

# **Paradox of the U.S-Saudi Alliance: Deconstructing External and Internal Threats**

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## Abstract

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, President Obama made his second visit to Saudi Arabia. Unlike his first meeting in June 2009, where the U.S President was welcomed with an elaborate ceremony, this reception was considerably less formal. On the agenda were a variety of pressing issues, such as the ongoing Syrian crisis, the continued political turmoil in Egypt, the recent US-Iranian rapprochement and the escalating conditions in Ukraine.

The U.S-Saudi alliance is by far one of the world's longest and most important partnerships of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is centered on its strong economic ties in the oil sector to as well as its mutual security concerns in both the Middle East and abroad.

Due the U.S and Saudi Arabia's surprising longevity, which has puzzled neo-realist theorists, this thesis will apply Steven David's omni-balancing theory, in an effort to better comprehend the internal and external elements, which have impacted their alliance.

The thesis argues that omni-balancing theory can be used to better understand alliance formation and durability by examining patterns throughout the life span of their exchanges. It also argues that when internal threats are higher than external threats, that less collaboration will be imminent. Conversely, the thesis argues that higher external threats will result in increased collaboration. This hypothesis is tested by looking at patterns between the U.S-Saudi alliance from the early 1900s till the present day and dividing chapters by patterns in threats and interests.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Research Question and its Value</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1.2 Literature review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1.3 Argument</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>1.4 Research Design and Methods</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Explaining the Puzzle Through Omni-Balancing and Traditional Neo-Realist Lens</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Balance of Power theory</b> -.....	<b>13</b>
<b>Stephen Walt- Balance of Threat</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Randall Schweller- Balance of Interest Theory</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Steven David- Omni-balancing theory</b> -.....	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The Humble beginnings of a Strategic Partnership The Formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Early Diplomatic Relations</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>World War II</b> -.....	<b>25</b>
<b>External Threats- 1900-1950s</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Internal Threats- 1900-1950s</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter 4: 1950s- 1960s- The Rise of Arab Nationalism</b> - .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Pan Arabism: A Brief Historical Overview</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>External and Internal Threats</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter 5: 1970s- Collaboration and Contempt</b> -.....	<b>35</b>
<b>The Decline of the U.S-Saudi partnership?</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Collaboration and Support towards the Communist Threat</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>External Threats and Internal Threats</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter 6: 1980s- 1990s- The Height of U.S- Saudi Alliance and Triangular Balancing in the Middle East: Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Iran-Iraq War</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>First Gulf War- The Continuation of U.S-Saudi Cooperation</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>External Threats</b> - .....	<b>45</b>
<b>Internal Threats</b> - .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Chapter 7: 2000s- The War on Terror: The Partnership of Inconvenience?</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>The Dysfunctional Alliance</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Internal and External Threats</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Contemporary Problems and the Future of the U.S-Saudi Alliance</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Analysis of Internal and External Threats in the Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>59</b>

## Introduction

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, President Obama made his second visit to Saudi Arabia. Unlike his first meeting in June 2009, where the U.S President was welcomed with an elaborate ceremony, this reception was considerably less formal. On the agenda were a variety of pressing issues, such as the ongoing Syrian crisis, the continued political turmoil in Egypt, the recent US-Iranian rapprochement and the escalating conditions in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> The meeting in March was hailed by many in the Obama administration as being widely successful and constructive, while for many others, the meeting itself was seen as a key indication of a rapidly changing policy shift by both the U.S and Saudi Arabia and the dynamics of the their paradoxical alliance.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S-Saudi alliance is one of the longest and most durable partnerships from the mid-twentieth century onwards; it has been riddled in numerous controversies as well as associated with considerable transformations both within the Middle East and abroad. As Thomas Lippman wrote in his book “*Saudi Arabia on the Edge: The Uncertain Future of an American Ally*,” it is impossible to disconnect the US’ foreign policy in the Middle East from its partnership with Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of the Kingdom’s immense political and religious legitimacy in the Muslim world as well as their important influence amongst regional actors. The importance of the U.S-Saudi alliance and the role of Saudi Arabia in particular, comes in the backdrop of a

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, Simon: Riyadh Briefing: President Obama's Visit to Saudi Arabia. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 26 Mar. 2014. Web. 03 June 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Acosta, Jim: Obama Administration: U.S. and Saudi Arabia 'very Much Aligned'. *CNN Political Ticker RSS*. 28 Mar. 2014. Web. 03 June 2014.

