

## Al Qaeda and the House of Saud: Eternal Enemies or Secret Bedfellows?

In February 2005, less than two years after suicide attacks on Western residential compounds in Riyadh killed 34 people, including nine Americans, and ushered in an unprecedented wave of terrorist violence across the kingdom, the Saudi capital hosted a three-day international counterterrorism conference. During the short period between the bombings and the terrorism conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's image had transformed from an oasis of relative calm in an often volatile region into the place held responsible in many ways for Al Qaeda's birth and growth and where the triumph or demise of this international terrorist organization would ultimately be determined. Underlining President George W. Bush's wish to work publicly as closely as possible with the al-Saud in the ongoing fight against Al Qaeda, its affiliates, and its sympathizers in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, U.S. homeland security adviser Frances Fragos Townsend emerged from the conference declaring that Washington "stands squarely" with the kingdom's rulers. She emphasized that the conference was proof positive of a "commitment to the elimination of terrorism" on the part of the al-Saud ruling family.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, not all observers were quite so bowled over by the stage-managed proceedings in Riyadh.<sup>2</sup> The delegates from numerous international organizations, the United States, and 50 Arab, Asian, and European countries, with the exclusion of Israel, which predictably was not among the invitees, sat listening to senior Saudi princes, routinely accused of at the very least failing to prevent the funneling of money from Saudi-based Islamic charities to terrorist

---

John R. Bradley is author of *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). A former managing editor of the Jeddah-based *Arab News*, he has reported extensively from Saudi Arabia and the wider Middle East for the *Economist*, *New Republic*, *Salon*, *London Sunday Times*, *Washington Times*, *London Telegraph*, *Independent*, and *Prospect*. He writes a weekly column on the Middle East for the *Straits Times*.

---

© 2005 by The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
*The Washington Quarterly* • 28:4 pp. 139–152.

organizations, give speeches condemning terrorism. As recently as July 2005, the U.S. government suggested that wealthy Saudi individuals remain “a significant source” of funds for Islamic terrorists around the world, despite widely publicized efforts to shut down these channels.<sup>3</sup> On top of such accusations, it is widely recognized that the royal family has empowered a hard-line Wahhabi

**The endgame of the global jihad preached by Al Qaeda will be played out in Saudi Arabia.**

religious establishment that propagates an extremist interpretation of Islam, which critics argue acts as a guide and inspiration to terrorists such as Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden and his followers, giving it ideological and day-to-day control over the kingdom’s mosques, judiciary, schools, media, and religious police.

There were thus two polarized reactions to the conference, reflecting the diametrically opposed views among Saudi observers in the West when it comes to the question of

the kingdom’s role in the war on terrorism. On one side are those such as Townsend who, believing Saudi Arabia to be a crucial ally, focused on the conference’s powerful symbolism. They stressed that one of its important objectives was to dispel persisting doubts in the West about the Saudi royal family’s commitment to combating terrorism. On the other side are those who see duplicity in every al-Saud statement<sup>4</sup> and were especially critical of the conference’s high symbolism, as it allowed the regime to showcase its purported counterterrorism successes without having to engage in substantive debate on broader, more controversial issues.

Both interpretations contain elements of truth. When it comes to the issue of fighting Al Qaeda, the al-Saud regime has been and continues to be part of the problem in fundamental ways. Yet, it is equally undeniable that, considering the absolute nature of the al-Saud family’s rule and the dearth of acceptable alternatives, at least in Western eyes, the regime is indispensable to any solution to terrorism. Townsend implicitly acknowledged in Riyadh that, if bin Laden’s goal is to overthrow the House of Saud and subsequently to gain the prestige that would come from the custodianship of Islam’s two holy mosques and control of one-quarter of the world’s known oil reserves, then the main U.S. policy objective in response must be to guarantee the royal family’s survival.

