
U.S.-SAUDI RELATIONS: A FOUNDATION OF MUTUAL NEEDS

By

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Much that is written on U.S.-Saudi relations is based on an analysis of the mutual needs between the two countries. This is not intrinsically a bad way to proceed, but it encounters at least two major and often fatal pitfalls. The first is in miscalculating what the Saudis need. Many authors base their analysis of Saudi needs not on Saudi priorities, but on what the authors think those priorities should be. Such analysis fails to take sufficiently into account the calculus by which the Saudis order their priorities. The second pitfall can be described as a failure to assess the balance of needs. The assumption is often made that the Saudis need the United States more than the contrary, and therefore the Saudis should be more amenable to heeding American bidding. This bias presents no problem in confrontational relationships, but in a cooperative relationship such as that characterizing U.S.-Saudi relations, it can lead to unrealistic expectations of how much the other party is likely to reciprocate American efforts on a given problem. In order to avoid these pitfalls, it might be helpful to try to look at how U.S.-Saudi relations have been viewed by the two countries as they developed over time.

U.S. NEEDS

U.S. attitudes toward Saudi Arabia have been marked by ambivalence since the United States recognized the kingdom a half-century ago. In the early years, the ambivalence centered around the proper role of government in support of U.S. private sector interests in the exploration, discovery and exploitation of Saudi oil resources. After World War II, the ambivalence shifted to the often conflicting U.S. policy goals of bilateral support for Israel and cooperation with friendly Arab states such as Saudi Arabia against the strategic threats of direct or indirect Soviet expansion in the region. In the 1970s, U.S. ambivalence increased as Saudi Arabia was perceived both as the linchpin in the OPEC oil pricing decisions inimical to U.S. economic interests and as the key oil-exporting country with which good relations were imperative.

Saudi Arabia's rising political stature in the Arab world has created yet another anomaly. Saudi support has become necessary for the successful negotiation of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. The Saudi government exhibits a strong desire for such a settlement, as evidenced by the Fahd plan of 1981 and the follow-up plan adopted at the Arab summit meeting at Fez, Morocco in September 1982. And yet, Saudi Arabia will not join or lend support to any U.S. peace efforts that do not explicitly recognize Palestinian rights of self-determination.

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Despite this ambivalence, the areas of U.S. policy interest in Saudi Arabia have been remarkably stable. They have centered on oil, politics, security and economics. Issues and priorities have changed over the years, but, more importantly, the bilateral relations in pursuit of each of these areas have developed more or less independently of one another. The result has been that when two or more interests are involved in a particular issue, policy options toward that issue are greatly narrowed by well-defined relationships independently developed over long periods of time. For example, the Saudi request for F-15s and AWACS in 1978 and 1981 had a high political content centering on the growing role of Saudi Arabia in the Arab-Israeli problem, particularly since 1973. The requests themselves, however, represented a step in the development of a modern Saudi air defense system largely conducted under U.S. tutelage and begun in 1962 with no reference whatever to Israel.

OIL INTERESTS

U.S. oil interests in Saudi Arabia developed in the 1930s, when private American oil companies obtained a concession to begin exploration. Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in 1938 and after a brief hiatus during World War II, Saudi Arabia started the process of becoming the world's leading oil exporter. Nevertheless, U.S. government interest remained essentially passive until the energy crisis of 1973-74. Since that time, government-to-government relations have replaced oil company to oil-exporting country relations as the principal avenue for American influence on Saudi oil policy. Thus, the U.S. government has acquired the responsibility, along with that of having to develop a national energy policy, of working out ground rules for dealing directly with Saudi Arabia on energy issues.

The task has been further complicated by the interjection of oil into politics. The 1973-74 Arab oil embargo, initiated and maintained by Saudi Arabia, was essentially an economic response to a political issue. Even apart from this response, there continues to be a political element in U.S.-Saudi oil relations in the Saudi accommodation of U.S. oil interest in return for U.S. accommodation of Saudi political and security interests.