drastically changing Middle East, in which historical regional leaders, such as Egypt, Iran and Iraq have been weakened by war, sanctions, civil uprisings or a combination of some or all of these factors and leaving the region without a clear leader. Unlike these traditional frontrunners, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has continued its modernization process, has emerged unscathed from the Arab uprisings and has continued to build its regional alliances with other Gulf nations as well as made strong advancements towards building up its military capabilities, particularly through its hefty military expenditures. These shifts in the regions balance of power and the Kingdom's importance in ensuring the stability and security of the Middle East, along with the degree of consistency and surprising longevity the U.S-Saudi Arabia partnership, makes it perhaps one of the world's most important alliances to date. Add also, the Kingdom's large oil wealth, which is still arguably the most important in the world, and it becomes apparent why the U.S-Saudi alliance has been preserved, despite their numerous disputes. Nevertheless, the U.S-Saudi alliance stretches far beyond their economic ties, linked heavily also in their mutual security and global strategic interests, the two countries have collaborated greatly on intelligence sharing, financial assistance, conducting operations and much more. Nevertheless, the U.S-Saudi alliance has puzzled theorists for its longevity. Despite numerous tentative moments, which have come at immense political costs for both nations, the longevity of their alliance has made it highly paradoxical. Amongst those, who have failed to comprehend this complicated relationship between the U.S and Saudi Arabia have been neo-realist scholars, which have contributed to our understanding of alliance formation and its durability. For neo-realists, alliances are always short in their duration and generally argue that weaker states are expected to balance against the growing hegemony of other actors. However, as this alliance of over a half century will illustrate, this has not been the case. Unlike neo-realist predictions, the U.S-Saudi alliance has not only endured, it has also prospered significantly at numerous intervals. Thus, due to the immense

importance the U.S-Saudi alliance has had, as well as the continued significance it is expected to maintain for the foreseeable future, this analysis will examine the longevity of the U.S-Saudi alliance in light of numerous tentative periods throughout its partnership to decipher the paradoxical nature of their alliance. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to answer the following questions:

Why is it important to understand the longevity and ultimate decline of the U.S-Saudi alliance?  
Which factor has been the most significant driving force in maintaining the U.S-Saudi alliance, external or internal threats?

In this thesis I will argue that these questions are important, due to the U.S and Saudi Arabia's unique partnership and the immense impact that both actors play for the Middle East and the world. Moreover, due to the limitations by numerous neo-realist scholars and theories, such as balance of power (Waltz), balance of threat (Walt) and balance of interest (Schweller) owing to their focus on external threats and not internal threats, I will build on the work of Steven David that argues that both are necessary in alliance formation and its durability. Unlike traditional neo-realists that assume that internal security is already consolidated and therefore not important, I argue that the disadvantages between developing and underdeveloped nations, makes this assumption invalid, as developing countries are often still new states, which have not managed to fully consolidate their power bases; unlike developing nations that have been working towards this for centuries. Moreover, I argue that unlike in the developed nations of the world, where the risks of a shift in the status quo is typically limited to political ramifications (losing elections), a shift in developing nations often results in considerable bloodshed, as is evidenced by the drastic

changes that occurred in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this analysis will build upon the work of Steven David by applying his omni-balancing theory to the U.S-Saudi alliance and examine the external and internal motivations associated with the longevity of their partnership. I argue that by adapting David's approach one cannot only get a better understanding behind the motivations for the longevity of the U.S-Saudi alliance, but also distinguish moments of imminent decline and collaboration, based on historical patterns. Moreover, this analysis will respond to criticisms made towards David's theory about its inconclusiveness over whether external or internal threats are more important in analyzing alliance formations and their durability. I hypothesize that when internal threats are high and external threats are low and that interests do not converge, that the U.S-Saudi alliance will experience a decline, as is currently the case. Conversely, I hypothesize that when external threats to both the U.S and/or Saudi Arabia exist, that the alliance will prosper, most notably during 1980s and 1990s. These contributions to David's omni-balancing theory as well as to alliance theory will provide a model for other cases, to better understand the role of internal and external threat in determining alliance formation and its durability as well as provide a greater understanding of the paradoxical partnership between the U.S and Saudi Arabia.

Since the late 1940s, the U.S and Saudi Arabia have witnessed considerable regional and global developments, which have tested their alliance. As such, this analysis will explore both internal and external elements to understand the impact these motivations have had on both alliance formation and its durability. I define external threats as imminent dangers to a country's national security. While internal threats in this case are any threat, which can directly impact the internal stability of the nation from within, which could lead to the overthrow of the monarchy. With this in mind, I will group periods that have similar patterns or threats and examine these internal and

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, Lisa: Demystifying the Arab Spring. June 2014. Web. 03 June 2014.

external threats to demonstrate which of the two was most significant during these periods. It is expected that by pointing to these changes, one will be able to see a pattern in which decline or increased collaboration would be imminent. A breakdown of these periods and their central focus will be outlined in the roadmap in the following section.