### **Al Qaeda Stakes Its Claim**

---

Oddly, it would appear that bin Laden shares Townsend’s view that the endgame of the global jihad preached by Al Qaeda will be played out in

Saudi Arabia. Having failed to topple regimes or establish permanent Islamic governments in Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan and with failure imminent in Iraq as well, bin Laden's birthplace remains his last gasp opportunity. If he fails there, he will ultimately have failed in his broader strategy. Despite their evident willingness to conduct smaller-scale terrorist operations, Al Qaeda cells in Saudi Arabia appear to be holding off from a direct attack on an oil installation or pipeline or against the Saudi royal family itself.

In his two direct addresses to the Saudi regime in August 1995 and December 2004, even bin Laden himself called for internal reform within the Saudi government rather than revolution from below. Self-appointed Al Qaeda spokesmen regularly post on Web sites that the organization is waiting to launch a full-scale assault against the al-Saud and its economic lifeline because a direct threat to their rule will cause the princes' "separate fingers to become an iron fist." A major attack would almost certainly result in the imposition of a state of emergency, restricting terrorists' mobility. It is better, the spokesmen argue, to let the royal family squabble among themselves about reforms as resentment grows over intensifying economic problems. An increasingly unstable Saudi Arabia would remain a fertile recruiting ground for arms, money, and volunteers.

All this, critics claim, is well understood by the al-Saud ruling family, who, it has long been argued, paid off Al Qaeda in the 1990s to ensure there would be no direct attacks launched against their regime.<sup>5</sup> It is indeed strange, considering the often trumpeted line that Al Qaeda wants to "overthrow the Saudi ruling family and replace it with a Taliban-style regime," that no Saudi princes have been assassinated, despite the many thousands of them, most of whom are more vulnerable to such targeting than Westerners who live in heavily guarded residential compounds. Could it be, therefore, that bin Laden recognizes that, in the official Wahhabi religious establishment he officially despises, because they legitimize the al-Saud regime's rule by, as the favorite Islamist taunt goes, "issuing fatwas for money," he nevertheless sees his closest ideological ally in a world where he is hunted and increasingly marginalized?

### **Promoting a Solution ...?**

---

The House of Saud's role as part of the solution is the easiest to assess because it is trumpeted, rather than deliberately obscured, by the regime's officials and the state-controlled media. The Saudi government's counterterrorism framework included an amnesty offer for militants who turn themselves in, that they will not face the death penalty and will only be prosecuted if they

committed acts that hurt others;<sup>6</sup> a massive anti-extremism campaign in the Saudi media and on billboards throughout the main cities, given a boost by the high number of Saudis and other fellow Muslims among the November 2003 bombing casualties;<sup>7</sup> the reeducation of extremist clerics by the Saudi royal family, although the details remained vague and there was never any independent verification that this retraining ever actually took place;<sup>8</sup> and unprecedented cooperation between the Central Intelligence Agency

and Saudi security forces, which includes sophisticated command centers in Jeddah and Riyadh.<sup>9</sup>

The May 2003 bombings served as a wake-up call for the Saudi royal family, leading it to construct the above framework, and it has since been locked in an endless cycle of violent confrontation with militants. Between May 2003 and June 2005, more than 30 major terrorism-related incidents occurred in the kingdom. At least 91 foreign nationals

---

**Al Qaeda cells appear to be avoiding directly attacking the Saudi royal family itself.**

---

and Saudi civilians have been killed and 510 wounded, according to former intelligence chief Prince Turki al-Faisal. Al-Faisal has also stated that 41 security force members have been killed and 218 wounded, while 112 militants have been killed and 25 wounded.<sup>10</sup> Included among these: a November 2003 attack on another Riyadh compound killed 17 people, but this time the dead were mostly Muslims. This attack, however, seems to have been an isolated incident, as all other attacks have targeted the regime, or Western people, buildings, and businesses.

