudi relations has suffered certain setbacks. The year 2017 according to statistics showed a nine percent decline in the United States-Saudi Arabia trade. These are not unconnected to the frequent disagreements between both parties arising from divergent views as relating to mostly the Syrian war of 2011. While Saudi Arabia accuses the United States of not being truly committed to ending the regime of Bashir al-Assad, the

United States in turn conveyed its dismay over the way Saudi Arabian women were treated in the country.

Among other events that have strained the relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, the greatest harm was done when investigations into the 9/11 attacks revealed the involvement of Saudi Arabian citizens. Others with similar effects include the United States lifting of sanctions on Iran, U.S. discovery of shale oil, its production and subsequent export which crashed the global oil prices which caused the Saudi oil production to decrease by almost fifty percent.

Arms Export to Saudi Arabia

For decades, the United States has continued to supply the Saudi Arabia with weapons according to its trade and bilateral agreements. Although this has raised lot of questions in recent times, it remains unclear what direction the United States is headed regarding the issue at hand. However, recent figures suggest an increase in arms trade between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Today, there is an increased call to place restrictions on all arms sale to Saudi Arabia, primarily because of what is termed and “abuse” of the same by the Saudi government. In 2015, and what the UN has termed the “world’s worst man-made humanitarian disaster”, the Saudi authorities,



armed with United States weapons undertook bombings in Yemen, a situation which has caused wanton difficulties to the Yemeni people and have brought their infrastructure to the brinks of collapse.

Saudi authorities and their allies had put together the campaign which would crush the Iran-allied Houthi rebels loyal to the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. This victory although anticipated to come sooner has continually evaded the Saudi regime, and a war which was thought to last for weeks has now dragged on further, with no end in sight even after four years.

Consequently, the humanitarian situation on the ground in Yemen, and the roles the Saudis played in bringing about this carnage has raised a lot of questions regarding

further arms sale to Saudi Arabia. There are now increased calls for restrictions to be placed on arms export to Saudi Arabia banking on their actions and excesses both involving the killing of the American based journalist as well as their actions in Yemen. In response, former allies around the world including Germany, Denmark and Finland have all announced suspension of arms sale to the country and others including Britain and Spain almost cutting its exports to Saudi in half.

Regardless of the decision by supplies to either terminate or cut exports to Saudi Arabia, indices show an increase in the overall weapons import into Saudi Arabia, with figures at a 38% increase. This is primarily attributed to the United States increase in its weapons supply within the periods of 2016 to 2017. The decision by the United States to continue its weapons contract with Saudi Arabia was defended by the President of the United States who hinted that halting the countries deal with Arabia would only push them to Russia or China, and this according to him was a foolish move.

War on Yemen – Saudi Crimes and the U.S Response 500

Yemen has been engrossed in a conflicts since 2014. Basically, this conflict has its origins on the uprising which forced its long time authoritarian president to relinquish power to his deputy, as well as the failure of a political transition which was believed would have brought stability to the country.



President Ali Abdullah was forced to resign and handed over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2011. However, things didn't go quite s planned for

President Hadi, as his government became greatly plagued by issues including incessant attacks by jihadist, corruption, unemployment, food insecurity as well as the springing of different separatist movements and to crown it all, loyalty of security personnel to the ousted president.

Watching the chaos and inability of the President to get a handle on the situation, the Houthi movement which had led several crusades against the former regime saw an opening, and therefore took over control of the northern heartland as well as other neighbouring areas. Unpleased with the current state of affairs, including the transition, many citizens soon took sides with the rebel leading to the fall of Sanaa.

Then, in a sudden twist of things, it is thought that Saleh found a way to rally members of the security forces loyal to his government as well as the Houthi rebels in a bid to retake the country in March 2015, causing President Hadi to flee the country.

As the conflict raged on, Saudi Arabia were troubled by the threat of having a rogue government in Yemen who are supported by Iran. It therefore put together several other states, mostly Sunni Arab and led a bombing campaign against the rebels in a bid to restore the ousted president.

As the war ensued, powerful nations including the U.S., UK and France offered support by way of weapons, logistics and intelligence. And although the Saudi government initially projected the war to last for only a couple of weeks, this however has proven not to



be the case as the region has been engrossed in the same war for over a period of four years and no progress other than the cold bite of a stalemate has been recorded.

With the support of its international partners, its alliance soon dropped into the port city of Aden where it helped flush out Houthi elements as well as their allies.

