Realism Not Relationships: A Study of the US-Saudi Alliance under President George W. Bush

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Abstract

This study examines the validity of the claim that the United States-Saudi Arabia alliance under the Bush administration was driven by its financial and personal ties to the kingdom. To determine the motivations of the Bush administration, a case study that explores the US-Saudi alliance under Bush, Clinton, and Obama is used. The implications of realism and liberalism, theories of international relations that often have divergent foreign policy recommendations, are considered as alternative motivations driving the Bush foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia. The policies of the three administrations are both consistent with each other, and demonstrate a primacy of realist principles over liberal ideals. Due to the coherence of the Saudi policies of the three presidencies, it indicates that realism, not relationships, motivated the US-Saudi partnership under Bush.
Introduction

In 2014, a Saudi blogger named Raif Badawi was sentenced by religious court to ten years in prison, one thousand lashes, and a substantial fine for an online post encouraging religious and political debate (Black 2015). The Badawi case illustrates the wide gap in the values between the United States and its long-time ally, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia jails dissident individuals, such as Badawi, but the United States protects the freedom of speech through its Constitution. While the judicial system of Saudi Arabia is based upon a strict, Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic law, the United States values the separation of church and state (Khatib 2015; Unger 2006: p. 84).

Despite these differences, Saudi Arabia and the United States have maintained a close partnership throughout recent history (Bronson 2006: p. 3). The disparity between the two systems of governments leads to scrutiny about the foundation of the relationship. Within international relations, there exists two major, but often conflicting, schools of thought that have divergent implications for foreign policy. While the two strands of thought may be reconciled in some instances of international affairs, they often remain in conflict. Liberalism, which places an emphasis on human rights and political participation, is fully incompatible with the US-Saudi alliance. On the other hand, realism focuses on the self-interested pursuit of security and prosperity by states. Because the US-Saudi partnership in counterterrorism, regional security, and the procurement of oil is beneficial to American security and economic well-being, the alliance is more consistent with the realist interpretation of foreign policy.

During the presidency of President George W. Bush, there was speculation that the American policy towards Saudi Arabia was guided by neither realism nor liberalism. Instead, there was the allegation that the close alliance between the two countries was driven by his personal and financial relationships with the Saudi royal family. A narrative developed that
Bush disregarded crucial security concerns of the United States while simultaneously supporting a repressive government that was the antithesis of American liberal principles. Because of those relationships, the Saudi policy under Bush was supposedly guided by selfish, personal motives rather than a realist or liberal interpretation of international relations.

To examine the validity of this claim, this study compares the US-Saudi alliance under Bush as well as his predecessor, President Bill Clinton, and his successor, President Barack Obama. Using both primary and secondary sources from the public domain, the policies of Clinton, Bush, and Obama in key areas of the partnership—counterterrorism, arms sales, oil, and reforms—are examined. Because diplomatic relationships contain an element of secrecy, the study may exclude relevant information of the Saudi policy under the three presidents. Additionally, when examining the sources, it is important to incorporate a degree of scepticism to account for bias. Because authors often have a particular motivation for writing, it is necessary to consider their viewpoint when analysing documents. Despite these drawbacks, the study is able to construct a comprehensive overview of the foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia under each administration.

Of the three presidents, Bush had the strongest personal and financial ties to the kingdom, and as a result, the largest potential for a conflict of interest. Despite the existence of these relationships, the Saudi policy under Bush in the areas of counterterrorism, arms sales, oil, and reforms did not deviate significantly from that of either Clinton or Obama. At the same time, US-Saudi cooperation in these areas benefited both American security and economic strength. The personal and financial ties of the Bush administration to Saudi Arabia did not significantly alter his foreign policy towards the kingdom. Consistent with Clinton and Obama administrations, the Saudi policy under Bush was guided by realist interests.
While the American policy towards the kingdom persistently aligns with the realist viewpoint, it remains a difficult partnership. Not only is the kingdom’s cooperation erratic, but the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam the kingdom sponsors often breeds extremism within the Middle East detrimental to American security (Gause 2009; Shapiro and Sokolsky 2015). At the same time, the liberal United States is charged as being hypocritical by supporting the repressive Saudi government.

Despite these difficulties, it is likely the partnership will continue in the foreseeable future due to entwined interests of counterterrorism, regional stability, and economics.

Understand the true foundation of the partnership is important in order to determine how to proceed in the future. Putting a misplaced emphasis on the links of the Bush administration to Saudi Arabia obscures the true nature of the bilateral relationships. Without a proper understanding, it would be difficult for the United States to design a proper Saudi policy.

This study is broken down into five sections. The first chapter briefly overviews the tension between realism and liberalism, as well as their implications for foreign policy. The second chapter provides background information on the history of the US-Saudi alliance prior to the Clinton administration, detailing the relationship throughout both the Cold War and the Gulf War. Within the third chapter, the methods of the study are outlined, including both its benefits and drawbacks. The fourth chapter consists of the case study examining the US-Saudi relationship under all three presidencies. Lastly, the final section discusses the overarching conclusions of the case study, as well as implications for the future of the relationship.
Chapter 1: Literature Review


The US-Saudi alliance represents this conflict between American interests and ideals (Atlas 2012: p. 357). Continued cooperation with the Saudi Arabia is necessary for the security and prosperity of the United States. Yet, because Saudi Arabia is a historically repressive monarchy, these interests are not easily reconcilable with American ideals of civil liberties and democracies. The United States chastises many neighbours of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East for their lack of freedom, yet American criticism pointed at the kingdom is significantly muted. As a result, there is an apparent inconsistency underlying the relationship.

Liberalism and Realism

Within realist tradition, there is an emphasis on the role of the state, anarchy, and power (Doyle 1983a: p. 218; Mearsheimer 1990: p. 12; Gilpin 1996: pp. 7-8; Walt 1998: p. 31; Mowle 2003: p. 566; Mearsheimer 2005: p. 139). States are both the main actors and assumed to act in a rational manner. Anarchy describes the structure of international relations; there exists no higher authority to enforce rules within the interactions between
states (Waltz 1979: p. 61). In the anarchical condition, states compete for power. Although most often seen as military capabilities, “power” can also refer to economic strength (Morgenthau 1948: p. 31; Gilpin 1996: p. 8). Conflict, which arises as a result of insecurity and constant competition for power, is considered both common and difficult to mitigate within the realist paradigm.

Realism, however, is not a unified tradition (Gilpin 1996: p. 6; Legro and Moravcsik 1999: p. 9). Distinct strands emphasise the different roles of anarchy and power. Classical realism believes that anarchy is a constraint and power is an end (Morgenthau 1948: pp. 5, 29; Waltz 1988: p. 616). While anarchy is important, classical realism contends that inherent human selfishness plays a major role in conflict (Morgenthau 1948: p. 4; Nye 1988: p. 241; Gilpin 1996: p. 6). Because humans are selfish, they will attempt to secure as much power as possible, and will never be constrained by moral principle. Anarchy allows states, which are controlled by humans, to pursue that selfish course of action (Waltz 1988: p. 616). Conflict stems from the simultaneous and unrestrained pursuits of power by states.

On the other hand, neorealism holds that anarchy dictates conflict and power is a means of security (Waltz 1979: p. 66; Nye 1988: p. 241; Waltz 1988: p. 616; Gilpin 1996: p. 6). Anarchy creates an inherently unsafe world. Since states are unable to rely on a higher power to guarantee their security, they aim to increase their own power to either deter or secure themselves from an attack (Waltz 1979: pp. 106-107). Despite the different emphasis on the role of anarchy and power, classical realism and neorealism have a consistent conception of competition among states for limited resources (Legro and Moravcsik 1999: pp. 14-15).

In contrast, liberalism places an importance on certain principles within international relations (Doyle 1986: p. 1152; Doyle 1983a: p. 206). Liberalism promotes many core values at the international level that it does at the domestic level (Doyle 1986: p. 1152; Fukuyama

Similar to realism, liberalism has several variations. The different subsects of liberalism are more diverse than the realist tradition (Doyle 1986: p. 1152; Moravcsik 1997: p. 514; Mowle 2003: p. 566). While debate remains about what constitutes a liberal theory (Moravcsik 1997: pp. 514-515), three main strands are consistently identified: economic interdependence, democratic peace theory, and regulatory liberalism (Nye 1988: p. 246; Walt 1998: p. 32).

Economic interdependence asserts that the growing interconnectedness of the international market helps mitigate conflict (Nye 1988: p. 246; Moravcsik 1997: p. 530). If the future economic prosperities of states are linked, there is less incentive to resort to war (Mearsheimer 1990: p. 41; Walt 1998: p. 32). The second strand of liberalism, the democratic peace theory, premises that democracies are less likely to wage war against one another. As a result, the spread of democracy is linked to increasing peace (Doyle 1986: p. 1151; Mearsheimer 1990: p. 41; Smith 1995: p. 65; Lake 1998: p. 13; Walt 1998: p. 32). Lastly, regulatory liberalism examines how institutions and norms can mitigate conflict within the international realm (Nye 1988: p. 246). Within this approach, a broad concept of international regimes, consisting of norms, procedures, or rules, dictate expectations in international relations (Keohane and Nye 1987: p. 741; Nye 1988: p. 240; Jervis 1999: p. 53). The United Nations, for example, provides a formal framework for states to resolve conflicts peacefully. As a result of formal institutions or informal norms, states can either lower the costs of

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Though there is disparity within both the liberal and realist tradition, points of contention can be discerned. Liberalism holds that there is more opportunity for cooperation within international relations (Nye 1988: p. 250; Moravcsik 1997: p. 520; Jervis 1999: p. 47; Mowle 2003: p. 561). While realism is not inherently violent, it is less optimistic about the conditions of anarchy being overcome (Mowle 2003: p. 561). Connected closely to the liberal emphasis on the possibility for cooperation is the perspective that forces beyond the capabilities of a state can alter the international structure (Powell 1994: p. 338; Dueck 2004: p. 517). All strands of liberalism contend that an outside force, whether it is interconnected economies, democratic norms, or international institutions, can help mitigate anarchy (Keohane and Nye 1987: p. 729; Powell 1994: p. 315; Moravcsik 1997: p.518). Realism does not discount that these factors exist, but rather rejects the liberal conclusion that they can affect relations between states (Waltz 1979: pp. 26, 88; Doyle 1983a: p. 219; Powell 1994: p. 325; Mearsheimer 1990: p. 44; Gilpin 1996: p. 6). From the realist perspective, only the share of power of a state dictates whether it will pursue its interests.