In May 2004, gunmen attacked the offices of the Houston-based company ABB Lummus Global, in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu, killing six Westerners and a Saudi. One month later, oil company compounds in the Eastern Province city of al-Khobar were the target; hostages were taken at the Oasis residential building, and at least 30 people were killed. In December 2004, the U.S. consulate in Jeddah was attacked. Militants breached its heavily fortified defenses and, before being killed, managed to pull down the U.S. flag. A group calling itself Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for most of these large-scale attacks. In the meantime, Al Qaeda-affiliated cells in Riyadh and Jeddah have periodically singled out Westerners for execution. Most infamously, U.S. contractor Paul Johnson was kidnapped in Riyadh in June 2004 and beheaded, the ghastly crime recorded on video and immediately posted on Islamist Web sites.

In the face of such atrocities, no one now seriously doubts the Saudi regime's commitment to hunt down and kill individual militants who have

carried out or are believed to be planning terrorist attacks inside the kingdom. The denial of the existence of homegrown extremists, evident in Interior Minister Prince Naif's refusal for six months after the September 11 attacks to acknowledge that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals, is today a distant memory. In fact, Prince Naif's internal security force has borne the brunt of the casualties, losing more men battling suspected Al Qaeda cells than any other security force in the Arab world. In April 2005, it was an Interior Ministry announcement that reported how residents of the tiny provincial capital of Sakaka in Saudi Arabia's northernmost province, al-Jouf, had witnessed a grisly scene in the main public square: the corpses of three convicted and beheaded militants had been tied to poles, on top of which were placed their severed heads. The three, who had returned to the kingdom after fighting in Afghanistan, were executed by the central government after being convicted of murdering the region's deputy governor, a top religious court judge, and a police chief. They had also killed a Saudi soldier and kidnapped a foreign national, long before such kidnappings became "fashionable" among Islamist groups in the Middle East.

At its height in 2003, the unrest in al-Jouf, a power base of the al-Sudairi branch of the ruling family, which included King Fahd, Defense Minister Prince Sultan, and Riyadh governor Prince Salman, represented in microcosm the kingdom-wide tensions that threatened to spill over into a general uprising.<sup>11</sup> The rebellion's end in April 2005, with the crudely symbolic public display of its leaders' heads, marked the moment that the al-Saud triumphed over the most extreme of its homegrown enemies, at least for the time being. From a list of the 26 most wanted terrorists issued after the May 2003 bombings, only two remain at large; the others have been killed or captured or have surrendered. Just hours after Riyadh issued a new list of 36 most wanted terrorists in July 2005, the Moroccan terrorist at the top, Younis Mohammed Ibrahim al-Hayari, was killed in a shoot-out with Saudi security forces.<sup>12</sup>

### **... Or Fueling the Problem?**

---

The other role of the House of Saud—its part in the problem—is much more difficult to document and explain, as the Saudi regime does not want the world to know about it. What is clear, however, is the broad context: Riyadh's fight against terrorism since May 2003 and related calls for national unity have provided a façade for behind-the-scenes moves to strengthen the role of the Wahhabi religious establishment, with whom the al-Saud rules in effective partnership.<sup>13</sup> Such moves are bad news for the war on terrorism in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. The Saudi royal family certainly cracked down

hard on Al Qaeda in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the subsequent Islamist campaign of violence inside the kingdom. To shore up support among its core constituents, however, whom the crackdown risked alienating, it also reached out not only to the masses through advertising campaigns, but also to the hard-line religious establishment whose support legitimizes the royal family. The regime claimed to endorse a “truer” version of Islam than that of the terrorist organizations. Yet, the line between that “truer” Islam and Al Qaeda’s proclaimed ideology is becoming increasingly blurred.