As previously stated, the political risks and costs to the U.S-Saudi alliance along with the alliance's longevity have puzzled many scholars, particularly in light of numerous tentative periods. According to neo-realist scholars and theories it was predicted that the U.S-Saudi alliance would not endure as long as it did, especially because of the differing interests and concerns. However, as has also been indicated, this has yet to be the case. Although developments in recent years suggest that the US- Saudi alliance has reached a nadir in their long-standing partnership, which has greatly undermined their alliance of convenience, despite continued collaboration. While there remains great uncertainty over whether these developments will result in a decline in their partnership or if this tentative period will increase collaboration, as it has in the past, there is considerable speculation that these new developments are drastically different. With this in mind, my thesis will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical base, exploring the evolution of balance of power into other notable theories, such as balance of threat, balance of interest and omni-balancing theory. Following the theoretical chapter, this analysis will approach the entire life span of US-Saudi relations, but will divide periods by key similarities, which will be discussed further later. Chapter 3 will outline the early interactions and diplomatic communications between the U.S and Saudi Arabia between 1900-1950, while also pointing to key external and internal threats. Chapter 4 will give a brief overview of the 1950s and 1960s, with a focus on the rise of Arab Nationalism, particularly with Egypt under President Nasser, and the impacts it had on the U.S-Saudi partnership as well as

external and internal threats throughout this time period. Chapter 5 will focus on 1970s, a period of immense tension between the U.S and Saudi Arabia with the rising importance of oil as a tool for political leverage. Chapter 6 will examine the threats from Iran and Iraq respectively, between the 1980s and the 1990s, as well as the rise in U.S-Saudi collaboration. Chapter 7 will analyze the second major tentative period in the U.S-Saudi Alliance, in light of the September 11 attacks, and the external and internal challenges this has created for Saudi Arabia. Chapter 8 will focus on the contemporary problems that the U.S- and Saudi Arabia are currently grappling with in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

## 1.1 Research Question and its Value

Why is it important to understand the longevity and ultimate decline of the U.S-Saudi alliance?

Which factor has been the greatest driving force in maintaining the U.S-Saudi alliance, external or internal threats?

The U.S Saudi Alliance is one of the longest and most enduring partnerships, stretching on for longer than half a century. However, with a decline in external threats, a U.S pivot towards East Asia and mounting divisions about how to address regional crises, the relevance of this alliance has become increasingly less important. Moreover, unlike in previous periods where the alliance was maintained due to the need for military hardware or protection, the Kingdom and its Gulf allies are rapidly turning inwards, and providing an alternative to U.S hegemony in the region. But, in light of the Arab Uprisings that swept the Middle East since 2010 as well as the ongoing crises plaguing the region, never before has U.S-Saudi collaboration been more critical. The rise of radical extremist militias, a refugee epidemic in the Levant and the need to maintain a free flowing oil export to strengthen an already weakened economy, the continued instability and future of countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, all will be of major importance, both now and in the future. Thus, despite this new decline in U.S-Saudi relations, never before has maintaining their alliance intact, been more crucial, particularly in light of Saudi Arabia's rising role in the Middle East. This analysis is also important due to the contributions it can have on the work of Steven David, who is often criticized for not indicating which is more important in alliance formation and its durability between external and internal threats. Building on David's work will provide a model for future research in alliance theory as well, bring the field of international relations one step closer towards understanding the many complexities surrounding the decision of states (leadership/elite as well as unitary actors) in engaging and ending alliances.

## 1.2 Literature review

Prior to the 1970s and 1980s, there remains limited literature on Saudi Arabia, even less so on U.S-Saudi relations up until this time. Nevertheless, the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrated the first stages of the paradoxical alliance between the U.S and Saudi Arabia, one that could prosper despite numerous disagreements. However, by the 2000s, Saudi Arabia would once again become a central theme of academic literature due to the emerging interest in subjects such as Islam, terrorism, radical extremism, Islamic jihad, that were also considered at the time as being emblematic of the Kingdom, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Many books have sought to criticize the U.S for their ongoing partnership with the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> While others, particularly in the late 2000s, sought to shed light on other aspects of Saudi society, in an attempt to normalize and bridge cultural differences. Books, such as “Saudi Arabia on the Edge: The Uncertain Future of an American Ally” by Thomas Lippman or authors such as Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, who have all done extensive research within Saudi Arabia, have provided a glimpse into the fragile state of U.S-Saudi relations, and tried to reassure readers, particularly the American public, that there was more to their partnership and to Saudi Arabia, than oil politics, radical extremism or royal succession. Others, such as Rachel Bronson, took an even more assertive position, by addressing the importance of the U.S-Saudi alliance, in her book entitled “Thicker Than Oil”, she points to important collaborations during the Cold War, which have since ceased, due to a lack of a clear global strategy. Nevertheless, others only seemed to want maintain outrage in light of the U.S-Saudi connection in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks,

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<sup>4</sup> Baer, R.: *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude*. Crown. (2003)

building up the negative rhetoric which would foster the immense tension between U.S-Saudi relations for most of the 2000s.<sup>5</sup>

Despite early attempts to understand the U.S-Saudi alliance, and the immense knowledge that these authors have shown, none have yet to integrate it into the neo-realist alliance theory paradigm to formulate a pattern. I hypothesize, that by not doing so, authors missed a valuable opportunity to better understand key decisions by both the U.S and Saudi Arabia in maintaining and building on their partnership despite the many hurdles and political costs it has endured. Therefore, there still remains a gap within the current popular literature on Saudi Arabia, which should be explored, particularly in light of the Kingdom's growing prominence as a regional and international player and its rapidly changing alliance with the United States since the start of the Arab uprisings.