Another point of contention revolves around the major concerns of states. While realism is characterised by the self-interest of a state (Waltz 1979: p. 91), liberalism recognises broader concerns within the international realm (Mowle 2003: pp. 567-568; Mearsheimer 2005: p. 145). As a result, liberalism places a larger emphasis on issues such as collective security and human rights. These points of contention demonstrate that the realist perspective is a more static, narrower, and self-interested viewpoint than liberalism.

*Impact on Foreign Policy*

Liberalism emphasises the link between the promotion of American values, particularly open markets and democracy, and American security (Dueck 2004: p. 532).
Through open markets, states can develop mutually beneficial financial relationships that underpin the economic interdependence strand of liberalism (Doyle 1983a: pp. 231-232; Doyle 1986: p. 1161). The spread of democratic values is associated with the democratic peace theory. If larger segments of the world embrace democratic principles, it is argued that the world broadly, and the United States specifically, will be more secure (Doyle 1986: p. 1151; Layne 1994: p. 46; Lake 1998: p. 13; Dueck 2004: p. 516; Kurth 2005: p. 636; Cram 2015: p. 376). Adherents to the liberal theory contend that principles of free markets and liberal democracies represent the “end of history,” (Fukuyama 1989). Since the end of the Cold War, no other ideology presents a feasible alternative system of government to a liberal democracy. Conflict is inevitable, but the world is slowly transitioning to states which consistently adhere to liberal values (Doyle 1983a: p. 230; Fukuyama 1989). In such a world, the opportunity for conflict is reduced.

Democratic peace theory offers implications for how a liberal state may interact with its autocratic counterparts. Under this theory, alliances between democratic and autocratic states are considered both unstable and inconsistent. The theory posits that because repressive states act in an illegitimate manner with respect to their own citizenship, they will act in a similar unlawful manner in international affairs (Doyle 1986: p. 1161; Homolar 2010: p. 710). As a result, this fosters mistrust between democratic and autocratic states (Doyle 1986: p. 1157). Because of this mistrust, alliances between democratic and non-democratic states are unsustainable (Doyle 1986: p. 1162). While recognising the pragmatic difficulties, Doyle (1983b) also argues that for states to have a foreign policy fully aligned with the liberal ideals, an alliance between an autocratic and a democratic state is impossible. The liberal state cannot accept the human rights violations associated with illiberal state for any reason (pp. 344-345).

Both proponents of liberalism, and realist critics, note that the forcible promotion of democracy can be detrimental to the liberal state itself, local populations affected by war, and the stability of the world order (Nye 1992; Layne 1994: p. 47; Gholz et al. 1997: p. 10). The 2003 War in Iraq reinforces that notion; it has failed thus far in its ultimate goal to establish a functional democracy in Iraq (Cockburn 2014: p. 8). It also fostered resentment across the local population against the United States, and created a power vacuum in the state. Currently, Iraq suffers from sectarian violence and the rise of the Islamic State (Gause 2014a; Cockburn 2014: p. 8). While Saddam Hussein was guilty of massive human rights violations, American military intervention decreased stability within the region. Rather than using forcible military intervention to promote democracy, other adherents to the liberal viewpoint argue for the spread of democracy via peaceful means, such as through institutions (Dueck 2004: p. 516).
Both the empirical evidence and the theoretical explanation behind the idea of democratic peace are rejected by the realist viewpoint. Realists argue that, throughout history, there have been relatively few democracies (Mearsheimer 1990: p. 50). The liberal theory of democratic peace, therefore, rests on little evidence. The definition of democracies is often debated as well. If Germany in 1914 is classified as a democracy, then World War I would be a significant anomaly within the democratic peace theory (Layne 1994: p. 44; Mearsheimer 1990: p. 51; Waltz 1991: p. 669).

Realists also contend that the domestic structure of states fails to impact their international dealings. Layne (1994) argues that in “near-misses” in wars between democracies, the interests of and the relative balance between the two states played a larger role in avoiding war than shared democratic norms (pp. 14, 38). The domestic structure of a state cannot mitigate the competition between states in an anarchical world. Any changes to the structure of international realm result from the alterations in the distribution of power (Morgenthau 1948: p. 30; Waltz 1979: pp. 93, 97; Nye 1988: p. 241; Waltz 1988: p. 618; Mearsheimer 1990: p. 12; Waltz 1991: p. 668; Legro and Moravcsik 1999: p. 34). States are not constrained by norms or other factors, but rather the capabilities of more powerful states within the system (Waltz 1979: p. 72; Doyle 1983a: p. 219; Mearsheimer 1990: pp. 6-7; Gilpin 1996: p. 8; Moravcsik 1997: p. 521).

Besides rejecting the implications of liberalism, realists find liberal thought to be dangerous in some instances (Mearsheimer 2005: p. 143). While liberal thought has gained traction since the end of the Cold War, it remains relatively untested. Today, America is the sole superpower in the world. In the future, power may be more evenly distributed between states. By assuming that other democracies are non-threatening, the United States may not adequately prepare for a rising power (Layne 1994: pp. 48-49). If American foreign policy emphasises liberalism over realism, it could be disastrous for future security implications.

From a realist viewpoint, a substantial military commitment for solely humanitarian intervention or collective security would represent an overextension of power that could endanger both security and prosperity (Gholz et al. 1997: pp. 40, 43).

The necessity of choosing between liberal and realist approaches is often rejected (Lake 1998: p. 11; Schuker 2002: p. 581; Mearsheimer 2005: p. 142; Boyle 2008: p. 207; Brose 2009; Lizza 2011; Atlas 2012: p. 360; Cram 2015: p. 368). It is argued that the United States can find an effective balance between these two theories. In some cases, that may be possible. During World War II, the United States fought for its own security and against Nazism (Mearsheimer 2005: p. 142).

Combining realism and liberalism, however, is more the exception than the rule (Mearsheimer 2005: p. 142; Boyle 2008: p. 207). In particular, promoting democracy within larger segments of the Middle East is significantly risky. Currently within this geographic region, Islamist organisations garner the most public support and have the most anti-American outlook. If democratic reforms were to happen quickly, it is likely that more radical groups would gain power (Huntington 1993: p. 32; Gause 2009; The Economist 3 February
In Egypt, for example, after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood was elected. The episode illustrates the difficult choice the United States would face in a rapidly democratising Middle East. It must choose between engaging with a regime potentially hostile to its interests or rejecting a government that was democratically elected. While the implications of realism and liberalism can be reconciled in some cases, the current political atmosphere of the Middle East makes it difficult.

**Liberalism, Realism and Rhetoric**

The tendency by leaders to justify actions that are consistent with the realist paradigm with liberal rhetoric complicates the relationship between liberalism and realism in foreign policy (Walt 1998: p. 43; Litwak 2000: p. 20; Schuker 2002: p. 581; Leffler 2005: p. 407; Mearsheimer 2005: p. 143; Pressman 2009: pp. 175-176; Homolar 2010: p. 714; Atlas 2012: p. 264; Byman 2013: p. 306). President George H.W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 1991 was framed as an international effort to preserve Kuwaiti sovereignty and promote a “new world order” that renounced aggression (Nye 2002). At the same time, the war also ensured that Hussein would not invade Saudi Arabia, and jeopardise American access to oil (Brands 2004: p. 118). The United States had an economic interest in preserving its supply of reasonably priced oil, but Bush Sr. appealed to more lofty reasoning to justify the war.

Issues arise, however, when a state such as Saudi Arabia that does not fit the mould of a “good” state under the liberal tradition can serve American interests as defined by realism.

Because liberalism and realism may be incompatible, American foreign policy is often perceived as inconsistent (Schuker 2002: p. 581; Boyle 2008: p. 206). This is also illustrated in the different approaches towards democratisation in the Middle East. Because most governments within the Middle East are autocratic governments with a history of human rights violation, the support of those governments conflicts with a liberal foreign policy in a democratic America. Based on both the appeals to American principles within foreign policy as well as the simplistic categorisation of states, it would be expected that Middle Eastern states would be treated comparably with respect to democratisation (Morey et al. 2012: p. 1186). Both Bush and Obama, however, have been criticised for promoting democracy more strongly in unfriendly Middle Eastern countries than in purported allies (Gordon 2003: pp. 159-160; Pressman 2009: pp. 175-176; Jones 2011; Morey et al. 2012: p. 1186). The discrepancy in the push for democracy within the Middle East is likely the result of how different countries serve American realist interests (Jones 2011).
US-Saudi Alliance and the Cold War

During the Cold War, the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States was less complicated. Because the security landscape was defined by the overarching threat of the Soviet Union (Mandelbaum 1996: p. 28; Boyle 2008: p. 194; Yetiv 2008: p. 18; Teitelbaum 2010: p. 1), the strategic interests of the two countries largely aligned during this era; the United States and Saudi Arabia shared a common enemy of the Soviet Union (Pollack 2002: p. 77; Gause and Chanin 2003: p. 121; Long 2004: p. 27; Bronson 2005: p. 123; Bronson 2006: p. 5; Gause 2011: p. 2; Haass 2011: p. viii; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 636).

