

# Odd couple

## U.S., Saudi Arabia strange bedfellows for a single reason: oil

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — King Abdel Aziz brought sheep for slaughter. President Roosevelt brought his own Navy cruiser. From the start, at that 1945 meeting, Saudi Arabia and America were an odd couple. This is the first in a three-part series looking at where the "special relationship" is headed.

By **CHARLES J. HANLEY**  
Associated Press

**PRINCE SULTAN AIR BASE, Saudi Arabia** — Whenever she goes to town, Donna Caswell first straps on her body armor. Then the U.S. Air Force sergeant drapes herself from head to toe in a black robe.

The first protects her against America's Saudi enemies, the second against the ire of its Saudi friends.

"It's, well, interesting," Caswell says.

A half-century after they first joined forces, the "special relationship" between the United States and Saudi Arabia stands at the heart of global geopolitics — and at the top of any list of "interesting" alliances.

One partner is dynamic and democratic, the other traditional and feudal. One is open, the other closed and repressive. One celebrates diversity, the other hides half its population in veiled anonymity.

### (In)Convenient marriage

A single shared interest binds superpower to desert kingdom: One needs to buy oil, the other needs to sell it.

The marriage of convenience is proving, in some ways, an inconvenient one.

Irritations and disagreements trouble the military partnership. Two terror bombs have brutally announced grassroots Saudi opposition to the

Americans. And Saudi infidelity to one of its vows may eventually take some charm out of the relationship.

About 20,000 U.S. servicemen and women are on duty in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf, keeping an eye on Iraq, Iran and the industrial world's oil supply.

From this tent city on the desert's edge, some 80 Air Force warplanes, ready to defend the kingdom, fly patrols over southern Iraq. Three hundred miles away, the Gulf's waters are crowded with up to 35 Navy warships. Scattered elsewhere, equipment is being "prepositioned" for thousands of Army soldiers to be flown in during a crisis.

The U.S. military commitment strengthened as America's dependence on imported oil grew through the 1990s. Few contrary voices were heard in Washington.

Analysts estimate the Persian Gulf commitment costs U.S. taxpayers at least \$40 billion a year.

### Danger in the city

Local hostility to the American troops is inflaming the opposition to the Saudi monarchy. The "solution" is becoming part of the problem.

In Riyadh, the capital, Saudi officials sound reassuring.

"I don't think there's a strong resentment of the Americans. They're not a colonial force," said royal adviser Abdel-Aziz Al-Fayez. But he conceded, "Not everybody has the same feeling."

Since the bombings, which together killed 24 Americans in November 1995 and last June, the U.S. profile has been lowered. American forces have been consolidated in two locations — a high-security compound outside Riyadh and the Prince Sultan Air Base 80 miles south of the capital.

The few who travel off-base follow strict security rules. And women, like

**"As long as there is oil in Saudi Arabia, the Americans will be there."**

**ALEXANDER BIGH**  
former Israeli government adviser

postal specialist Caswell, must also don the full-length "abaya," to avoid harassment by Muslim religious police enforcing "the veil" on women.

Everyday dealings are tense in other ways, too. The Air Force must disguise chapels as "morale centers," for example, because other religions are outlawed here. And a Saudi commander recently declared the U.S. side of this base off-limits to his troops because 400 Air Force women work there.

Larger handicaps also burden the U.S. mission:

■ The Saudis won't allow U.S. Navy vessels to make port visits.

■ They rebuffed an American proposal to stockpile military equipment on Saudi soil for a "crisis" brigade.

■ Since bankrolling the Gulf War, the Saudis have declined to contribute to U.S. operations like the huge deployment of American troops in Kuwait.

Although little cash is forthcoming for operations, Pentagon officials are quick to point out the Saudis are writing big checks for other things — \$62 billion in U.S.-made armaments; between 1990 and 1995.

Saudi Arabia's role as the U.S. defense industry's biggest foreign customer is a special link in the special relationship. It also points up a shortcoming: Too many ultramodern warships stay in port and too many missiles in boxes because the Saudis are undermanned and undertrained.

After the Gulf War, the Saudis said they would double their armed forces to 200,000 men by 1998. They would be a "pillar" of Gulf defense, the Pentagon said. Islamic clergy, ashamed the nation had been rescued by non-Muslims, petitioned the king for even more.

International experts estimate Saudi strength at only 105,000 as of last year, when Saudi defense spending was actually reduced by 9 percent.

"Saudi Arabia is pretending it is building a strong army," concluded Said Aburish, London-based author of a study of the ruling House of Saud.

### Family dilemma

He and other knowledgeable observers believe the Saud family faces a dilemma: The U.S. military presence is provocative to their people, but a powerful Saudi army might threaten family rule.

And so the odd couple continues to dig in the desert. And what about when Saddam Hussein, the enemy, eventually falls from power in Iraq? Will the U.S. military leave?

The Saudi ambassador in Washington, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, says he sees no need for a "permanent structure." But one Gulf specialist, former Israeli government adviser Alexander Bligh, sees a different outcome.

"As long as there is oil in Saudi Arabia," he predicted, "the Americans will be there."

## Reno rejects call for independent counsel in funding probe; GOP reacts angrily

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno rejected Republican calls Monday for an independent counsel to investigate campaign fund-raising, telling Congress that career prosecutors can handle the probe.

"I am unable to agree, based on the facts and the law, that an independent counsel should be appointed to handle this investigation," Reno wrote Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

Reno wrote that a task force of Justice Department prosecutors and FBI agents is pursuing the investigation.

Reno made clear that the Justice task force does not now have specific, credible evidence of a felony by any of two dozen top officials, including President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and Cabinet members.

Republicans in Congress reacted angrily with Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., calling Reno's decision inexcusable.

"There is a clear conflict of interest when the attorney general appointed by the president is called upon to investigate possible illegal acts by the vice president or other high-ranking administration officials," Lott said in a statement.

Before Reno's decision, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., suggested that she should be called before the House Judiciary Committee to explain her reasons "under oath" if she refused to name an independent counsel.

Gingrich continued the attack Monday. "As a historian, I do not see any possible way for the attorney general to defend the decision not to have an independent counsel," he said at a York, Pa., fundraiser.

**"Thanks Event Staff! You Rock!"**

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Last meeting tonight at 7:45 p.m. We will discuss & evaluate this past semester & brainstorm ideas to improve UPC event staff.  
**Bring your ideas!!!**

## Whites turn backs on blacks at violence protest march

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — White residents came out onto their front steps Monday and turned their backs on about 500 blacks who marched through the working-class neighborhood in a protest against racial violence.

Hundreds of police kept watch on the mostly white Grays Ferry section, where racial tensions have been running high since the beating of a black family by a mob of whites and the killing of a white teen-ager during a robbery.

Angry words flew between some of the marchers and the onlookers, but there was no violence, and there were no arrests.

"They're turning their backs on the

reality that Philadelphia has to become a city of brotherly love," said Rasheeda Ali, who marched through the narrow streets of the rowhouse neighborhood with a baby in her arms. "They're turning their backs on brotherly love."

"Grays Ferry Residents Marching in Unity," one banner proclaimed. Many marchers carried the red, green and black flag representing black nationalism. Others held signs that read "Bring good to the hood."

The march and service were in response to the Feb. 23 beating of Annette Williams, her son and nephew by a mob of white men outside a Roman Catholic church social hall. Eight men have been charged with ethnic intimidation.

**Daily Nebraskan**

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