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Current U.S. oil needs from Saudi Arabia are deceptively simple: the assured flow of sufficient oil supplies to meet the Free World's needs at reasonable prices. There is, of course, a great deal of room for disagreement over what is sufficient, what the Free World's needs are in contrast to its wants, and what a reasonable price is for a long-term wasting asset. It is in reaching a consensus on these issues that the conduct of U.S.-Saudi oil relations chiefly concerns itself.

U.S. POLITICAL INTEREST

Saudi Arabia has long been considered a friend of the United States, despite the difficulties inherent in the kingdom's antipathy for Israel. The relative importance of U.S. political interests in Saudi Arabia has fluctuated, however. Prior to the 1970s, U.S.-Saudi relations were based more on strategic and oil interest than on political concerns. With the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a major leader of the Arab moderates after 1973, however, the United States began to consider support of the Arab-Israeli peace process as crucial. Neither country envisaged or desired the kingdom to become an actual party to peace negotiations, but the United States actively sought both behind-the-scenes efforts and public Saudi support for the peace process. The United States was greatly disappointed, therefore, that the Saudis declined to support the Camp David accords and the subsequent Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and Camp David process, which, with all its shortcomings, was viewed as the best vehicle for achieving an Arab-Israeli settlement.

The United States also began to view Saudi political leadership among the Arab moderates as a force for stability in the region. For example, Saudi participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council was seen as a stabilizing factor. So were assistance programs to Lebanon, North Yemen, Morocco and Sudan.

Based on these perceptions, the United States has come to see its political needs in Saudi Arabia as centering on a strong Saudi supportive role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, including U.S. efforts to effect a withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon. In the context of Arab politics, the United States needs Saudi Arabia to continue to play the leading moderating and stabilizing role that it has been attempting to do over the past few years.

U.S. SECURITY NEEDS

Saudi Arabia has been a focus of U.S. security needs since the kingdom was granted lend-lease eligibility during World War II. Following the war, security concerns waned briefly but then reappeared with the advent of the Cold War. In the late 1940s, an agreement was reached for the construction of an airbase at Dhahran that was to become a part of the U.S. strategic air defense system. In 1951, another agreement was concluded to provide for the creation of a United States Military Training Mission (USMTM) to Saudi Arabia. USMTM has remained the principal source of advice and assistance to the Saudi armed forces ever since.

In the 1960s, U.S. security interests in Saudi Arabia shifted. In April 1962, U.S. base rights at Dhahran formally came to an end by mutual consent. Intercontinental ballistic missiles had already lowered the need for strategic airbases, and the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia was becoming an increasing liability to the kingdom because of the rising tide of militant Arab-nationalism that characterized the area. In the Arabian Peninsula, that tide was most manifest during the Yemeni civil war of 1962-70, with Saudi Arabia supplying the royalists and Egypt supporting the republicans. In an attempt to arrange a settlement, U.S. Ambassador Bunker offered King Faisal an air defense survey as a sweetener to agree to a peace with President Nassar. The agreement failed, but the survey became the basis for developing the modern Saudi air force.

Despite the turmoil in the Arabian Peninsula, U.S. security concerns throughout the Middle East decreased as the Cold War gave way to detente and as strategic concern increasingly shifted to southeast Asia. In the 1970s, however, U.S. security interest again shifted to the Middle East and in particular to the Gulf. A new sense of urgency over Gulf security arose after the British withdrawal in 1971. In response to the perceived threat of a "power vacuum" in the Gulf following the withdrawal, the United States evolved the "Two Pillar policy," which essentially meant helping Iran and Saudi Arabia (the two pillars) build up their military establishment to maintain Gulf security without requiring the introduction of U.S. troops. The tremendous increase in oil revenues due to the energy crisis, moreover, enabled both Saudi Arabia and Iran to accelerate the rate of military development, largely directed by U.S. advisors.