While the opposition of both countries to the Soviet Union was consistent with realism, the Cold War environment also overshadowed the contradiction of the alliance with liberalism. The United States was committed to the containment of the communist ideology, particularly in the oil rich Middle East (Kunniholm 2002: p. 428; Kurth 2005: p. 636; Yetiv 2008: p. 28). At the same time, a moral opposition to communism that was compatible with the liberal tradition existed in the United States. As a theocracy, Saudi Arabia shared the aim of preventing the spread of the “godless” communism (Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 138). The security of the kingdom was also threatened by Soviet proxies in the region, including Egypt and Yemen (Pollock 2002: p. 79; Bronson 2006: p. 34).

Saudi Arabia was a key ally in protecting American realist interests during the Cold War (Bronson 2006: p. 4). A cornerstone of the United States-Saudi Arabia partnership was oil (Pollack 2002: p. 78; Unger 2004: pp. 58-59; Long 2004: p. 26; Bronson 2005: p. 133; Bronson 2006: p. 15; Yetiv 2008: p. 28; Gause 2011: p. 26; Byman 2013: p. 293; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 141). When Saudi Arabia took control of its oil industry in the 1970’s from American companies (Gause 2011: p.23; Long 2004: p. 28), it was vital to the American economy to maintain a strong relationship with the kingdom. Not only home to the world’s...

Saudi Arabia also had a geostrategic security importance during the Cold War (Unger 2004: p. 59; Bronson 2006: p. 25). After World War II, the anticolonial legacy was strong in the Middle East (Bronson 2006: p. 33). As European powers withdrew, a resulting power vacuum held the potential for Soviet expansion (Kunniholm 2002: p. 429; Yetiv 2008: p. 29). The Saudi and American fear of the growing influence of Moscow resulted in cooperation to stem the communist threat in the Middle East (Bronson 2004: p. 120). When Britain officially withdrew from the Persian Gulf in 1971, the United States was embroiled in Vietnam, with limited options to ensure Middle Eastern stability. As a result, President Nixon relied heavily on arming and supporting regional governments—in particular Iran and Saudi Arabia—to act as counterweights to the Soviet client states in the Middle East (Litwak 2000: p. 57; Kunniholm 2002: p. 429; Yetiv 2008: p. 31; Teitelbaum 2010: p. 10).

During the Cold War, the increasing oil wealth and anti-communist outlook of Saudi Arabia enabled it to fund various proxy conflicts to prevent the spread of communism (Bronson 2006: p. 158). When the American government was restrained from supporting anti-communist movements by Congress or public opinion, Saudi Arabia, as an autocracy, was not subject to those pressures. In those instances, Saudi Arabia supported proxy conflicts that served both American and Saudi security, but were politically unfeasible for the American government (Unger 2004: p. 61). The Saudi funding of proxy conflicts aligned with American security concerns in the Cold War era, but ironically threatened the United States in the long-term. During the 1980’s, Saudi Arabia, along with American help,
supported Islamic extremist groups that eventually defeated Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Bronson 2006: p. 2003; Fisher 2013a). Those same groups, often with continued support from Saudi nationals, later directed attacks at the United States (Unger 2004: p. 177; Cockburn 2014: p. 104).

The US-Saudi cooperation on security issues during the Cold War was not limited to funding proxy conflicts. At the end of World War II, President Truman assured King Saud that the United States would protect Saudi Arabia against external aggression (Yetiv 2008: p. 28). The kingdom faced varying threats from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Iran, but lacked the military means to protect itself (Long 2004: p. 27). The United States initially tried to arm regional allies, but eventually provided explicit guarantees to Persian Gulf allies via the Carter Doctrine (Litwak 2000: p. 27; Kunhiholm 2002: p. 430; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 638). Announced in 1980, the Carter Doctrine stated that any aggression in Persian Gulf was considered an attack on American interests, and would necessitate a military response (Stork 1980: p. 3). Beyond security guarantees, the United States also became the primary supplier of weaponry for the kingdom (Pollack 2002: p. 83; Bronson 2006: p. 34; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: pp. 637-638; Blanchard 2014: pp. 8-9).

Before 1980, the United States had insufficient capability to deploy its military in the Gulf region (Yetiv 2008: p. 47). Under Carter and continuing afterwards, the United States undertook efforts to create a military infrastructure in Saudi Arabia to allow the United States to project military power in the region (Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 142; Yetiv 2008: p. 79; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 635). The improved infrastructure was consistent with realist principles for both countries. While allowing the United States to improve its military capabilities, it provided Saudi Arabia with increased protection from regional military threats.

Despite the close alignment of American and Saudi strategic interests, the Arab-Israeli conflict remained a point of tension between the two countries (Pollack 2002: p. 77; Gause

While the Arab-Israeli conflict caused recurring strain, the threat of communism remained the most pressing concern (Bahgat 2009: p. 181; Pollack 2002: p. 80). Besides necessitating a series of shared strategic interests consistent with realism, the opposition to communism overshadowed the contradiction of the Saudi-American relationship with liberalism. Partly, this resulted from an emphasis on practical interests over morality during the Cold War. Because the Soviet Union was deemed to be such a substantial threat, the human rights abuses associated Gulf allies were downplayed (Yetiv 2008: p. 37). Beyond realist interests, communism itself was considered immoral by the American government (Leffler 2005: p. 411; Boyle 2008: p. 194; Cram 2015: pp. 367, 375). Because Saudi Arabia was opposed to the communist ideology, its autocratic nature may not have been as controversial.

In addition to its opposition to the Soviet Union, the Saudi religiosity was not a hindrance during this era, but rather an asset (Bronson 2005: pp. 122-123; Bronson 2006: pp. 35, 241; Hunter 2007: p. 505). Because communism was an atheist ideology, it was incompatible with the Saudi theocracy (Saikal 2004: p. 22). As the home to two of the three holiest cities in Islam, Saudi Arabia possessed a certain amount of religious authority in the largely Muslim Middle East (Bronson 2006: p. 7; Smith 2006: p. 102; Campbell and Yetiv
2007: p. 138; Yetiv 2008: p. 38; Bahgat 2013: p. 567). During this era, the United States believed it could leverage that religious authority to combat communism (Saikal 2004: p. 25; Bronson 2006: p. 133). The shared antipathy against the communist ideology, and the usefulness of Islam as a counterweight to communism, made the incompatibility of the alliance with liberalism less important.

**US-Saudi Alliance and the Gulf War**

While the Cold War created an alignment of American and Saudi interests, Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent Gulf War offered another opportunity for cooperation. Despite the crippling Iran-Iraq War that raged in the 1980’s, Iraq still maintained the strongest conventional army in the Gulf arena (Smith 2006: p. 94; Yetiv 2008: p. 25). By gaining control of Kuwait, Hussein demonstrated expansionist tendencies, secured access to additional oil supply, and freed Iraq from the burden of paying Kuwait wartime debts. Hussein’s invasion and annexation of Kuwait had troubling implications for other vulnerable countries in the Middle East (Moberly 1992: p. 1037; Brands 2004: p. 117). Saudi Arabia’s position was particularly precarious (Brands 2004: p. 117; Yetiv 2008: p. 80). Not only did the kingdom border Iraq, but the Saudi substantial oil reserves would have allowed Hussein to dominate the Gulf oil supplies (Brands 2004: 118; Yetiv 2008: p.80). Saudi Arabia feared it would be the next target.

An Iraqi expansion into Saudi Arabia would have endangered American interests based on the realist worldview. Most notably, an annexation of Saudi Arabia would have threatened the supply of reasonably priced oil (Moberly 1992: p. 1038). The addition of Saudi oil to the Iraqi and Kuwaiti reserves would have resulted in Iraqi control over seventy percent of Gulf oil (Brands 2004: p. 118). If Hussein consolidated the Gulf oil, he could have easily manipulated both price and production (Moberly 1992: p. 1038; Gholz et al. 1997: p. 27; Yetiv 2008: p. 7). Limiting American access to reasonably priced oil would have had
devastating economic consequences (Gholz et al. 1997: p. 25; Litwak 2000: p. 56; Brands 2004: p. 131; Yetiv 2008: p. 81). Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and possible aggression towards other Gulf states, was viewed as a threat to American prosperity.

American and Saudi security interests closely aligned in the Gulf War, resulting in a partnership consistent with realism. The threat to Saudi territorial integrity allowed for much closer cooperation. Because Saudi Arabia lacked the means to forcefully expel Iraq from Kuwait, it was necessary for America to intervene militarily. While the United States had undertaken efforts in previous years to build substantial military infrastructure in the kingdom, there were concerns about religious objections from stationing American forces within Saudi Arabia. Despite his apprehension, King Fahd allowed American troops on Saudi territory during the first Gulf War (Moberly 1992: p.1042; 9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 57; Bronson 2006: p. 195; Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 142; Yetiv 2008: pp. 81-82). Saudi Arabia also took on the financial burden of war effort (Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 640). The close cooperation during the Gulf War has been noted as the high point of the alliance (Bronson 2006: p. 203; Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 142).