Saudi leaders, in their eagerness to prove their Islamist credentials in the face of charges of being U.S. puppets,<sup>14</sup> have empowered a number of clerics who, although not overtly critical of the regime, are also not overtly critical of the terrorists—indeed, on occasion, quite the reverse. The words and actions of these clerics challenge the official, antiterrorism narrative fine-tuned at the Riyadh conference, heavily promoted by the state-controlled media as well as Saudi embassies abroad, and tied to reality by the frequent clashes between the security forces and suspected militants. In this counternarrative, the al-Saud, despite its effort to hunt down those who directly threaten its own rule, is less serious about tackling the deeper issues related to the funding of, ideological legitimization of, and recruitment for Al Qaeda in the kingdom.

Particularly alarming was Riyadh’s announcement, just days after the counterterrorism conference and one day before a first round of partial municipal elections got underway, that Abdullah al-Obeid, a former head of an Islamic charity, had been appointed as the kingdom’s new education minister. Described by the *Wall Street Journal* as “an official enmeshed in a terror financing controversy,” he is a former director of the Muslim World League (WML), the parent organization of the International Islamic Relief Organization, which the U.S. Department of the Treasury claims may have had financial ties to Islamist terrorist groups. Al-Obeid was head of the WML from 1995 to 2002, during which time the charity spent tens of millions of dollars to finance the spread of Wahhabism. The *Wall Street Journal* quoted an essay by al-Obeid from 2002 in which he blamed “some mass media centers that are managed and run by Jews in the West” for reports linking terrorism and Islam.<sup>15</sup> He also reportedly organized symposia to explain that Palestinian suicide attacks on Israelis “are conducted in self-defense” and “are lawful and approved by all religious standards, international treaties, norms, and announcements.”<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of such evidence, al-Obeid, who replaced as education minister the secular, progressive-minded Muhammad al-Rasheed, a man hated by the hard-line Wahhabis,<sup>17</sup> is not an individual the West should trust to delete anti-Semitic and anti-Christian passages from the Saudi school cur-

riculum, let alone its pro-jihadi rhetoric, all widely blamed as providing ideological justification for attacks on non-Muslims by terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. Nor, for that matter, is there much cause for confidence in the Saudi chief justice, Saleh bin Muhammad al-Luhaidan, who also holds the rank of government minister. Al-Luhaidan has been accused of instructing Saudis on how to fight U.S. and Iraqi troops in Iraq in the name of Allah. An October 2004 recording obtained and distributed by a Washington-based Saudi dissident group has al-Luhaideen making remarks at a mosque in Riyadh in response to questions from a group of Saudis who wanted to join terrorist organizations in Iraq.<sup>18</sup> He is heard advising that those who still want to join the fight must be careful when entering the country because U.S. planes and satellite surveillance equipment may be monitoring the borders. He adds that those Saudis who do manage to enter Iraq will not be punished by the Saudi security forces and insists that money raised for the jihad must go directly to those who will launch attacks.

**Bin Laden himself called for reform within the Saudi government rather than revolution.**

Two of the kingdom's most extremist, anti-Western clerics, Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Auda, known as "awakening sheikhs" because of their powerful influence on young Arab Muslims in the early 1990s in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War when they were imprisoned by the al-Saud, have also returned to the mainstream, even acting as intermediaries between the government and suspected terrorists.<sup>19</sup> Al-Hawali, who reportedly recently suffered a heart attack, is secretary general of the Global Anti-Aggression Campaign, a militant, anti-American entity established by more than 225 radical figures from across the Islamic world as a response to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The group's initial statement condemned "the Zionists and the American administration led by right-wing extremists that are working to expand their control over nations and peoples, loot their resources, destroy their will, and to change their educational curricula and social system."<sup>20</sup> In November 2004, al-Hawali and al-Auda were among 26 Saudi clerics, most of whom receive their salaries from the Saudi royal family, who published a religious statement urging Muslims to wage holy war in Iraq. "Jihad against the occupiers is a must," said the statement. "It is not only a legitimate right, but a religious duty."<sup>21</sup> The fact that both of these men remain in their jobs speaks volumes.