Critics of this policy decried it as fostering an arms race in the Gulf. Moreover, Israel had become concerned at the potential for Saudi oil power to drive a wedge between the United States and Israel. This concern gave added incentive to supporters of Israel in the United States to oppose major arms sales to Saudi Arabia, most notably the F-15 sale in 1978 and the AWACS sale in 1981.

Two events in the late 1970s restored a full measure of urgency to U.S. security interest in Saudi Arabia; the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran in 1978-79, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The former not only resulted in the demise of the Two Pillar policy, but also raised fears that Saudi Arabia might also be susceptible to an Islamic fundamentalist revolution. The Mecca Mosque incident in November 1979 and the Shi'a riots in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province in 1979 and 1980 reinforced such fears. But in retrospect, U.S. concern over Saudi stability appears to have been over-reactive, the product of misunderstanding of the fundamental differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Still, U.S. perceptions of the kingdom's instability have persisted and have resulted in a new degree of ambivalence about how best to support the Saudi regime.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan served to reawaken U.S. strategic concerns of a conventional military threat to the Gulf either by the Soviet Union or one of its surrogates. In response to this threat, the Carter Administration countered with a strategy for the Gulf that centered on the acceleration of a rapid deployment force (RDF) development. The Reagan Administration initially responded to the threat with its "strategic consensus" concept.

In both cases, the primary U.S. security need from Saudi Arabia came to be seen as increased military cooperation to deter conventional military attack. Due to Arab political sensitivities over granting foreign bases in general and U.S. bases in particular so long as the Arab-Israeli problem remains unsolved, base rights are out of the question. Short of that, the United States is seeking prior consensus on how to proceed in the event of contingencies.

U.S. ECONOMIC NEEDS

Ironically, the earliest U.S.-Saudi economic relations involved efforts to prevent the financial collapse of the Saudi regime during World War II. In

succeeding years, U.S. economic and commercial relations with Saudi Arabia were left largely in private hands. After 1973, Saudi Arabia's accumulation of massive foreign exchange holdings created considerable public sector interest as well. Initial American attitudes were mixed. On the one hand, there was anxiety that unless Saudi Arabia and the other oil exporters with higher revenues than capital requirements "recycled their petro-dollars," world liquidity would suffer. Such fears were an added economic incentive to large U.S. military sales to the Gulf. On the other hand, fears were expressed in some quarters that the Saudis and other Arab oil exporters would invest so heavily in the United States that they would be able to impose political conditions on the U.S. economy. A score of bills were introduced in the Congress, aimed directly or indirectly at restricting Arab investment.

Fortunately, reason prevailed and no such restrictions materialized. On the contrary, the United States has endeavored, through a number of cooperative arrangements such as special Treasury issues, to facilitate the orderly investment of Saudi reserves in the United States. Given the size of Saudi dollar and other foreign exchange holdings, the United States needs the Saudis to continue the responsible investment policies they have pursued since the energy crisis.

On the commercial side, U.S. firms have long enjoyed a good reputation in Saudi Arabia for high quality products and straightforward business dealings, a legacy begun by the oil companies. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is a free market economy in which, with the exception of the Arab boycott, few commercial restrictions exist. Indeed, the greatest U.S. trade restrictions with Saudi Arabia have been levied not by the Saudis but by the United States. Through foreign tax, commercial practices and anti-boycott legislation, millions of dollars of business and thousands of jobs have been lost to European and Japanese competitors. Nevertheless, the United States needs to maintain its high volume of exports, in particular to offset payments for imports.

SAUDI NEEDS

Despite the many mutual interests between Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Saudis do not calculate their interests in quite the same way as Americans. Two factors, Islam and geographic isolation, have contributed most to Saudi perceptions of international relations and foreign policy priorities. From Islam has come the concept of a bipolar world that adapts to the present international environment. In the classical Islamic version, the world is divided into the monotheists and atheists. It is easy enough to place communism in the latter category and the Muslim world and the West in the former. As keepers of Islam's two holiest shrines, Mecca and Medina, the Saudis feel a special responsibility to maintain the religious as well as political integrity of the Muslim world and believe the United States has a similar responsibility to the political integrity of the entire Free World.