### **1.3 Argument**

Most alliance theorists, classical and revisionists (Stephen Walt vs. Randall Schweller) are focusing on external threats as a driving force for alliance building, I will argue that in the case of Saudi Arabia, the internal threats have come to the forefront and that previous external threats now having been considerably subdued, has enabled Saudi Arabia to chart a different course. Moreover, I will suggest that as the U.S began its pivot toward East Asia and continues its withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, a rapidly growing Saudi Arabia will begin to take a more assertive role in the Middle East, a policy that had previously been unthinkable since the times of

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

Ibn Saud, the kingdom's founder. This analysis will seek to outline and explain why this shift has occurred and argue against current neo-realist theories. For instance, while traditional neo-realists have struggled to explain the longevity of such an alliance, particularly in light of the immense cost it had for both countries, I will address a less mainstream approach. Adopting the work of Steven David and applying to the U.S-Saudi alliance, I hypothesize that one can determine when the two will experience a decline in their partnership, based on shifting priorities for Saudi Arabia. When internal concerns come to the forefront of Saudi Arabia's central goals, the U.S-Saudi alliance experiences a decline. Conversely, when external threats are high, the alliance will prosper.

#### **1.4 Research Design and Methods**

To better understand the paradoxical alliance between the U.S-Saudi Arabia, this analysis will begin with the earliest diplomatic interactions, to explore the evolution and interests of both countries as time has progressed. Chapter 3 provides an overview of their earliest motivations, foreign policy strategies as well as an overview of key external and internal threats between the 1950s and 1960s. All subsequent chapters will be grouped by a period of ten to twenty years, based on their similarities and will focus on key events, threats or interests that either strengthened or tested the U.S-Saudi alliance. As the 1950s-1960s was a period in which Arab Nationalism and the U.S support for Israel were the main driving factors, these two decades have been grouped together. The 1970s, which on the other hand, experiences a wide array of different policy shifts and numerous turbulent events, will be analyzed independently. The 1980s and 1990s, as the alliance is focused more directly on either the threat of Iran or Iraq, and represents

the highest periods of collaboration, these periods will be analyzed together. The period between 2000- 2008, having experienced drastically changing shifts between the U.S-Saudi alliance once again, due to the War on Terror, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the rise of radical extremism both within and outside Saudi Arabia will require an independent analysis. Finally, the last chapter will provide an overview of the sharp changes the U.S and Saudi alliance have experienced since the start of the Arab uprising which have indicated a continual decline.

Following each time frame, this analysis, will deconstruct these periods by approaching them through the lens of authors like Walt, Schweller and David, to better comprehend the motivations behind their respective actions as well as to contribute to the gap in alliance formation. These various theories were chosen to account for differing views on alliance theory and its applicability to the U.S-Saudi alliance. The alliance itself was chosen, due to its far-reaching importance of the two nations play on regional and global security and their unique longevity.

This thesis will use process tracing and longitudinal analysis to decipher the varying degrees of importance of external and internal threats. Threats will be chosen based on their far reaching impact on Saudi security and using a variety of different sources to test their validity in academy. Longitudinal analysis will be used to break single cases into several segments and connect them to the impact they had to Saudi security or in shaping U.S-Saudi relations. Process tracing on the other hand, will be used to draw connections between threat (IV) and the health of the alliance (DV). As previously mentioned, internal threats in this case are any threat, which can directly impact the internal stability of the nation from within, which could lead to the overthrow of the monarchy. External threats are menaces that go beyond the Kingdom's capacity, and must be addressed with the U.S or other stronger actors, and which could result in territorial loses to another regional actor. Thus external threats are more focused on the threat of invasion from a

stronger regional actor. Alliance health is measured by looking at Saudi activity on the world stage, whether it takes a position which is drastically against U.S interests or which it unquestionably going to create a rift in their partnership or a period of declined collaboration.