The al-Saud's secret strategy is to put out the message that it is okay to attack "infidels" in Iraq, but not in Saudi Arabia. Critics of the regime refer

to this when they point out alleged “Saudi duplicity.” According to a recent study, some 60 percent of suicide bombers in Iraq are Saudi nationals,<sup>22</sup> and even a Saudi-based analyst concedes that as many as 2,500 Saudis have crossed over to Iraq to join the insurgency.<sup>23</sup> Saudi observer and Gulf expert Simon Henderson has written in a more general context:

Worried about their own necks, the Saudi royal family tolerates a political fudge, hoping that it can reduce support for Al Qaeda from among its citizens and win the battle for Islamic legitimacy. Al Qaeda recognizes the basic rules, targeting foreigners. Hence, no direct attacks on members of the House of Saud itself. ... Before 9/11, Western officials say that senior princes were paying off bin Laden to avoid targeting the kingdom altogether. That changed when Western pressure stopped the payments. For the West, this means more terrorism and high oil prices.<sup>24</sup>

The new strategy of tacitly encouraging Saudi terrorists to blow themselves up in Iraq or at least not disciplining those who openly encourage such action is a continuation of this game. It represents yet another attempt by the al-Saud to postpone a final showdown with bin Laden and his followers. The al-Saud have certainly done little, if anything, to stop young Saudis from traveling to Iraq. The failure of the regime to challenge more rigorously the jihadi culture in its schools and mosques, beyond the confines of glossy advertising campaigns, as the remarks by the education minister and chief justice clearly demonstrate, compound the long-term risk of blowback from such appeasement.<sup>25</sup>

The al-Saud regime further muddies the water with its campaigns of outright misinformation. The hunt for Paul Johnson’s corpse is a good example of this. Only hours after his murder, Saudi security forces gunned down a man believed to be Al Qaeda’s leader in Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin, in an ambush at a petrol station in the capital. He and several followers were caught, the Saudi authorities said, attempting to dispose of Johnson’s corpse. Yet, the next day it became known that Johnson’s corpse had not been found. Still today, it has yet to be located, and the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh has called off the search. In fact, despite the attempts to link al-Muqrin to the abduction and although al-Muqrin had a long and bloody history from fighting in Chechnya to apparently planning the May 2003 attacks, this is probably the one atrocity of which he was innocent. Saudi spokesmen had mournfully repeated in Riyadh and Washington that the authorities had launched a massive manhunt for Johnson that had narrowly missed saving him but had at least brought rough justice to his abductors shortly after the deed. But this story turned out to be another example of rhetoric replacing reality. Instead, the indications are that al-Muqrin was lured into a trap independent of and planned well ahead of the Johnson case



and that it was another terrorist leader, Saleh al-Oufi, later named as al-Muqrin's successor, who had carried out the abduction. When Johnson's head was recovered a month later, it was in the freezer of a safe house used by al-Oufi.<sup>26</sup>

### **Dangerous Liaisons: Al Qaeda and the House of Saud**

---

Al Qaeda's infiltration of the Saudi security forces, the widespread sympathy in those forces' rank and file for the terrorist organization's goals, and the intelligence leaks that result have had multiple negative consequences, the most profound being the assassination of senior officers and the collaboration between lower ranks of the security forces and terrorists during attacks. Members of the state security apparatus, whose job now ostensibly amounts to keeping the al-Saud in power in the face of growing domestic opposition, find themselves directly in the radicals' firing line. A radical Saudi Islamist group affiliated with Al Qaeda claimed they blew up a car in December 2003 in Riyadh belonging to Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim al-Dhaleh, a senior Saudi security officer who escaped by the skin of his teeth. The group, the Brigade of the Two Holy Mosques, also said it had tried to kill Major General Abdel-Aziz al-Huweirini, the number three official in the Saudi interior ministry, who was shot in Riyadh the same month. The statement warned Dhaleh "and those like him" against pursuing their war against Islamists in Saudi Arabia.<sup>27</sup> These were not empty threats.