The Saudis have a problem fitting Israel into this paradigm, for Israel is both monotheist and a part of the Free World. They get around the problem by considering their quarrel not to be with Judaism but with political Zionism. In Saudi eyes, the injustice of the creation of Israel and the expansion of Arab territory under Israeli control has not only diverted Arab attention from the broader communist threat but has also fostered the radicalization of the

Arab world, frustrated over the lack of progress toward the realization of Palestinian rights. The great anomaly for the Saudis is that the United States, which is seen as the ultimate protector against communism, is also seen as the vital supporter of Israel, and by inference, of Israeli intransigence in refusing to recognize Palestinian rights of self-determination.

The second factor, isolation in the vast desert reaches of Najd, as central Arabia is called, has over the centuries produced an insular attitude of encirclement by enemies. This "encirclement syndrome" historically focused on rival tribes, expanded during the 19th and 20th centuries to include outside powers and currently includes Zionist Israel, Marxist Ethiopia, South Yemen and Afghanistan, revolutionary Islamic Iran and also Libya. Radical Syria and Iraq cannot be ruled out as future threats. This sense of encirclement has helped to instill among the Saudi leadership a continuing search for security, which is reflected in every aspect of U.S.-Saudi relations.

SAUDI PETROLEUM NEEDS

Saudi Arabia, with its commanding position in OPEC, would seem to have limited needs from the United States on the issue of oil. From the Saudi perspective, however, there are great needs. Despite efforts to diversify its economy, Saudi Arabia will remain largely one-dimensional so long as the oil holds out. And despite Saudi Arabia's tremendous oil reserves, oil is a wasting asset. On the supply side, the Saudis wish for no interference from the major consuming countries, opposing any hint of consumer actions such as stockpiles to neutralize OPEC. On the demand side, however, they wish for the United States and other major consumers to adopt long-range measures to restrain demand, thus relieving OPEC of the political onus of forcing conservation through higher prices and limits on production. Declining demand due to higher prices has met this need more effectively than have U.S. policies, tied as they are to American consumer opposition to U.S.-imposed restrictions such as gasoline taxes. Moreover, the current recession is also doing a more effective job than U.S. energy policy in promoting energy conservation. Nevertheless, when economic recovery takes place, that part of total conservation born of hard times will disappear. Thus, it is highly likely that the Saudis will again appeal to the United States to curb its appetite for oil.

Possibly a more persistent problem for the Saudis is the need for cooperation and consultation in attempting to stabilize oil prices, so that the steep rises and declines in demand the market has experienced since OPEC came of age can be avoided. The inherent confrontational relationship between buyers and sellers, however, makes this difficult. Some of the ideas put forward by the Saudis, such as using a market basket of currencies rather than the U.S. dollar to denominate oil prices, are considered by the United States to be against its economic interest. Still, the need for stable prices exists equally for all major producers and consumers.

SAUDI POLITICAL NEEDS

The primary Saudi political need from the United States is to effect a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem as soon as possible. So long as the problem remains, the Saudis believe that it will factionalize and radicalize

the Arab world, make dealings with the United States difficult and maximize opportunities for Soviet expansion in the area. The sine qua non for a settlement is recognition of Palestinian rights of self-determination. However, the Saudis are perfectly willing for the parties directly involved to negotiate how the granting of those rights should be implemented. Saudi Arabia does not consider itself a confrontation state or a direct party to such negotiations, and can be expected, under certain conditions, to accept whatever the parties agree upon. The major sticking point is East Jerusalem. It is the third holiest site in Sunni Islam (after Mecca and Medina), and the Saudis would adamantly oppose any solution that would leave East Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

At the same time, the Saudis do not think that the parties can agree on a settlement. They attribute this to the intransigence in Israel that has grown during the Begin government. Saudi opposition to the Camp David process is grounded in the conviction that it provided no avenue for realization of Palestinian rights and that its provisions for autonomy are no more than window dressing -- a conviction they feel was reinforced by Begin's own public statements. The Saudis see the only hope for peace, therefore, is for the United States to force Israel into concessions on Palestinian rights and on Jerusalem. That done, they feel that they and the other Arab moderates can deliver the Arab side on other contentious issues.