## **Chapter 2: Explaining the Puzzle Through Omni-Balancing and Traditional Neo-Realist Lens.**

In this section, this analysis will draw from an assortment of different approaches towards understanding alliance formation and their durability, in an effort to deconstruct the motivations the U.S and Saudi Arabia have had in maintaining their partnership. This analysis will begin with a brief introduction to balance of power theory and its prominence in international relations theory as a tool to explain the formation and continuity of alliances between states. However, as many early balance of power authors have suggested, Balance of Power theory, as it stands is unsuitable to deciphering policy decisions. This analysis will focus more extensively on works that have built upon Waltz's approach balance of power theory; such as Stephen Walt's classical realist Balance of Threat theory or the revisionist approach, introduced by Randall Schweller, which has become known as balance of interest theory. This section will lay out the main arguments of these two theories as well as the strengths and weaknesses of both in understanding the U.S-Saudi alliance. Lastly, as classical and revisionists have generally focused on external threats and less so on internal threats to understand alliance behavior, this analysis will draw on the work of Steven David. According to David's "omni-balancing theory" external and internal threats are paramount to alliance formation and its continuation.<sup>6</sup> However, as David is often

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<sup>6</sup> David, Steven: Explaining Third World Alignment. *World Politics* Vol.43. No.2. pp.233. (1991)

criticized for not stating whether external or internal threats are more important, this analysis will attempt to fill that gap, by adapting it to the U.S-Saudi alliance and the various time periods of contention, which will be examined throughout this thesis. Based on my hypothesis, a modified version of David's omni-balancing theory, which considers global changes and challenges that can be used to understand why the U.S-Saudi alliance has endured for over half a century, despite numerous tentative intervals between the 1940s till the present day and why these periods occurred.

### **Balance of Power theory-**

The classic model for understanding alliances and their durability is the balance of power theory. In its most basic form, balance of power theory claims that state's central motivation is to prevent other states or a combination of states from gaining too much power.<sup>7</sup> Alliances are formed to counter-balance actors that have grown too powerful and put others at risk. Following the realist understanding of power politics, one state's power is measured in comparison to the power of other state's, which can be examined through its relative capabilities, which in turn is measured as military power, financial resources, proximity, size of the population and so on.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of the balance of power school, such as Liska (1962) Morgenthau (1960) and Waltz (1979), weak states are unlikely to join dominant states (i.e. bandwagoning). Instead, states will aim to balance the dominant actors to avoid a situation where one state dominates the system (hegemony).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dwivedi, Sangit: Alliances in International Relations Theory. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* Vol.1. No.8. (2012) p.228.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* p.230.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* p.228.

Kenneth Waltz argued that “balance of power politics prevail whenever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.”<sup>10</sup> Power theorists choose to balance over bandwagon for two main reasons. The first pertains to a state’s unwillingness to put their survival in the hands of stronger actors who may turn against them and which would be too difficult to circumvent once other actors have been subdued.<sup>11</sup> “Placing one’s trust in continued benevolence” is therefore too risky to entertain as a credible option in the long term unless it is the only way to ensure survival or maximize power.<sup>12</sup> The second reason is that weaker actors have the chance to pursue their interests in an alliance of equally matched or closely matched states, which will ultimately allow them to have greater control over their status in the international system.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, balance of power theorists assert that the world system is one in which states will seek to protect the security and independence of states, which is achieved by ensuring that no single country is able to accumulate so much power that its influence becomes unmatched.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the clear contributions that balance of power theorists have made towards understanding alliance formation and their duration, it remains insufficient for comprehending the complexities behind the U.S- Saudi alliance. According to balance of power theory, the U.S-Saudi alliance should have ended a long time ago, particularly after the end of the Cold War. As the world system changed from bi-polar to uni-polar, with the U.S as the sole remaining hegemon, balance of power affirmed that actors would balance against the United States, this included European

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<sup>10</sup> Waltz, Kenneth: *Theory of International Politics*. Addison-Weasly (1979) p.121.

<sup>11</sup> Walt, Stephen: Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power. *International Security* Vol.9. No.4. (1985) p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Mersheimer, John: Structural Realism. In Dunne, T., Kurki, M.; Smith, S: *International Relations Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press. p.81-83.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* p. 81-83.

<sup>14</sup> Mersheimer, John: Structural Realism. In Dunne, T., Kurki, M.; Smith, S: *International Relations Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press.

allies.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, weaker actors such as Saudi Arabia should have attempted to balance the U.S' rise to global hegemony and align with other weaker actors. However, till now this hypothesis has proven inaccurate. In fact, despite previous assertions by balance of power theorists, the U.S-Saudi alliance has not only endured for over half a century, it has also increased its collaboration, despite numerous tentative periods. These tense periods between the U.S and Arabia such as the 1970s explored in Chapter 5 or post 9/11, which is examined in Chapter 7, have greatly tested the alliance and should have led to the dismantling of their partnership. Despite these tentative periods, the U.S and Saudi Arabia have continued their collaboration and dedication to one another until the start of the Arab Uprisings, when the alliance began a period of decline once again. This could be linked to their differing policy concerns and priorities and, as I will argue, due to a lack of clear external threats.

Nevertheless, due to the continued partnership between the U.S and Saudi Arabia despite the numerous tentative periods and the clear costs both nations have endured in maintaining their alliance, balance of power does not substantively explain this phenomenon.