In April 2004, a suicide attacker driving a truck blew up the headquarters of the counterterrorism unit in Riyadh, destroying much of the building and killing five people. In December of the same year, militants attacked the Interior Ministry in Riyadh itself, although damage was minimal and claims that Prince Naif was the target were viewed skeptically because he was on an official trip to Tunisia at the time of the blast. Also, in June 2005, Mubarak al-Sowat, head of the police investigations department in Mecca and a leading proponent of launching preemptive strikes against suspected extremists, was shot nine times outside of his home and then hacked to pieces with an axe.<sup>28</sup> Giving a rare insight into the paranoia and fear with which senior security officials now have to live in Saudi Arabia, al-Sowat's wife told local media that her husband had received many death threats on his cell phone and by e-mail in the weeks and months leading up to his assassination and was "always distracted and nervous." He had become "constantly anxious and fearful" after he returned from Riyadh earlier in the year.<sup>29</sup>

Obviously, those singling out such individuals for attack must have excellent intelligence, likely provided by insiders. They know who to target, as

well as their victims' exact movements and when best to strike. There is also ample evidence of collaboration between the terrorists and security forces in the execution of terrorist attacks or, at the very least, of an unwillingness to respond swiftly on some occasions. In the attacks on the compounds in Yanbu and Al Khobar in May 2004, at least 90 minutes passed before security forces responded. In Al Khobar, the attackers were actually allowed to go free to fight another day when security forces turned a blind eye, despite the fact that the compound in which they were holed up had been completely surrounded.<sup>30</sup> The attacks in Riyadh in May 2003 depended on a significant level of insider information about the three compounds targeted, almost certainly provided by those "defending" them. The suicide bombers detonated their vehicle right inside the main housing block in the Vinell compound, which took them less than a minute to reach from the gate. As they drove at breakneck speed with a bomb weighing nearly 200 kilograms to the most densely populated part of the complex, they had to know where the switches were to operate the gates after attacking the guards and exactly where the main housing block was located.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Final Showdown?**

---

In his December 2004 address to the Saudi ruling family, bin Laden issued an unprecedented call for attacks that would sabotage the oil industries of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia.<sup>32</sup> Al Qaeda elements in Saudi Arabia immediately endorsed attacks on their own oil industry. "We call on all the [mujahideen] in the Arabian Peninsula to unite ... and target the oil supplies that do not serve the Islamic nation, but the enemies of this nation," said an Internet statement.<sup>33</sup> Bin Laden's new tack is a shift in Al Qaeda tactics, reversing his and others' edicts from the 1990s that made oil facilities in the Muslim world off-limits to attack. Because the hoped-for Islamic empire that he and others had announced in Sudan in 1993 would need oil revenues to thrive, the oil facilities had to be preserved for the glory of Islam.<sup>34</sup> In Saudi Arabia, these pipelines have become the obvious new targets for the Saudi jihadis. They could be sabotaged by an amateur with no military training, and a successful attack would have a huge psychological impact.

Government officials in Riyadh dismiss talk of attacks on the oil pipelines as a scare tactic, arguing that, because Saudi security forces have killed or arrested dozens of Al Qaeda operatives, bin Laden's ability to influence events inside the kingdom has diminished. That may be true, and there is no denying the Saudi government's multiple counterterrorism successes. Yet, although attacks on the heavily guarded oil-pumping facilities are indeed

unlikely, smaller incidents remain possible along the kingdom's more than 10,000-mile pipeline network. In his message to Saudi militants, bin Laden's main aim did not appear to be the destruction of major installations, which would rob the Saudi people of their primary means of financial income and turn them completely against him and his cause, but rather acts of sabotage that would increase oil prices, which he said should be \$100 a barrel. Saudi Arabia has more than a quarter of the world's known oil reserves, and even an abortive attack on the Saudi petroleum network would raise oil prices. It also would dramatically increase concerns in Washington about the al-Saud family's ability to maintain stability.