Realistically, the Saudis do not have much hope at the present time that the United States has the will to coerce Israel into a "just" peace despite what they perceive as the U.S. ability to do so. Thus, they believe, the Arab moderates must make the task easier by avoiding intransigence on their part. Saudi sponsorship of the Fahd plan of 1981 and subsequent 1982 Fez summit resolutions are examples of this thinking. The former failed, where the latter succeeded, in large measure because of the Reagan plan in September 1982. While the Saudis do not agree to everything in the Reagan plan, they see it and the Fez summit points as a step toward peace. In the meantime, they perceive the need for the United States to be evenhanded in its quest for a settlement.

SAUDI SECURITY NEEDS

Security has been at the heart of U.S.-Saudi relations from the earliest days. In the years during which the United States enjoyed base rights at Dhahran, the quid pro quo for the Saudis was an American commitment to the defense of the kingdom. Even after the base rights ended, U.S. reassurance of that commitment remained a major perceived Saudi security need. For years, American leaders in high level meetings would reaffirm official U.S. expressions of support for the regime beginning with the oral commitment expressed by President Roosevelt to King Abd al-Aziz (Ibn Saud) during their historic meeting aboard the U.S.S. Quincy on February 14, 1945.

With the closure of the Dhahran base in 1962, the USMTM became the principal tool of U.S. reassurance and military cooperation. Although USMTM was a decade old by then, there was little to show for it. The Saudis, mindful of the internal security implications of a large, modern military establishment, looked on USMTM more as a symbol of U.S. support than as the means for building up a strong military force.

The 1960s changed that view. The Yemeni civil war, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the creation of an independent Marxist state in South Yemen in 1967, and the 1968 British announcement of its intention to end its protective role in the Gulf by 1971 all helped to convince the Saudis that despite internal security risks, they had to build an effective armed force. For that, they turned primarily to the United States. The route was not always easy. For example, in 1965 the United States allowed Britain to sell Lightning fighters to Saudi Arabia in response to the air defense survey conducted by the U.S. Air Force as promised by Ambassador Bunker in 1963. The British were then in a financial squeeze, and the Americans hoped that with the profits from the sale, London could afford to buy F-111s from the United States. The British never did buy the F-111s, and the Saudis ended up with a front line aircraft ill-suited to their needs. To make up for this problem, they bought Northrop F-5s as a second line aircraft in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and skipping over the obsolescent F-4s, requested F-15s in 1978 to replace the worn-out Lightnings. The political controversy of this sale in the United States totally obscured the logic of the request in terms of a 15-year old, U.S.-designed program to build up the Saudi air force.

By 1973, virtually every major Saudi military modernization program involving the United States was in place. Subsequent arms requests were for follow-on equipment and services rather than for entirely new programs. The most extensive and expensive program involved Saudi air defense, but there were also programs with the Saudi army and navy, and, wholly separate from USMTM, a program to modernize the Saudi Arabian National Guard, the kingdom's tribally recruited paramilitary security force.