The obvious American economic interest in securing access to oil was consistent with realism, but Hussein’s blatant transgression of international law allowed for the American intervention to be framed as aligning with liberalism as well. Hussein’s violation of Kuwaiti sovereignty provided a morally justifiable reason to intervene (Moberly 1992: p. 1038; Litwak 2000: p. 56; Yetiv 2009: pp. 84-86; Homolar 2010: p. 714). At the same time, the nature of the intervention was consistent with the liberal interpretation of foreign policy. During the Gulf War, the United States did not act unilaterally. Instead, it obtained a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution for the use of force, and gathered a coalition of thirty-four partners (Klare 1998: p. 14; Yetiv 2008: p. 86; Homolar 2010: p. 713). By utilising a multilateral strategy in the Gulf War, the United States demonstrated how the
UNSC could deter blatant aggression (Moberly 1992: p. 1038; Homolar 2010: p. 713). Both the rationale and the conduct of the war were considered appropriate under international law. As a result, the Gulf War was consistent with both the liberal and realist conceptions of international affairs.
Chapter 3: Methods

A case study methodology is used to analyse the validity of the claim that the Saudi policy of the Bush administration was guided by personal motives. Alternatives to the theory that Bush was guided by his personal and financial relationship are that his policy was motivated by the implications of the liberal or realist theories. Based on the fundamental differences in the system of governments and values of the two nations, the liberal theory is less likely to play a role. In contrast, the historically intertwined economic and security relationships between the two countries suggests that the Saudi policy under Bush may have been guided by realism.

The Saudi connections to the Bush administration are supposedly unique. As a result, if they had played a substantial role in the policy formation under Bush, then there should be a corresponding variation in the relations under the three administrations (Tepperman 2004). Conversely, if the policies of the three presidents remain relatively consistent, it suggests that an alternative explanation behind the US-Saudi alliance under Bush was responsible.

To gather a clear picture of the US-Saudi alliance under Clinton, Bush, and Obama, primary and secondary sources are used. Statements by all three presidents and representatives of their administrations are analysed, particularly from the Public Papers of the President Archive and the White House site. Other critical primary sources are the national security strategies of all three presidencies, the 9/11 Commission Report, and congressional testimony. Primary sources are supplemented with secondary sources, including newspaper articles, journal articles, and books, all of which help formulate a more comprehensive picture of the Saudi policy under all three presidents.

The narrow scope and the focus on causal mechanisms of this investigation make the case study an appropriate research method. Within a case study, generalizations are often sacrificed to explore the unique factors of the case (George and Bennett 2004: p. 22;
Steinberg 2007: p. 185; Gerring 2013: pp. 10, 48-49). Because the focus of this study centres on the motivations of three administrations, the in-depth knowledge of the small selection of cases is appropriate. Case studies also provide insight into what causal mechanisms are at play, while more general, larger sample studies focus on the measured causal effect (George and Bennett 2004: p. 21; Steinberg 2007: pp. 182, 185; Falleti and Lynch 2009: p. 1144; Gerring 2013: pp. 43-44). Lending itself to a case study format, the aim is to determine if the Saudi ties to the Bush administration, or alternative explanations, are the causal mechanism in the formation of the policy.

\textit{Drawbacks}

Both the methodology and the evidence of the study presents obstacles. Despite the suitability of the case study method, it inherently sacrifices generalizability (George and Bennett 2004: p. 31; Gerring 2013: p. 76). Implications surrounding the foundation of the alliance are limited to the three administrations examined. While a consistent theoretical explanation between the policies of Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations would point to a larger trend in the US-Saudi relationship, further study to substantiate that generalization would be needed.

In addition to difficulties with the methodology, the sources gathered present another complication. Identifying causal mechanisms within case studies is often easier in older cases because larger amounts of information are available (Tannenwald 2015: p. 221). Within this study, the focus is on American presidents whose administrations recently ended, or are still in office. Because the study focuses on current cases, there is potential for deficits in the information from documents remaining classified. Additionally, because certain aspects of international relations occur clandestinely, relevant documents may never be available (George and Bennett 2004: p. 104). Despite this hurdle, large amounts of information on all three administrations are identified and analysed. Due to the prominence of the Middle East
in American foreign policy, especially after the September 11th attacks, there is a substantial amount of information in the public domain about the relationship of the three administrations and Saudi Arabia. A later examination may benefit from access to new sources, but the study is able to establish a comprehensive overview of the US-Saudi alliance under the three administrations.

Bias is another drawback to the sources used in the case study (Bennett 2015: p. 231). Within this study, both the primary and secondary sources are examined with a degree of scepticism. Public statements by politicians are often tailored to a particular audience. In addition, authors of secondary sources may have underlying motivations for writing (George and Bennett 2004: pp. 100-103; Atkinson and Coffey 2011: p. 78). While the potential for bias does not invalidate any of the sources, one must account for the viewpoint of the authors when examining documents. Careful analysis by the researcher, as well as drawing from a large range of resources, helps mitigate this risk (George and Bennett 2004: p. 102; Prior 2011: p. 98).
Chapter 4: Case Study

The results of the case study strongly suggest that the financial and personal ties of the Bush administration did not significantly alter the US-Saudi partnership. Instead, while the partnership remains inconsistent with the liberal paradigm, realist implications played the major role in the US-Saudi alliance under Clinton, Bush and Obama.

This chapter is divided into six sections. In the first two sections, the personal and financial ties between Saudi Arabia and the administrations of Bush, Obama, and Clinton are explored. While the monetary relationships of the three presidents with Saudi Arabia varied greatly, Bush had the strongest financial links to the kingdom. Bush also had the closest personal ties with members of the Saudi royal family, but those relationships have been overemphasised.

The next four sections examine the approach of the three administrations to crucial areas of the US-Saudi relationship—counterterrorism, arms deals, oil, and reforms. Among all four policy areas, there is continuity between the policies of Bush and that of his successor and predecessor. The US-Saudi alliance was consistently guided by realist, not liberal, principles under all three presidents.

Financial Ties

In the United States, monetary relationships between public officials and businesses and foreign governments are scrutinised to prevent undue influence. Foreign governments are banned from directly contributing to governmental campaigns (Helderman and Hamburg 2015), but are allowed to lobby the American government. Saudi Arabia has spent millions of dollars in lobbying the United States (Lacey 2009: p. 73). The Saudi embassy spent $1.9 million in payments to a lobbying firm in 2013 alone (The Sunlight Foundation).

Beyond direct lobbying, the “revolving door” between the public and private sector raises serious ethical questions. Individuals that move from the public to the private sector
have the ability to leverage their contacts to produce government business (Unger 2004: pp. 225-226; Cillizza 2015). The shift from private firms to government service also holds the same potential for a conflict of interest. Associates of the Bush administration had ties to two private industries connected to Saudi Arabia—the oil and defence industries (Unger 2004: p. 199).

While the financial relationships of the Bush administration held the potential for personal gain for Bush and his associates, the existence of these ties alone are not a sufficient indication that the Saudi policy under Bush was financially motivated (Kuhn 2004; Tepperman 2004). From 1987 to 2003, Unger (2004) estimated that $1.4 billion was exchanged between those close to the Saudi royal family and those associated with Bush (p. 200). While these financial relationships deserve scrutiny, these links revolve around two of the traditional cornerstones of the US-Saudi relationship—oil and defence. Because these industries have been major partners with the Saudis before Bush ascended to office, the financial transactions do not necessarily indicate corruption.

Both Bush and Bush Sr. amassed significant personal wealth in the oil industry (Cave 2001). During their tenure in the oil business, Saudis invested in the ventures of both the elder and younger Bush (Tepperman 2004). The connections with the energy sector extended into Bush’s cabinet, as the vice-president, national security advisor, and secretary of commerce were all highly placed executives of oil or gas companies prior to their positions in the Bush administration (Cave 2001; Unger 2004: p. 222).

In addition to oil, associates of the Bush administration had ties to the defence industry, largely stemming from the private equity firm, the Carlyle Group (Cave 2001; Unger 2004: pp. 169, 199). After Bush Sr. left office, both he and his Secretary of State, James Baker, began working for this investment firm. While Bush Sr. and Baker never directly participated in arms deals, it is alleged that their position at the firm helped garner
more Saudi defence business (Unger 2004: p. 167). The Carlyle Group held significant shares in defence contractors, which often sold arms to Saudi Arabia (Unger 2004: p. 169).

Obama has taken a strong stance against the potential influence of financial relationships on public policy decisions. When a member of the United States Senate, Obama pushed for stricter regulations concerning ethics and lobbying (Birnbaum 2006). While campaigning for president, Obama criticised the relationship between oil companies and then Vice-President Dick Cheney (Obama 2007; Obama 2008). Obama’s condemnation of Cheney focused on a perceived disregard for the environment, and not foreign policy. But, it demonstrated Obama’s discomfort with the possible influence of financial relationship on public policy.

After his election, Obama continued to pursue limitations on the influence of business relationships. In January 2009, he signed an executive order that required all executive post appointees to sign an ethics agreement that limited gifts from lobbyists and attempted to close the “revolving door” between government and the private sector (Obama 2009a). In his 2012 State of the Union address, Obama once again highlighted the importance of limiting the “corrosive influence of money in politics,” calling for a ban on public officials owning stocks in industries they influenced (Obama 2012).

Any perceived conflict of interest between Saudi money and the Obama administration would arise from the appointment of Hillary Clinton, his first Secretary of State and wife of Bill Clinton. The foundation formed by H. Clinton and her husband received donations from foreign governments, including Saudi Arabia. When she accepted her post, H. Clinton agreed to discontinue donations from foreign government, except those that were approved by the State Department (Grimaldi and Ballhaus 2015; Hellederman and Hamburger 2015). Saudi Arabia donated between $10 and $25 million to the foundation, but discontinued donations once H. Clinton assumed her post (Grimaldi and Ballhaus 2015;
Speculation remained that prior donations influenced H. Clinton’s approval of weapons sales to Saudi Arabia in her role as Secretary of State (Sirota and Perez 2015).

With respect to financial ties, the Clinton administration falls between the two poles of the Bush and Obama administrations. Clinton was not associated with any businesses that had significant involvement with Saudi Arabia like Bush nor was he as outspoken against the influence of financial donations on public policy as Obama. Clinton solicited the Saudi government for a donation to the University of Arkansas when he was governor, and in 1989, secured a $23 million to establish a Middle East Centre (Weiner 1993; Lacey 2009: p. 214). While the donation was more direct than the financial relationships of the Bush administration, it did not personally enrich Clinton.