Adding to concerns about the impact of bin Laden's tape is the knowledge that the thousands of Saudi jihadis who have snuck over to Iraq are likely to return to the kingdom once Iraq stabilizes. They will have been trained in urban warfare, including instruction on how to sabotage oil pipelines. As was the case after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, these Saudis are going to bring their terrorism back home with them. A confidential Interior Ministry document obtained by a London-based Saudi dissident group apparently acknowledges that 200 Saudis may have already returned to the kingdom in the wake of bin Laden's call.<sup>35</sup> What happens next will largely determine Al Qaeda's future in Saudi Arabia. "We expect the worst from those who went to Iraq," Prince Naif said in remarks published in July. "They will be worse [than those who have already launched attacks], and we will be ready for them."<sup>36</sup>

There are troubling signs; the tactics employed by the Iraqi insurgents are evident in the attacks on Westerners in Saudi Arabia. Copycat incidents include the dragging of Westerners' bodies from the back of cars, the use of assassinations to sabotage the vital oil sector, and kidnappings. The ideological bonds that bind the insurgents in Iraq and Saudi Arabia were made explicit by those who beheaded Johnson in Riyadh when they signed their claim of responsibility "the Fallujah Brigade."<sup>37</sup> In an attack in which six Westerners and a Saudi were killed in Yanbu, militants dragged the body of one of the victims into a local school playground and forced students to watch. "Come join your brothers in Fallujah," they shouted, in reference to the city where four U.S. contractors had been similarly slain.<sup>38</sup> The Al Qaeda cell that attacked foreigners in Al Khobar also dragged the body of a Westerner through the streets from a car. The leader of the group said on an Islamic Web site afterward that a subsidiary of Halliburton had been singled out for attack because "it has a role in Iraq."<sup>39</sup>

**Riyadh's fight against terrorism has strengthened the Wahhabi religious establishment.**

**The al-Saud's strategy is that it is okay to attack 'infidels' in Iraq, but not in Saudi Arabia.**

The flow of Saudi jihadis to Iraq benefits the al-Saud regime in the short term, at least in the sense that, if they are blowing themselves up in Baghdad, they will not be doing so in Riyadh. Yet, there is potential for long-term blowback, just as there was when the "Afghan Arabs" returned from Afghanistan in the 1990s. The other main, related problem is that the al-Saud is increasingly following a domestic agenda focused solely on counterterrorism. Riyadh's relentless fight against militants and repeated calls for national unity have conveniently provided a façade behind which the monarchy can abandon the few reform initiatives previously in place and reverse any movement, at least in the short term, toward democratic change.

By remaining complicit with the regime, particularly at a time when Saudi citizens remain oppressed, unemployed, and in some

cases even impoverished, Washington is essentially allowing the kingdom to become a recruiting ground for Al Qaeda. The United States is dependent on Saudi oil, but the Saudi regime is dependent on the United States for its survival. Current U.S. policy toward the kingdom should use that leverage to call for genuine reform, rather than just supporting the royal family in the belief that it will keep terrorists at bay. If the United States does not look beyond the short-term benefits of stability resulting from its relationship with the Saudi regime, it will face far more severe, long-term consequences.

## Notes

---

1. Mohammed Rasooldeen "U.S. Says Saudi Victory Crucial to Defeating Global Terror," *Arab News*, February 8, 2005, <http://arabnews.com?page=1&section=0&article=58688&d=8&m=2&y=2005>.
2. See, for example, Simon Henderson, "Lights, Camera, Inaction? Saudi Arabia's Counterterrorism Conference," *PolicyWatch*, no. 956, February 11, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2254>.
3. "U.S. Calls Saudis 'Significant Source' of Terror Funding," Agence France Press, July 14, 2005.
4. Robert Spencer, "Ending the Saudi Double Game," *FrontpageMagazine.com*, June 23, 2005, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=18520>.
5. Nick Fielding, "Saudis Paid Bin Laden 200 Million Pounds," *Sunday Times*, August 25, 2002, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-393584,00.html>.
6. "Saudis Offer Amnesty to Militants," Associated Press, June 23, 2004.
7. "Saudi Attacks Blamed on Al-Qaeda," Associated Press, November 9, 2003.
8. "Retraining for 1,000 Saudi Preachers," Reuters, June 25, 2003.