### **Stephen Walt- Balance of Threat**

According to Walt, alliances generally reflect a state's desire to balance against security threats. While balance of power theory suggests that states will form alliances in reaction to imbalances of power, balance of threat theory asserts that states do not balance against power but rather

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<sup>15</sup> Posen, Barry: European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity. *Security Studies* Vol.15. No.2. pp. 149-186. (2010) p. 150.

against perceived threats, which is determined by what the perceived intent of actors are.<sup>16</sup> Thus, if a state is perceived as having hostile intent towards its neighbors, those neighbors will attempt to balance against this threat by forming alliances. If a state is not deemed a threat, because their intent is perceived as being friendly, states will not be as concerned about an increase in military expenditures or other advantageous changes. In his book *“The Origins of Alliances”*, Walt tested his balance of threat theory in the context of the Middle East between 1955-1979, examining patterns in alliance formation, which reinforced his “balancing hypothesis” and the role of threat and perceived intent. Based on his findings, actors would form short-term alliances with other regional actors based on the perceived threats of specific periods and would amend them according to different threats at different times. This reflects a major drawback to explaining the U.S-Saudi alliance and its longevity particularly if we also consider the internal motivations. In periods of immense regional instability, such as the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s or the First Gulf War of the 1990s, which will be jointly explored in Chapter 6, the U.S and Saudi Arabia have often come together to combat common threats. According to Walt, these findings support his belief that states generally balance instead of bandwagon. Yet, this aspect is only relevant if external threats are the sole motivation for alliance formation or alliance continuity, which other scholars such as Steven David argues is not the case. Conversely, in periods of significantly less threat (external) to their respective interests, the two nations have often followed their own national objectives, which may or may not align with the others goals. Clear examples of this can be seen in light of the Israeli wars, in which Saudi Arabia distanced itself from the United States. This was especially apparent following the Yom Kippur War, and the oil embargo of 1973, which would soon follow it.

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<sup>16</sup> Walt, Stephen: *The Origins of Alliances*. London: Cornell University Press. (1987) p.5.

Although, balance of threat certainly advances our understanding of alliance formation by adding the concept of intent and threat, it too falls short of explaining the paradoxical alliance between the U.S and Saudi Arabia. Much like balance of power theory, balance of threat is unable to explain the longevity of the U.S-Saudi alliance for over half a century as well as the rationale behind maintaining this controversial partnership despite immense political costs to both sides. Moreover, the focus on external threats at the expense of internal threats and motivations for alliance formation make its application insufficient. Lastly, Walt has been criticized for not including actors that are not directly threatened and which still choose to balance or bandwagon.

### **Randall Schweller- Balance of Interest Theory**

According to Schweller, Walt's balance of threat theory says little about alliance formation. Instead it aims to describe how countries will react to external threats to their security.<sup>17</sup> For Schweller, this approach leads to the exclusion of states that do not feel threatened and which still seek to balance or bandwagon. Schweller also departs away from the classic understanding of balance of power and balance of threat schools, by arguing that bandwagoning is significantly more common than many scholars have suggested, particularly Walt who has generally favored the notion that states typically balance and rarely bandwagon.<sup>18</sup> While Schweller agrees with Walt and other scholars that balancing is the most common approach as a reaction to threats and dangers. Schweller argues that balance of threat does not account for states that are unthreatened and that bandwagoning is not given the attention it deserves. For Schweller, alliances are

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<sup>17</sup> Dwivedi, Sangit: Alliances in International Relations Theory. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* Vol.1. No.8. (2012) p. 232.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p.232.

reactions to opportunities as well as threats<sup>19</sup>. As such, Schweller understands alliances as an extension of gains, to counter the chances of potential losses.<sup>20</sup> In response to Walt's balance of threat and also building on the Waltsonian approach to balance of power, Schweller provides his own model for understanding alliances, balance of interest, which puts a special emphasis on fear and greed as primary variables.<sup>21</sup> Schweller's "balance of interest" theory argues that unthreatened revisionist states, which are not considered by Walt, often bandwagon with the stronger revisionist state or coalition for opportunistic reasons. (Schweller, 2004, 116-117) In his book, entitled, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In", Schweller suggests that while "balancing is an extremely costly activity, bandwagoning **rarely involves cost.**"<sup>22</sup> Schweller asserts that this is because, unlike balancing, bandwagoning often enables free-riding with stronger actors and sharing in the spoils of war.

While Walt and Schweller provide important contributions to the field of international relations, both largely ignore internal politics, which in some cases may play an even greater role in explaining alliance formation. Just as Schweller suggests that unthreatened actors may have other motivations, such as greed or fear at the external level, one must also consider the possibility that states may be responding to perceptions of internal threats, which is the case of Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> Thus, much like balance of power and balance of threat, Schweller's balance of interest theory, also falls short of adequately explaining the U.S-Saudi alliance. Although neo-realist theorists

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<sup>19</sup> Schweller, Randall: Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing. *International Security* Vol.29. No.2 (2004) p.116.

<sup>20</sup> Dwivedi, Sangit: Alliances in International Relations Theory. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* Vol.1. No.8. (2012) p. 232.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* p.232.