**Personal Ties**

Personal ties between the Bush family and the Saudi royal family have also been questioned. In particular, the close relationship between the former Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and Bush Sr. has been seen as an avenue for the Saudi government to obtain greater influence. The focus on the Bandar-Bush connection obscures many of the nuances of the Saudi relationship. Close personal friendships may hold the potential for undue influence, but they can also ease diplomatic relationships (Brown 2015). Moreover, Bandar was only one member in the royal family, albeit in a crucial role. Bandar did not perfectly reflect Saudi interest, nor did the status of his relationship with an American president dictate that of other members of the royal family. Lastly, Bandar stepped down from his post as ambassador in 2005, and therefore, his influence upon the Bush administration was limited to half the time Bush was in office.

Although Bandar was a close personal friend to Bush Sr., that did not translate into a strong relationship with his son. When Bush ascended office, the US-Saudi partnership was
tested (Ottaway 2009: p. 160). It was strained first by an American bombing of Iraq, in which
warplanes launched from the kingdom without Saudi consent (Ottaway 2009: p. 160). Later
in the first year, King Abdullah was infuriated by the apparent lack of interest in the
Palestinian-Israeli conflict by the Bush administration (Unger 2004: pp. 241-242; Bronson

Bandar’s influence failed to stop Bush from taking actions contrary to Saudi interests
that benefited the United States. Both American actions were consistent with a realist view of
foreign policy. The airstrike was a retaliatory response to Iraqi attempts to shoot down
American planes, so it aligned with principles on security. On the other hand, the deliberate
disassociation from the Arab-Israeli conflict resulted from Bush’s contention that the peace
process was a futile attempt that did not directly impact upon American security or prosperity
(Bahgat 2009: p. 185; Ottaway 2009: p. 159).

Still, Bandar served Bush well in some cases. When King Abdullah threatened to end
Saudi relations, Bandar was shocked by the aggressive tone he was ordered to deliver
(Ottaway 2009: p. 164). Bandar delivered the content of the message, but tailored it to be
more effective to the American audience (Lacey 2009: p. 220). Bush responded quickly with
a letter to King Abdullah, and relations improved. It was Bandar’s familiarity with the Bush
administration that proved to be an asset in preventing a complete break between the two
countries.

In contrast, Clinton appeared to have professional relationships with members of the
Saudi government, but not personal friendships. Clinton is often noted as having a distant
relationship with Bandar (Lacey 2009: p. 214; Ottaway 2009: p. 122). Some claim that the
strain was the result of an apparently more forceful approach to counterterrorism under
Clinton. The difficulties in the relationship between Clinton and Bandar can also be the result
of Bandar’s demonstrated preference for Bush Sr. (Lacey 2009: p. 215). On the night Clinton
was elected, Bandar was with Bush Sr., despite diplomatic tradition that ambassadors should remain neutral (Lacey 2009: p. 215). Bandar’s clear partiality would not have endeared him to the Clinton administration.

Clinton had a better, albeit professional, relationship with other Saudi royal family members. When he visited the kingdom in 1994, King Fahd awarded Clinton the highest honour, the King Abdul Aziz Medal (Ottaway 2009: p. 129). Had Clinton’s troublesome relationship with Bandar been the result of increased pressure on the kingdom, it is likely that all members of the royal family would have distanced themselves.

Bandar resigned from his post as the American ambassador in 2005, and has not been a factor in the Obama administration. Despite the departure of Bandar, Obama recognised the value of cordial relationships to foreign policy. When King Abdullah passed away in early 2015, Obama shortened a trip to India to pay respects to the late King and meet the new monarch, King Salman (The Guardian 24 January 2015). The importance of the visit was highlighted by it following shortly after the contentious decision by the Obama administration to not send any representatives to the memorial honouring those killed in the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks (Buncombe 2015; The Telegraph 12 January 2015; The Guardian 24 January 2015). Obama’s statement after Abdullah’s death also specifically mentioned that Obama “valued King Abdullah’s perspective and appreciated our genuine and warm friendship,” (Obama 2015c). While public statements should be taken with a degree of scepticism, the sentiment indicated a recognition by the Obama administration of the importance to American policy of amicable relationships with Saudi Arabia.

Compared to Bush, the Saudi relationships with Clinton and Obama appear professional rather than personal. Despite this discrepancy, the role of personal friendships in the Bush policy towards Saudi Arabia are often overemphasised. The influence of Bandar, a close friend of Bush Sr., failed to stop Bush from taking actions counter to Saudi interests,
but that friendship also helped alleviate tension in some cases. While there is a discrepancy between the personal ties of Bush and that of Clinton and Obama, it appears that the Saudi friendships of Bush associates did not negatively impact American policy towards Saudi Arabia.

Counterterrorism

The revelation that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers of the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks were Saudi nationals raised profound questions within the United States about the utility of a continued partnership with Saudi Arabia. (The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2001: p. 1; Pollack 2002: p. 89; Bronson 2006: p. 5; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 146). Allegations were made that Bush failed to pursue a tough counterterrorism policy towards Saudi Arabia because of his financial and personal ties (Unger 2004: pp. 200-201, 284-285). This criticism fails to withstand scrutiny when the conduct of the Bush administration is compared to Clinton and Obama. Despite the inconsistency of the values between the two nations, collaboration on counterterrorism continued under all three presidencies because it provided security benefits. The realist tradition, not liberalism or the relationships of the Bush administration, best explains the counterterrorism policies of Bush, and those of Clinton and Obama.

Throughout the tenures of Clinton, Bush, and Obama, the Saudi counterterrorism partnership provided flawed results. The difficulties of the partnership did not occur because Bush was lenient, but rather, were the result of the motivations behind Saudi cooperation. There was an underlying logic behind US-Saudi counterterrorism cooperation that was consistent with realism. Because many Islamic fundamentalism ideologies designate both Saudi Arabia and the United States as enemies, it represents a danger to the security of both nations (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 372; Blanchard and Prados 2007: p. 2; Lacey 2009: p. 228; al-Saud 2010: p. 74; Teitelbaum 2010: pp. 22-23; Gause 2011: p. 28; Fisher
2013b; Gause 2014; Blanchard 2015: p. 8). Despite this shared threat, the United States and Saudi Arabia did not necessarily align on the approach to counterterrorism (Bronson 2006: p. 6; Fisher 2013a; Blanchard 2015: p. 20). Saudi counterterrorism cooperation occurred when the end results served the security of the kingdom as well as America, and became more tentative when the expected outcome negatively impacted the kingdom. Despite the erratic nature of Saudi cooperation, it served American efforts against terrorism.

During all the three administrations, the level of cooperation from the Saudi government fluctuated. In the Clinton era, the Saudi government was not forthcoming about information surrounding the Khobar Towers bombing within the kingdom that killed nineteen Americans (Pollack 2002: p. 85; Unger 2004: p. 176; Bronson 2006: p. 216; Blanchard and Prados 2007: p. 22; Ottaway 2008: p. 134; Lacey 2009: p. 215) On the other hand, the Saudi government was an active partner in the American attempt to extradite Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan prior to the September 11th attacks (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 115). After September 11th, the Saudi government played a more significant role in intelligence sharing during both the Bush and Obama administrations (Prados 2005: p. 2; Gendron 2010: p. 499; Obama 2013). The Bush administration also praised Saudi law enforcement agencies for pursuing and detaining terrorists (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 2005; The White House 2006b: p. 11). During the Obama administration, Saudi Arabia served as a drone base to undertake strikes against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Stone 2012; Fisher 2013b). Despite these benefits to American security, Saudi Arabia continues to promote a radical strain of Islam that threatens the West (Gause and Chanin 2003: p. 123; Bronson 2006: p. 148; Gendron 2010: pp. 495, 499; Shapiro and Sokolsky 2015). An aspect of counterterrorism cooperation that encompasses many of these contradictions of the inconsistent, but beneficial, partnership is terrorism financing.

The claim that the Clinton administration pressured Saudi Arabia more forcefully in the role of terrorism financing appears to be unsubstantiated (Bronson and Unger 2004). Throughout the Clinton administration, there were attempts to broadly combat terrorism financing (The White House 2000). These initiatives, however, were slow to be implemented officially, and did not focus extensively on Saudi Arabia. Clinton’s counterterrorism coordinator, Richard Clarke, established a plan to combat al-Qaeda in 1998 that included targeting its financial sources. While Clarke continued to be guided by this plan, it was never formally adopted (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 120). It was only in 1999 that the National Security Council (NSC) designated the need to curb terrorism financing as a major
initiative (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 185). The NSC focused largely on bin Laden’s personal wealth, and not the flow of donations from the kingdom. It was only discovered in 2000, the last year of Clinton’s tenure, that al-Qaeda was not personally funded by bin Laden (9/11 Commission Report 2004: pp. 170, 186). Upon that discovery, the Central Intelligence Agency suspected that al-Qaeda was dependent upon private donations and charities, but failed to identify concrete sources (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 186; Bronson 2006: pp. 225-226).