9. Douglas Frantz, "Once Indifferent, Saudis Allied With U.S. in Fighting Al-Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 2004.
10. Dominic Evans, "Saudi Arabia Says Ready to Beat Militants from Iraq," Reuters, July 10, 2005.
11. John R. Bradley, "Smoldering Rebellion Against Saudi Rule Threatens to Set Country Ablaze," *Independent*, January 28, 2004.
12. Abdullah Al Shihri, "Saudis Kill Top Militant in Gun Battle in Capital," Associated Press, July 4, 2005.
13. John R. Bradley, "The House of Saud Re-Embraces Fundamentalism," *Asia Times*, April 12, 2005.
14. Bin Laden makes this accusation, at some length, in both his August 1995 and December 2004 addresses to the Saudi royal family.
15. Glenn Simpson, "New Saudi Aide Is in Terror-Fund Probe," *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2005.
16. For more details about al-Obeid's appointment, see Henderson, "Lights, Camera, Inaction?"
17. "Saudi Islamic Doctrine Hard to Control," Associated Press, April 20, 2004.
18. See "Saudi Minister Supports War Against Iraq: Report," *Saudi Institute*, April 26, 2005. Al-Luhaidan admitted to NBC News that the voice on the recording was his and that they were his words but claimed, rather unconvincingly, that he had not intended to express those opinions. See Lisa Myers and the NBC Investigative Unit, "More Evidence of Saudi Double Talk?" April 26, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7645118/>. Since he was exposed, however, al-Luhaidan has made a clear statement calling for Saudis not to enter Iraq. See "Saudi Official Warns Youths Against Fighting in Iraq," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, July 6, 2005.
19. Erick Stakelbeck, "The Saudi Hate Machine," *National Interest* 2, no. 49 (December 2003), <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue49/Vol2Issue49Stakelbeck.html>.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Stephen Schwartz, "The Foreign Face of Iraqi Terrorism," *Weekly Standard*, March 8, 2005.
23. Mahen Abedin, "Al-Qaeda: In Decline or Preparing for the Next Attack? An Interview with Dr Saad Al-Faqih," *Jamestown Foundation* 3, no. 5 (June 15, 2005), <http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369721> (hereinafter Jamestown interview).
24. Simon Henderson, "Bin Laden Increases His Challenge to the House of Saud," *London Times*, May 31, 2004.
25. John R. Bradley, "Saudis Jihadis Aping Iraq Rebels," *Washington Times*, June 23, 2004.
26. Michael Scott Doran, "Two Deaths and a Dissembling in Riyadh," *Daily Star*, August 27, 2004.
27. Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Saudi Bomb: A Shift in Al-Qaeda Tactics," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 22, 2004.
28. "Mecca: One Security Officer Assassinated," *Arabic News*, June 20, 2005.
29. "Slain Saudi Policeman Was Under Threat," United Press International, June 20, 2005.

30. "Saudi Security Forces 'Agreed to Let Al-Qaeda Killers Escape,'" *London Telegraph*, June 1, 2004.
31. Robin Gedye and John R. Bradley, "Bomber Moles in Saudi Security Forces," *London Telegraph*, May 16, 2003.
32. John R. Bradley, "Terror Comes to Saudis," *Washington Times*, January 19, 2004.
33. Ibid.
34. Amir Taheri, "What 'Fueled' the Saudi Raid," *New York Post*, December 6, 2004.
35. Jamestown interview.
36. Evans, "Saudi Arabia Says Ready to Beat Militants from Iraq."
37. Bradley, "Saudi Jihadis Aping Iraq Rebels."
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.