Following the energy crisis of 1973-74, the Saudis decided to accelerate these programs and had the money to do so. Most of the spending went into military construction, but the large figures began to draw U.S. Congressional criticism. This situation led to what became a series of crises of confidence by the Saudis in the U.S. commitment to the security of the kingdom. The Saudis were very much aware of the military logic of their requests, based as they were on U.S. surveys and recommendations. Thus they came to consider the U.S. reaction to them as a "litmus test" of friendship. The Saudi suspicions of U.S. intentions were also based in part on continuity. Whereas the Americans originally involved in advising the Saudis on military development had long since departed and retired, the same Saudis were still in office. Prince Sultan, the Defense Minister, and his brother Prince Abdallah, head of the National Guard, were both appointed in 1962. The current ruler, King Fahd, was appointed Interior Minister the same year. Thus, there were few U.S. policy explanations or justifications that they had not heard before.

In addition, with little hope that Saudi desiderata for U.S. initiatives toward an Arab-Israeli settlement could be met, arms sales became, almost by default, the principal avenue for reassuring Saudi Arabia of U.S. support for its needs. Thus the battles to obtain Congressional approval for the F-15s and AWACS had a major psychological as well as a political and a military dimension.

Currently, the most pressing security threat to Saudi Arabia comes from the Iraq-Iran war. Not only is there a possibility that the war might spill over into the Arabian Peninsula, but Tehran has politically singled out Saudi Arabia as a regional opponent second only to Iraq, broadcasting anti-regime

invective daily to Shi'a Muslims living in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. The Shi'a riots of 1979 and 1980 have convinced Saudi officials of the security threat from Tehran.

It would be a mistake to calculate too highly Saudi needs for U.S. goods and services in the equation of overall U.S.-Saudi relations.

The U.S. offer to provide AWACS to Saudi Arabia early in the war and the subsequent favorable response to the Saudi request to buy them were helpful signs of U.S. support for their perceived legitimate security needs. However, at the present time, there may be more constraints on Saudi acceptance of U.S. security assistance than on the United States to offer it. For example, due to U.S. identification with Israel and in the absence of a settlement, it would be virtually impossible for the Saudis to consider granting base access rights or even other operational military cooperation such as joint maneuvers. Hence, the Saudis feel that they are in a box. Full U.S. participation in Saudi security needs in the Gulf cannot be realized without substantial progress on the Arab-Israel front.

SAUDI ECONOMIC NEEDS

It has been a long time since Saudi Arabia needed economic assistance from the United States. The last vestiges of grant aid, funding billets for small groups of Saudi military officers training in the United States, were discontinued in the 1960s, and at any rate the funding was primarily a gesture of political support.

More recently, the Saudis have needed adequate investment opportunities for their mounting foreign reserves. Indeed, had there been a little more understanding of Saudi investment priorities at the time of the 1973-74 energy crisis, a great deal of concern in the money markets of the West could have been avoided. Far from the free wheeling that was feared in some quarters, the Saudis have, if anything, been too conservative. Security has been their first priority, followed by liquidity and by return as a distant third. Thus, they have sought to invest in very secure instruments and, in order to maintain instruments and, in order to maintain liquidity, have tended toward short-term investments. Only over time have they slowly shifted to more long-term investments.

Given their priorities, the Saudis have looked to the United States, the largest and most secure of the money markets in the West, for both public and private sector assistance in placing their huge reserves. This has included special Treasury issues and other investment assistance. From their point of view, the Saudis' greatest economic need is to continue their close cooperative arrangements that have developed over the last decade.

The Saudis have also looked to the United States for assistance and cooperation in the area of economic development. The first economic development plan (1970-75) was drawn up largely with the aid of private American consultants. The U.S.-Saudi Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation, created in 1974, is another example. With a formidable task in economic and

social development still before them, the Saudis will continue to feel the need for U.S. cooperation for years to come.

In the area of commerce, Saudi preference for U.S. goods and services, developed over long years of mutually beneficial business relations, far outweighs the actual need for it. Most of their needs, including high technology, can be purchased, perhaps even more cheaply, from Western Europe, Canada and Japan. It would be a mistake to calculate too highly Saudi needs for U.S. Goods and services in the equation of overall U.S.-Saudi relations.