Upon taking office, the Bush administration had other defence policy priorities than al-Qaeda (Bronson and Unger 2004; 9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 199). As a result, the administration was slow to recognise the threat of terrorism (Bronson and Unger 2004; 9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 205). Despite that lack of focus, by June 7th of Bush’s first term, there was a presidential directive draft aimed at combating al-Qaeda that included an instruction for the Treasury Department to curb terrorism financing (9/11 Commission Report 2004: pp. 204-205). After the September 11th attacks, there was naturally an increased urgency to counter al-Qaeda. The June 7th draft was transformed into National Security Presidential Directive 9, signed on October 25, 2011. This directive mandated a disruption of funds to al-Qaeda and other organisations (9/11 Commission Report 2004: pp. 333-334). Throughout the Bush administration, the emphasis on terrorism financing continued (The White House 2002: pp. 5-6; The White House 2003: p. 11; The White House 2006a; The White House 2006b: p. 8). Based on documents regarding counterterrorism policy, the Bush administration was concerned with terrorism financing both immediately and consistently after the September 11th attacks. Terrorism financing posed a significant threat to the security of the United States, and Bush’s actions to mitigate its effects were consistent with the realist school of thought.
Despite Bush’s efforts, Saudi Arabia was slow to cooperate with American efforts to combat terrorism financing in the kingdom (Bronson and Unger 2004; 9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 373; Blanchard and Prados 2007: p. 23; Gendron 2010: p. 491). The slow pace of reform did not reflect a capitulation by Bush to Saudi Arabia. Rather, it demonstrated the role of Saudi preferences in the counterterrorism partnership with the United States, and the limited options at the disposal of the American government to alter the kingdom’s behaviour. Because charitable donations are one of the five pillars of Islam, governmental oversight can be interpreted as an obstruction to practicing Islam (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 372). Since the legitimacy of the Saudi regime is based on its religious credentials, there are domestic pressures against auditing charitable donations (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 372; Blanchard and Prados 2007: p. 28; Campbell and Yetiv 2007: pp. 140, 146). Cooperating on terrorism financing with the United States had the potential to undermine Saudi internal security, and therefore, its initial reluctance aligned with realist implications.

The turning point in terrorism financing, and Saudi cooperation terrorism in general, was similarly driven by realist concerns. In May 2003, al-Qaeda perpetrated an attack on Saudi soil, underscoring the danger the organisation posed to the kingdom (Black 2004; Bronson 2006: p. 243; Blanchard and Prados 2007: p. 22; Stone 2012). Because the threat to the kingdom was now apparent, the government became cooperative in stemming the funds to al-Qaeda (9/11 Commission Report 2004: p. 373; Bronson 2006: p. 243). In 2004, congressional testimony to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia highlighted several achievements the kingdom made—including the establishment of a Joint Task Force on terrorist financing with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and additional oversight of charitable donations (Black 2004). The new motivation, combined with improved training provided by the United States, brought marked improvement in terms of terrorist financing cooperation (Black 2004; Bronson 2006: pp. 244-
The improved cooperation enhanced American abilities to stem terrorist financing, providing security benefits to the United States. The cooperation in countering terrorist financing continued, despite difficulties, because both nations were motivated by realist concerns about security.


In the Obama administration, both the focus on terrorism financing (The White House 2010: p. 20), and the halting cooperation with Saudi Arabia continued. In 2010, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) report recognised that the kingdom prosecuted and convicted terrorism financiers with some success (2010: p. 40). Despite these efforts by the kingdom, major concerns about donations remain (Blanchard 2015: p. 10). The same 2010 FATF report cited issues with the Saudi framework for freezing terrorism funds as well as dealing with cash transfers (pp. 7-8). There was also substantial evidence that Saudi Arabia financially supported Sunni extremist groups within the Syrian civil war (Atlas 2012: p. 374; Cockburn 2014: pp. 34-37; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 147). The partnership continues despite difficulties because the limited assistance diminished the financial support of terrorist organizations. Similar to the Bush administration, the terrorism financing policy towards Saudi Arabia remained based on realist motivations under Obama.
Initially after the September 11th attacks, Saudi Arabia was slow to reform the financial system that allowed al-Qaeda to gather funds. Bush was characterised as neglecting American security by not pressuring the kingdom to staunch terrorism financing more quickly (Unger 2004: pp. 261-263). Upon examination of all three administrations, none of them were fully successful in cutting off all sources of funding within the kingdom. There was an increased focus on terrorism financing under Bush and Obama, but that reflected the security needs after September 11th. The difficulties faced by all three reflected the reality of limited options to coerce the Saudi government to cooperate when the kingdom deemed the action counterproductive to its own security. The results from Saudi cooperation, when it did occur, aided American anti-terrorism efforts. The joint counterterrorism efforts under all three administrations continued because of those mutual security benefits, indicating that the policies under all three presidents conform to realist principles.

The policies towards terrorism financing and the amount of pressure towards Saudi Arabia is relatively consistent among the three administrations. The strongest resistance towards the Saudi change of policy concerns the kingdom’s own security. The consistency across the three administrations indicates that Bush was not deferential to the kingdom in terms of terrorism financing. Rather, it demonstrates that the kingdom is an imperfect but useful partner that is strongly motivated by its own security in counterterrorism. As a result, the counterterrorism partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia is consistent with the realist paradigm.

**9/11 Commission Report Classification**

In addition to criticism surrounding the Bush administration’s terrorism financing efforts, controversy arose from Bush’s decision to classify a section of the *9/11 Commission Report*. Twenty-eight pages of the report supposedly detail financial relationships between Saudi royalty and al-Qaeda (Jacoby 2004). Bush censored those pages by citing national
security concerns, which has been characterised as evidence of his deference to the Saudis (Jacoby 2004; Unger 2004: pp. 280-281; Wright 2014). Under Obama, those pages remain classified (Wright 2014) despite Obama’s commitment to balance national security concerns with increased transparency (The White House 2010: pp. 38-39). That suggests that there were other considerations for the classification besides Bush’s relationship with Saudis.

An alternative theory is that, while those pages did indicate a financial relationship between Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda hijackers, those claims are unsubstantiated (Wright 2014). Because those twenty-eight pages are not verifiable, it is argued that Bush and Obama did not release them for fear it would strain the bilateral relationship which, while difficult, benefits American security and its economy (Wright 2014). Based on the American system for classifying information, records should remain secret if deemed damaging to foreign relations (Office of the Press Secretary 2009). Ultimately, it may have been determined that interfering with the US-Saudi relationship would be more detrimental to American interests than classifying those pages. Because the decision was consistent across both administrations and aligns with realism, it is unlikely that Bush had an ulterior motive.

**Arms Sales**

Arms sales to the kingdom have been characterised as another instance of financial relationships intruding upon foreign policy. During the Bush administration, there were suggestions that Saudi arms deals resulted from associates of the Bush administration benefiting financially from Saudi defence contracts (Unger 2004: pp. 200-201). A similar conflict of interest arose during the Obama administration. When H. Clinton was Secretary of State, she approved millions of dollars of arms deals to the Saudis. Because of large Saudi donations to her foundation before she assumed the Secretary of State position, there were allegations that she was swayed in her decision by that financial connection (Sirota and Perez 2015). While Saudi arms sales are inconsistent with the liberal paradigm, they conform to the
realistic approach. Consistently throughout the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, arms sales continued to Saudi Arabia because of military and economic benefits.

Saudi Arabia appears to be an unsuitable recipient of American arms under the liberal interpretation of international relations because of the repressive nature of the Saudi regime and its Wahhabi ideology (Unger 2004: p. 201; Sirota and Perez 2015). When the United States government approves an arms deal, one factor it considers is the record on human rights of the recipient country (Office of the Press Secretary 1995; Office of the Press Secretary 2014a; Sirota and Perez 2015). The Saudi record on human rights has been consistently poor (Atlas 2012: p. 357; Fisher 2013a). In 2014, Saudi Arabia received the lowest possible rating from The Freedom House in terms of political and civil rights, one of only nine nations to receive that score (The Freedom House 2014; Taylor 2015).

Though Saudi arms deals are inconsistent with American values, arms sales serve American economic and military interests aligned with realism. Arms sales to Saudi Arabia have been an aspect of the US-Saudi partnership since its inception (Bronson 2006: p. 34). During the oil embargo of 1973, the Nixon administration attempted to increase Saudi investment in the American economy. The aim of that effort was to regain part of the substantial amount of money spent on Saudi oil and to link Saudi prosperity to the American economy to deter another embargo (Bronson 2006: pp. 125-127; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: pp. 634, 636-637). As part of the initiative, the United States encouraged Saudi investment in the defence industry (Bronson 2006: p. 127; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 635).

The economic importance of arms exports became even more crucial after the Cold War. Without the threat of the Soviet Union, defence contractors faced declining domestic demand. Exports to outside countries, such as Saudi Arabia, served as an opportunity to bolster the market of American defence contractors (Lancaster 1994; Stork 1995: p. 17;
Pollack 2002: p. 84; Bronson 2006: p. 208). During the 1992 presidential campaign, both Bush Sr. and Clinton supported a $5 billion sale of F-15’s to Saudi Arabia because it would sustain jobs and stimulate the economy (Stork 1995: p. 16). Saudi arms purchases declined midway through Clinton’s tenure, but that resulted from the Saudi struggling economy rather than any reluctance by Clinton to provide weapons (Grimmett 2001: p. 4; Pollack 2002: p. 83). Despite that decline, Saudi Arabia was the largest arms market during the Clinton administration (Grimmett 2001: p. 47; Federation of American Scientists 2002). Under Bush and Obama, Saudi Arabia remained the top purchaser of American arms (Grimmett 2009: p. 43; Grimmett and Kerr 2012: p. 45).

Beyond the economic dimension, arms deals with Saudi Arabia provided security benefits (Mason 2014: p. 34). Selling arms to Saudi Arabia increased the interoperability of equipment if the American military needed to base an attack from the kingdom (Stork 1995: p. 17). The document outlining arms sales throughout all three administrations consistently noted interoperability as a primary principle (Office of the Press Secretary 1995; Ruggiero 2008; Office of the Press Secretary 2014a). During the Clinton and Bush administrations, Saudi bases were crucial in actual military operations. Though Clinton struggled to gain Saudi approval for each military mission in the Middle East during his tenure (Bronson 2006: p. 231), Saudi air bases were instrumental to the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Iraq. Under Bush, the compatible infrastructure of Saudi Arabia was once again vital to American military operations during the Iraq War of 2003 (Bronson and Unger 2004).