<sup>22</sup> Schweller, Randall: Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing. *International Security* Vol.29. No.2 (2004) p.93.

<sup>23</sup> Nonneman, Gerd: *Determinants and patterns of Saudi foreign policy: 'omnibalancing' and 'relative autonomy' in multiple environments*. In: Saudi Arabia in the balance : political economy, society, foreign affairs. Hurst & Co., London, (2005) p.318.

have been generally ineffective at explaining the longevity of the U.S-Saudi alliance as well as motivations linked to internal threats, Schweller and Walt provide an important understanding on this matter. As external and internal threats are important motivations towards understanding alliance formation and their continuity, it is imperative to draw from scholars, such as Steven David, who sought to build on these previous works but argued in favor of internal and external threats as being paramount to alliance formation.

### **Steven David- Omni-balancing theory-**

Like Schweller, Steven David also found limitations to current notions surrounding balance of power and balance of threat theories, pointing to developing countries (“third world”), which he suggests are not accurately covered by these approaches.<sup>24</sup> David offers an “Omni-balancing” theory to understand why developing countries align themselves in the way that they do, with particular emphasis on leaders and elites as core driving forces.<sup>25</sup> David’s theory provides an alternative view of alliance theory, which better explains some of the contemporary transformations currently taking place within the U.S-Saudi alliance as well as other alignments throughout the world. However, before applying it to the U.S and Saudi alliance, it is important to provide a brief summary of omni-balancing theory to understand this approach in relation to neo-realist assumptions, which have been discussed so far (i.e. balance of power, balance of threat, balance of interest).

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<sup>24</sup> David, Steven: Explaining Third World Alignment. *World Politics* Vol.43. No.2. pp.233-256. (1991) p. 234.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* p. 235.

Unlike other balance of power theories, David's Omni-balancing approach focuses on threats to state leadership (such as the royal family in Saudi Arabia or the religious elite), as opposed to threats to the state as a unitary actor. Moreover, unlike balance of power approaches, which only focus on external threats (because they consider internal threats as inconsequential due to the state's assumed ability to address concerns at the domestic level), David's approach emphasizes the importance of internal threats in alignment decisions.<sup>26</sup> According to David, balance of power fails to explain why leaders make alignment decisions from developing countries because it focuses extensively on the differences between international anarchy and internal stability. Mohammed Ayooob<sup>27</sup>, offers another reason why approaching developing countries solely under the external lens is unreliable. Ayooob argues that, due to the immense advantage of the developed world over a longer period of time, the internal realm is ignored because power has been consolidated. However, in much of the developing world, this ceases to be the case, where coups and protests threaten lives, not only political office. Nevertheless, David argues that in many developing countries, the state is either unwilling or unable to ensure security and stability in the face of rising tensions, and that alliances often provide a means toward ensuring their survival.<sup>28</sup> This is also reinforced by Ayooob's arguments, since states are still either too weak to consolidate their power, the legitimacy of the governmental system too low or the new states still have not reached the political culture needed for smooth transitions of power.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid* p. 236.

<sup>27</sup> Ayooob, Mohammed: The Security Problematic of the Third World. *World Politics*. Vol. 43. No.2. (1991) p.263.

<sup>28</sup> David, Steven: Explaining Third World Alignment. *World Politics* Vol.43. No.2. pp.233-256. (1991)

Omni-balancing theory makes great progress in incorporating the usefulness of internal threats to our understanding of alliance formation and their durability as well as combining it with external threats. Despite these advancements to alliance theory, David is often criticized for not indicating which is more important to alliance formation between External Threats and Internal Threats, which is precisely what I intend to contribute, by looking at the U.S-Saudi alliance and by examining patterns in decline and collaboration.

### **Chapter 3: The Humble beginnings of a Strategic Partnership The Formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Early Diplomatic Relations**

According to Benson Lee Grayson, prior to the twentieth century, interaction between the U.S and Saudi Arabia had been limited to Christian missionaries on the Arabian periphery. (Grayson, 1982, p.2) As he also illustrates, from the early 1900s and for nearly half century onwards, American foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia would be developed by a small handful of Middle East scholars and top policy makers, which did not consider the Arabian Peninsula as an important strategic interest. This was most likely due to the fact that oil would not be discovered until 1908 and that oil would not begin to play a major role until the 1930s and 1940s, particularly during and after WWII. However, due to this minimal interaction as well as due to the limited literature that was written about Saudi Arabia prior to the 1970s and 1980s, data on the U.S and Saudi Arabia alliance between the 1900-1950s remains very scarce. Nevertheless, in the 1900s, Saudi Arabia was still highly underdeveloped with a dispersed population and minimal infrastructure. With the discovery of oil in 1908 and the rising importance of (and global demand for) oil in the decades that followed, the young Kingdom would rapidly grow into one of the region's most wealthy and influential actors. Less than a century later the U.S-Saudi alliance

would grow into one of the most controversial and strategically significant alliances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To understand this complicated, yet important, alliance, one must examine the context in which it was formed and further developed, to comprehend the contemporary problems the countries are currently facing and how they may differ from past events.