The power vacuum created also enabled militants, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and the likes to seize control of territories in the south while carrying out different deadly attacks.

The Saudi Coalition also setup a blockade in the country, an action they justified by accusing Tehran of supplying rebels with weapons. This blockade has however led to a situation which is fuelling major humanitarian situations as more and more people are pushed into food crisis by the day. The cost of this war is steep, and every day, the numbers in terms of casualties continue to rise. Although both government and rebel forces were finally persuaded to talks, and an agreement was even reached by both representatives of the warring parties in Hudayda where each party committed to withdrawing its troops by mid-January – something that hasn't started happening yet, increasing fears the deal may soon go south.

Awful Human Rights Record in Saudi Arabia – focus

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enforces the Wahhabi religious laws under the absolute rule of the royal family. The Kingdom's rigid laws and its religious rulings have consistently placed it on the zenith in places with the least respect for human rights, as well as other reports, including the Freedom house's annual survey of political and civil rights placing it among the “worst of the worst”.

The country is notorious for its frequent execution of perceived enemies, political protesters or opponents. It is rather worrisome, that in such an era as this, a country would institute and mete out corporal punishment including lashes, amputations of wrists, hands, feet, as well as capital punishment including beheadings and hanging. The law is so flawed, it would declare a woman who is raped as guilty of sexual perverseness since she cannot “prove” her case in court, and would thus be sentenced to several lashes spanning periods of days, weeks, etc.



Over time, the international community, including the United Nations Committee Against Torture had criticized their laws, citing amputations, floggings and the likes. In their defence however, they informed the committee that these were “legal traditions” which have been passed on to them right from the inception of Islam, and rejected any perceived meddling in its legal system.

On a larger scale, one would expect the United States and other leading countries in the world to prevail on Saudi Arabia in a view to having them review and improve on the human rights of its citizens. In retrospect, it would seem world leaders have chosen to turn a blind eye to all the atrocities being perpetrated by the Saudi government and pretend like nothing is going on. But what are the ways by which the United States can pressure Saudi Arabia to reconsider its stance on human rights?

- Such countries including U.S., France, and the likes who offer assistance both militarily and otherwise must bring the Saudi's to the table and make them see reasons why they must review their policies
- Continuous engagement and re-orientation on the rights of its citizens until such a time when they understand the fundamental nature of the issues involved
- More pressure should be exerted on the Crown Prince to initiate reforms in the judiciary of the country, and fast-track the release of all political prisoners as well as remove ban on political parties
- Develop foreign policy strategies which would place more emphases on respect for human rights of citizens and seek for ways to make it binding on Saudi Arabia
- The UN should launch an investigation into as much cases of human rights violation as have been committed as possible, and in the end, people should be held responsible for their actions
- The international community must stand its grounds and respond to every verified case of human rights violations in accordance to international law, including the use of sanctions when necessary.

Generally, the global response to the shortcomings of Saudi Arabia have been nothing short of appalling. The spate of killings, flagrant disregard for human lives and the body language which inherently have remained opposed to change in spite of the members of the international community are all indications that more needed to be done to save the country from becoming a shadow of itself.

Conclusion 400

Relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States have been around for quite a while, and although the ride may not seem to have been an entirely smooth one, it will suffice to say that a lot of effort has been and continues to be put in maintaining and nurturing this relationship.

Saudi Arabia has not always been the favourite among countries of the world, especially due to its gross violation of human rights as well as a whole lot of atrocities it has become amerced in. Over the years, it has engaged in actions which portray it as being indifferent to the plight of its citizens, often caught up in a flagrant disregard for human rights as seen in the brutal murder and dismembering of Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S. based journalist.

The problem has not been so much about the atrocities they commit, even more worrisome than that, is the perceived silence with which the world has received them. It has become pertinent to remind the world that human right is a fundamental right and therefore, the need to join forces and ensure these rights are obeyed regardless of place and laws.

In conclusion, while it may not be certain what happens to activists, political opponents as well as civil society groups as pertaining to their arrest, torture, mutilation and consequent murder; one thing is certain, and that is the fact that officials who carry out such dastardly acts are acting under direct orders of the Saudi government, and the greater. However, it would seem a crisis may have been created due to the U.S.-Saudi relations, such that the Saudi government may have assumed an “untouchable” position due to obvious reasons bothering on oil and arms trade, with resultant weakening of the U.S. powers to curb their excesses.

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