Figure 1 below depicts military purchases, including arms and defence services, by Saudi Arabia under the three presidencies. Throughout the three administrations, military sales remained relatively consistent. The one anomaly occurs not during the Bush administration, but rather under the Obama administration in 2012. Had Bush administration
been motivated financial relationships, there would have likely been a corresponding increase in military transfers during his tenure that the data does not reflect.

The outlier during 2012 in Figure 1 represents a portion of the US-Saudi arms agreement worth $60 billion—the largest arms deal in American history (Black 2010). Despite the donations to H. Clinton’s foundation, other factors outside this financial relationship explain the arms deal. The economic and security benefits of the sale are the likely motivation (Ukman 2011). Not only did the arms agreement sustain 75,000 American jobs, but the delivery of weapons to Saudi Arabia bolstered its ability to militarily counter Iran (Black 2010; Tepperman 2010; Ukman 2011).

**Figure 1:** Annual US Military Sales to Saudi Arabia during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama Administrations


Within the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, there have been significant economic and military advantages to Saudi arms deals. As a result, their policies towards arms transfers with Saudi Arabia have been fairly consistent with both each other and realism. The continuity in policy between the administrations, as well as the benefits to American interests, contradicts the claim that Bush was motivated by financial relationships.
Oil

Similar to arms sales, significant relationships between members of the Bush administration and the oil industry were perceived as influencing the policy formation towards Saudi Arabia (Bronson and Unger 2004; Unger 2004: p. 223). In particular, Cheney’s former employer, Halliburton, conducted business with Saudi Arabia (Unger 2004: pp. 225-226). Throughout the history of the US-Saudi partnership, however, oil was a main component (Pollack 2002: p. 78; Gause and Chanin 2003: p. 116; Long 2004: p. 26; Unger 2004: pp. 58-59; Gause 2011: p. 2; Haass 2011: p. viii; Byman 2013: p. 293; Gutfeld and Zumbrunnen 2013: p. 636; Fisher 2013a; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 139). Oil was inextricably linked to American economic prosperity, and securing a stable oil supply at a reasonable price was a pressing national concern. Because of the importance of oil to American prosperity, the US-Saudi alliance in this area conforms to realist principles.


Saudi Arabia plays an instrumental role in meeting American oil needs. It consistently remains the second largest petroleum supplier to the United States (Bronson 2006: p. 249;
United States Energy Information Administration 2013; Mason 2014: pp. 33-34). In Figure 2 below, the petroleum imports from Saudi Arabia under the three administrations are shown. Imports remained fairly consistent throughout the Clinton and Bush eras. The spikes in 2001 and 2003 under Bush do not represent the influence of personal and financial relationships, but rather illustrate the Saudi role in stabilising world oil prices. Due to its large oil reserves and spare production capacity, Saudi Arabia can produce more oil to keep energy prices from rising (Pollack 2002: p. 81; Gause and Chanin 2003: p. 122; Bronson 2006: p. 3; Gause 2011: p. 26; Atlas 2012: p. 357; Bahgat 2013: p. 566; Byman 2013: p. 294; Blanchard 2014: p. 9; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 141). Both after the September 11th attacks, as well as the lead up to the Iraq War of 2003, Saudi Arabia produced more oil to moderate prices in the United States. Because the Saudi partnership served the American economy in both in the supply and the price of oil under the three presidencies, the alliance is consistent with realism.

Despite the relative similarity of Saudi oil imports during the Clinton and Bush administrations, there was a significant drop in 2009, the year Obama was inaugurated. The discrepancy in imports between the first year of the Obama presidency and the prior years of the Bush administration is explained by factors beyond the Saudi ties with the Bush administration. Due to the global financial crisis that occurred during this time, the demand for crude oil decreased, leading to lower imports in 2009 (Sheppard and Raval 2015). Since 2009, American petroleum imports from Saudi Arabia began to rise once again. The subsequent decline beginning in 2013 represents the growing domestic oil production in the United States from the development of the shale oil industry (Bahgat 2013: p. 578; Furman and Sperling 2013; Blanchard 2014: p. 9; Obama 2014; Mason 2014: pp. 33-34). As of 2014, the United States became the world’s leading oil producer, and moved closer to eliminating the burden of dependence on foreign oil (The White House 2015: pp. 5, 16).
Saudi Arabia similarly benefited from stable oil prices. While high oil prices increase pressure for conservation and alternative sources of energy, moderate prices are necessary to preserve a long-term market for oil (Gause 2011: p. 26; Blanchard 2014: p. 9). Since oil revenue is the main source of income for the kingdom (Bahgat 2013: p. 566; Blanchard 2014: p. 9), Saudi Arabia aims to protect the future market (Pollack 2002: p. 82; Long 2004: p. 30; Gause 2011: p. 26). Oil revenue supports domestic programs integral to Saudi internal stability; maintaining the flow of money from oil sales is critical to Saudi security as well. In terms of moderating prices, American and Saudi interests align, and cooperation results. Because of the simultaneous benefits to both countries in the realm of economics and security, the oil partnership is consistent with realism.


Despite the recent advancements of domestic oil production, the United States remains reliant on foreign, and in particular Saudi, oil to meets its energy needs (The White House 2015: p. 5). Saudi oil plays a role in setting the market price of oil, and affected the cost of all American oil imports, not just imports from the kingdom (The White House 1999: p. 44; The White House 2000; Gause and Chanin 2003: p. 121; Gordon 2003: p. 163; Bush 2008b: p. 83; Gause 2011: p. 2; Bahgat 2013: p. 578; Fisher 2013b; Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 141). There was no viable alternative to Saudi oil under the three administration, and as a result, the short-term policies of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama towards protecting American oil interest are consistent. Petroleum exports from Saudi Arabia are slightly lower under Obama than under Clinton and Bush, but that trend is attributed to factors outside of the Saudi associations with the Bush administration. While both alternative energy sources
and domestic production are attractive, the reality of replacing Middle Eastern oil remains a long-term prospect (BBC News 18 June 2008; al-Saud 2010: p. 78).

Both Bush and Obama departed from Clinton’s long-term policies by aiming to decrease American reliance on Middle Eastern oil. In both administrations, the Middle Eastern region was fraught with conflict, and as a result, threatened American access to oil. It served American interests to seek alternatives, and, ultimately, energy independence. The similarities in the long-term approach to energy security between the Bush and Obama administration is counterintuitive to the claim that Bush was unduly influenced by Saudi Arabia in energy policy formation. Decreasing the dependence of America on foreign oil hurt the Saudi economy, but served American interests consistent with the realist interpretations of international relations.

Reforms

The Saudi theocracy has been associated with the rise of Islamist terrorism (Unger 2004: pp. 200-201; Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 140), and the repressive nature is antithetical to American ideals of democracy. The perceived lack of concern about the Saudi system of government under Bush has been linked to the various relationships between Bush and Saudi Arabia (Unger 2004: pp. 200-201). But, neither the Clinton nor Obama administrations exerted additional pressure on Saudi Arabia to enact reforms. Rather than reflecting deference to Saudi Arabia on the part of the Bush administration, the pragmatic acceptance of the Saudi regime by all three administration was a recognition that the alternatives may pose an increased danger to American security and prosperity. With respect to American pressure on the kingdom to reform, American security implications of realism appear to have been deemed more important than the inconsistencies of the alliance with liberalism.
Pressure for reforms in Saudi Arabia is both difficult and must account for the impact upon American security (Bronson 2006: p. 240; The Economist 3 February 2011; Obama 2015a). A 2014 poll indicated that eighty-four percent of Saudi Arabia had either a “fairly negative” or “very negative” opinion of the United States (Pollock 2014). Due to the low public opinion of the United States, rapid democratisation in Saudi Arabia would likely install a regime hostile to American economic and security concerns (Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 153; Gause 2009; Atlas 2012: pp. 354, 378-379).


Not only does substantial pressure for democratisation threaten American security, but there are limited avenues to enact reform within a sovereign nation short of military force. The use of military force to enact regime change is both controversial, and incompatible with the respect for sovereignty enshrined in liberal theory. The Bush administration faced
significant criticism abroad for its efforts to impose democracy on the Middle East forcefully (Kessler 2006). Apparently cognizant of this critique, the Bush administration tempered calls for democracy in its second term with qualifications that “America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling,” (Bush 2005: p. 67; Rice 2005). Obama never supported the Iraq war, and did not have the same association with the intervention as the Bush administration. Nevertheless, he similarly distanced American foreign policy from forced democratisation (The White House 2010: p. 5; Obama 2011a: pp. 120-121; Obama 2011b: p. 554). Criticisms towards Bush for the lack of reform in Saudi Arabia ignores the reality that it difficult achieve in practice as well as in a manner consistent with liberalism.

Despite these limitations, the three administrations emphasised that American ideals and interests could be combined—the spread of democracy was often linked to increased security (Clinton 1994a: p. 132; The White House 1994: p. i; The White House 1995: p. iii; The White House 2000; The White House 2002: p. 1; Bush 2003b: p. 412; The White House 2006b: p. 3; The White House 2010: p. 5; Obama 2011b: p. 554; The White House 2015: p. 19). While the three administrations generally encouraged democratic reform that was consistent with liberalism, specific calls for reform were applied selectively to nations. The discrepancy regarding pressure for reforms aligns with realism. Cognizant of the difficulties of democratisation in partners such as Saudi Arabia, nations deemed threatening to American security and prosperity were more harshly criticised than allies.