BALANCING THE NEEDS

Three themes recur throughout the range of U.S.-Saudi relations: ambivalence, cooperation and security. Ambivalence placed constraints on the degree of cooperation possible within the relationship and also undermines the degree of mutual political, economic and military security. It would be naive to assume that ambivalence can be removed entirely. In some areas, such as oil, where the Saudis are a major exporter and the United States a major consumer, a certain amount of ambivalence over the terms of trade is inevitable. Nevertheless, it should at least be recognized in order to prevent unrealistic expectations of what the other side is willing, able or likely to do.

U.S. ambivalence toward Saudi Arabia stems primarily from two sources: the prospect of a continuing dependence on oil beyond the present slack market, as mentioned above, and the Arab-Israeli problem. In the case of oil, despite buyer-seller differences, there is still a large area of mutual interest in maintaining price stability, and, on the other side of the coin, in preventing dislocations to the Free World economy from precipitate price rises. There is also a mutual interest in curbing world inflation, created at least in part by high oil prices, and in long-run conservation. There are, of course, differences in U.S. and Saudi views over what the best policy goals in pursuit of these interests are. To the extent that Saudi policies, in pricing for example, do not meet U.S. goals, a broader dialogue is necessary that would make political or security trade-offs in return for concessions on price. To do this successfully, however, the United States must have a very clear idea of Saudi priorities as well as its own.

The degree of both U.S. and Saudi ambivalence toward one another arising from the Arab-Israeli problem is directly proportional to the degree of tension and polarization surrounding the problem. In times of crisis, the United States is most firmly associated with Israel at one pole and with the Arabs at the other. Thus, apart from the long-range goal of a comprehensive settlement, efforts to lower tensions and depolarize the Arab-Israeli problem will have a salutary effect on U.S.-Saudi relations.

On balance, the realization of U.S. and Saudi mutual goals requires cooperation. One of the problems for the United States in entering cooperative relationships with a weaker state is that it severely limits the use of superior power in pursuit of policy goals. The latter is most effective in a confrontational relationship. Thus, such lines of reasoning as, "They need us more than we need them," are self-defeating. If the United States truly believes that its needs are best served through cooperation with Saudi Arabia, then a calculation of the preponderance of need should not be a consideration. Instead, the terms of the relationship should be determined by

which side can do more to meet the other's needs -- in other words, not by which side needs the most, but by which side can contribute the most. The Saudis do not mind so much acknowledging their need for U.S. cooperation. For them, the problem is what they perceive to be a U.S. unwillingness to acknowledge that it needs Saudi cooperation as well.

With the preponderance of power and influence, the United States should not have insurmountable difficulty in establishing an acceptable quid pro quo for cooperation with the Saudis. For example, if a U.S.-dictated Arab-Israeli settlement and U.S. base rights are both out of the question, it should still not be impossible to work for something less than a settlement in return for something less than base rights. The important thing is to accept the essentially cooperative nature of the relationship.

Security is in many ways a psychological factor. It is true that one can, to a degree, quantify military capability, but it is more difficult to quantify the degree of deterrence that capability will produce and hence how much security it can bring. Saudi Arabia, because of its unique history and its current status as the world's key oil exporter lacking the military means to defend itself, is preoccupied with security as few other small states are. The periodic reassurance of support for the security of a regime that the Saudis wish from the United States is therefore highly psychological in nature. A long-standing weakness in the conduct of U.S. relations with the Saudis over the years has been insensitivity to this factor. Official and unofficial visits of U.S. leaders to Saudi Arabia have all too often undermined Saudi confidence in the strength of the U.S. commitment, particularly in the case of those officials who focus on substantive issues during what the Saudis consider ceremonial visits for the purpose of instilling mutual trust. In the long run, therefore, U.S.-Saudi relations will stand or fall on personal diplomacy far more than on the terms of negotiation of a given problem or on the scope or nature of programs proffered in the name of cooperation.

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