Prior to the September 11th attacks, democracy promotion was not a central feature of American foreign policy in the Middle East (Wittes 2008: p. 25). While Clinton encouraged democracy promotion in other regions, such as Eastern Europe, Middle Eastern liberalisation was not a priority (The White House 1994: pp. 19, 25; The White House 1995: p. 23; The White House 1997; The White House 2000; Wittes 2008: p. 25). Despite the lack of focus on reform in the Middle East, the human right abuses of Iran and Iraq were repeatedly
emphasised in the Clinton era (Clinton 1994b: pp. 3-4; The White House 1994: p. 25; Clinton 1995: p. 178; The White House 1995: p. 30; The White House 1996: p. 43; The White House 2000). Both Iran and Iraq were constantly featured within Clinton’s national security strategies as a threat to American security and their own populations. In contrast to Iraq and Iran, Saudi Arabia was not subject to the same denouncements despite its poor human right record and religious intolerance. Clinton differentiated democracy promotion based on benefits to American economic and security interests consistent with realism (Lagon 2011).

While Iran and Iraq were deemed threats, Saudi Arabia was a useful partner.

After September 11th, there was an increased scrutiny of the impact of American support for autocratic governments on the rise of Islamic terrorism (Wittes 2008: p. 26). The Bush administration demonstrated a consistent rhetoric to reform in the Middle East. Under Bush, the Iraqi and Iranian human rights records were again repeatedly denounced (The White House 2002: p. 14; Bush 2003a: p. 275; The White House 2006b: p. 20) Part of the rationale of the Iraq War in 2003 was the establishment of a stable Iraqi democracy that would encourage further democratic reforms in the larger Middle East (Bush 2004: p. 697; Campbell and Yetiv 2007: p. 153). Despite the increased focus on Middle Eastern reform, Saudi Arabia was not subject to the same condemnation as Iran and Iraq. Instead, the Bush administration provided muted criticism and praise for modest reform (Rice 2005; The White House 2006b: pp. 2, 38). While Saudi Arabia was treated differently than Iran and Iraq, the selectivity of criticism under the Bush administration was coherent with that of Clinton. The inconsistent treatment of Saudi Arabia under the Bush administration did not result from financial or personal relationships, but rather realist principles. The Saudi government benefited American security and prosperity while Iran and Iraq were deemed threats.

Similar to Bush, Obama emphasised reforms in the Middle East in a selective manner. In 2009, Obama noted a need for cooperation based on “mutual interests” in the Middle East,
but he also highlighted his commitment to universal human rights (Obama 2009b: pp. 760, 765). Two years later in the midst of the Arab Spring, Obama asserted that the United States had “a stake not just in the stability of nations, but in the self-determination of individuals,” (Obama 2011b: p. 554). During the Arab Spring, however, the Obama administration had a varied response. Bahrain, considered to be a Saudi client state, experienced violent uprisings by its Shi’ite majority population (Fisher 2011; Blanchard 2014: p. 7). While Obama encouraged other autocratic leaders experiencing uprisings to step down, he did not pressure the Bahraini government to do so (Fisher 2011; Jones 2011; Obama 2011b: pp. 555-556; Obama 2011d; Atlas 2012: p. 352; Morey et al. 2012: p. 1186). When Saudi Arabia sent troops to Bahrain in an attempt to quell the uprising, Obama’s Press Secretary said the measure was “counterproductive,” but stopped short of harshly criticising the incursion (Carney 2011; Sanger and Schmitt 2011). In the midst of democratic movements within the Middle East, Obama did not apply substantial pressure to Saudi Arabia or its client state Bahrain to make the transition to a democracy. After the Arab Spring, Obama continues to encourage the slow-moving reform in Saudi Arabia without denouncing the regime (Obama 2015a; Obama 2015b). This is consistent with the policy of the Bush administration towards realist implications of security outweighing the liberal interpretation of affairs that would advocate for substantial reforms within the kingdom.

Due to the increased emphasis on reform in the Middle East, as well as the obstacles to achieving it, Bush and Obama noted that reforms may be a case of slow, measured change (The White House 2006b: pp. 3, 6, 33; The White House 2010: p. 5). Praise for Saudi Arabia that emanated from both administrations revolved around these changes—including King Abdullah’s decision to hold elections for an advisory council. Because of the realities within Middle East, modest changes were the best any administration could do to serve values
associated with the liberal tradition while still respecting American security implications of the realist viewpoint.

The issue of reforms in Saudi Arabia brings liberalism and realism into direct conflict. While the Saudi system of government is repressive and promotes a strain of fundamentalist Islam, the monarchy itself does not directly threaten the United States in the same way as other hostile regimes in the region. Not only does the relationship serve American prosperity and security, but there are also limited options to enact reform in a sovereign country. The consistent approach by the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations to moderate their criticism towards the kingdom represents the dominance of realism in the Saudi partnership.
Conclusion

The financial and personal ties of the Bush administration did not unduly influence the American partnership with Saudi Arabia. Consistent with Clinton and Obama, the Saudi alliance under Bush represents a dominance of realist concerns over liberal principles. As a theocratic, repressive monarchy, Saudi Arabia is antithetical to American values. Despite this discrepancy, the difficult relationship provided benefits to American security and prosperity that are consistent with the realist school of thought throughout the three presidencies. Because of this continuity, it indicates that the alliance with Saudi Arabia under Bush was guided by realist implications, and not by personal and financial ties.

To determine the motivations behind the US-Saudi alliance under Bush, a case study methodology is used. During the study, the policies of Clinton, Bush, and Obama are compared using both primary and secondary sources. Due to the lack of access to classified documents, some information about the policies of the three presidencies may be lacking. At the same time, the documents examined are analysed carefully because of the potential for bias. Despite these difficulties, the study establishes an inclusive overview of the policies of the three administrations. While the case study method provides in-depth knowledge necessary for the narrow focus of the study, it sacrifices the ability to make generalizations about the partnership of the United States and Saudi Arabia beyond the three administrations. While the results of this study indicates that realism has persistently guided this partnership, further study would be needed to validate this claim beyond the administrations of Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

Based on the results of the case study, the Bush administration had the most potential of the three for a conflict of interest. While the personal relationships may have been overstated, associates of the Bush administration conducted substantial business in Saudi Arabia. Due to the consistency between the Saudi policies of the Bush administration and
those of Clinton and Obama, it indicates that those financial links played a negligible role. Ultimately, the focus on the personal and financial relationships between the Bush administration and Saudi Arabia obscures the motivation behind the bilateral relationship. While the Saudi partnership was not compatible with liberal ideals, it served many of the fundamental security and economic concerns of United States, indicating it was guided by realist principles.

Within the realist school of thought, the security and prosperity of a state are stressed as crucial factors. The Saudi partnership serves these most basic interests. Saudi counterterrorism cooperation was irregular under all three administration, but nevertheless provided crucial intelligence and law enforcement coordination that helped protect America against future terrorist attacks. Through arms deals, the United States increased the interoperability between American and Saudi armed forces, resulting in a stronger American military position in the Gulf region. Under all three administrations, a military presence in the region was critical to American security strategies.

Arms deals provided a simultaneous economic benefit. Through arms exports to Saudi Arabia, the United States sustained its domestic defence industry. Because of the economic benefits in jobs and export revenue, substantial arms exports to Saudi Arabia were a hallmark of the three presidencies. Oil, however, remained the most crucial economic benefit of the partnership. During all three administrations, oil remained a key resource to the sustainment of the American economy. All three administrations pushed for the development of alternative energies, but Bush and Obama focused more substantially on reducing dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Throughout the tenure of the three presidents, alternatives were both limited and long-term prospects. Until there are viable energy alternatives to oil, American foreign policy will be inextricably linked to its energy policy.
While the foreign policy implications of realism and liberalism may be combined in some cases, a truly liberal policy towards Saudi Arabia would be disastrous for American interests. The US-Saudi alliance would not exist under the liberal paradigm, but the United States would significantly hinder its security and economy if it severed ties with the kingdom. On the other hand, were the United States to push for immediate democratisation, the result would likely be a government with an anti-American outlook. The current reality of Saudi Arabia prevents the combination of realism and liberalism.

Future of US-Saudi Relations

The partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia is far from perfect. Currently, the alliance is subject to severe strains. Under the Obama administration, the Iranian nuclear deal has caused Saudi Arabia significant anxiety about its security (Elanger 2013; Ignatius 2013; Gause 2014a; Riedel 2015; Weinberg 2015). The kingdom has expressed its displeasure, but it is not an indication the partnership will disintegrate.

Throughout the history of the alliance, the partnership has been subject to conflict (Fisher 2013b). Historically, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a point of contention. The Clinton administration also faced difficulties with using Saudi facilities to bomb Iraq. Similarly, under Bush, the Saudi government was hesitant to allow the United States to stage the invasion of Iraq from its territory. The relationship weathered these disputes, and it is unlikely that the current discord indicates its demise (Fisher 2013b).

Between the two countries, there remains many areas of cooperation regarding economy and security. While the benefits to the United States are highlighted, the partnership provides similar dividends to the kingdom. Terrorism threatens the kingdom, and it relies on the United States for protection in the case of a regional aggressor. At the same time, the oil market in the United States provides crucial revenue to the kingdom.
While the American and Saudi governments appear inclined to continue the relationship, Saudi public opinion of the United States remains low. Coincidentally, the kingdom has been deemed to be unfit to rule by some extremist organisations. Both the dissatisfaction with the royal family, as well as the repressive nature of the government, may leave the kingdom vulnerable to an uprising (Gause 2013a; Obama 2015d). During the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia faced relatively little discord. At the moment, however, the Saudi government provides social services that potentially limited the unrest (Baxter and Simpson 2015: p. 140). If the government is unable to provide those, the kingdom may be susceptible to internal threats. While the Saudi royal family has survived periods of unrest, revolutions have been historically difficult to predict (Savitz 2009). The US-Saudi Arabia partnership may end not because of a conscious decision by either of the current regimes, but a revolution that installs an anti-American government.


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