During WWI, Ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia was able to get financial support from Great Britain in exchange for fighting against the Turks and in exchange for greater Arab autonomy in the region. Once Ibn Saud came to power in 1926, his foreign policy approach was no longer as assertive. For instance, despite immense pressure from the Wahhabis to continue the expansion further, Saud chose not to attack British protectorates such as Kuwait and Iraq or the British themselves, after they became the dominant power in the Middle East, replacing the Ottoman empire.<sup>29</sup> Saud understood that if the Kingdom was in conflict with the British, it could not seek the financial support they were desperately in need of, as well as security from the Ottomans. However, the demarcation of borders particularly as oil became increasingly more valuable, only enhanced the growing pressure on Ibn Saud to pursue an expansionary policy.<sup>30</sup> Although, territorial boundaries had no historical precedent or merit up until this time, due to tribal nature that existed throughout the Arabian Peninsula as well as the large stretches of uninhabited land, the new commodity would greatly transform this notion particularly along the Saudi-Kuwait-Iraqi borders.<sup>31</sup> Thus in assessing whether or not to continue their expansion further into Arabia, Saud had weighed his options and came to the conclusion that internal division at this time, would be more manageable than losing British favor. Consequently, as Goldberg points out, Ibn Saud chose to break with tradition; This decision would result in a conflict between the Wahhabis and

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<sup>29</sup> House, Karen: *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future*. Alfred A. Knopf (2012) p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Badeeb, M Saeed: *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982*(1993) p.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

the ruling family in 1927, which came to be known as the Ikhwan rebellion.<sup>32</sup> It was the first and only true internal threat the young Kingdom would face until the 1950s. Along with the internal implications of Saud's decision, this precedent would become a corner stone for future Saudi foreign policy that would minimize their pursuits of regional alliances and removed previous inclinations towards expansion.

Nevertheless, after successfully uniting his country and consolidating his power, Saud,'s next task was to seek international acknowledgement. However, at this time very few countries would recognize the newly formed Kingdom due to limited interaction, amongst these was the United States, which would not offer them full recognition until 1931. The same year and at the beginning of the Great Depression, the United States sent geologists to Saudi Arabia to find new forms of income, energy or minerals and to broaden their ties with the distant kingdom. Saudi Arabia suffered considerably from the Great Depression and was in desperate need of money to keep their young kingdom from collapsing.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in light of the developments following WWI, Saudi Arabia, was more reluctant to turn towards the traditional Great Powers for support, and considered the U.S as a lesser evil untainted by its colonial past, as the European powers had been.<sup>34</sup> This decision to favor the U.S over Great Britain points to a desire by the Saudis to have an actor, which would be less likely to meddle in its internal affairs. With the exception of WWI, until 1932 regional security did not play an important role and would not until WWII. Conversely, while external threats did were not significant, internal concerns remained a principal concern. However, Saud approached tribalism and traditional divisions in a very unique

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<sup>32</sup> Goldberg, Jacob: *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918*. Harvard University Press (1986) p.169.

<sup>33</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p.68.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

way: by integrating them into “his system of government, he made it a source of internal stability rather than a threat”, this was done by accommodating their needs, while also consolidating his rule with their forces.<sup>35</sup> This was a strategy that had never been adopted and which had been a constant theme of turmoil in the Saudi landscape prior to its unification under Ibn Saud’s leadership. This change meant that Ibn Saud could focus his attention on governing and modernization initiatives, ensuring the Kingdom’s economic future and tying itself to a rising power.

According to Grayson, early relations between the U.S and the Kingdom “were unexceptional and limited, due to perception that U.S interests did not warrant the establishment of any sort of mission in Jeddah”, this was clear throughout most of the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in the mid 1930s the Saudis tried to dissuade the Roosevelt administration from supporting Israel, even warning U.S officials that support for Israel could endanger future economic ties.<sup>37</sup> This would be the first instance in which Saudi Arabia would attempt to use oil as leverage for political gains. However, due to the limited dependence the U.S had on Saudi oil at this time. Although, this brief altercation between the U.S and Saudi Arabia would ultimately not change the U.S position on Jewish settlers, the U.S finally decided to open a permanent mission in Jeddah, due to the growing importance of oil and the rise of U.S nationals in the Kingdom as well as rising foreign direct investment.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Badeeb, M Saeed: *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982*(1993)

<sup>36</sup> Grayson, Lee Ben: *Saudi-American Relations*. University Press of America (1982) p.5.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.7.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p.8.

As Grayson points out, the growing presence of the U.S in Saudi Arabia and their increased collaboration generally paralleled with the rapid importance of the oil industry in the Kingdom. However, U.S support for Jewish settlements risked damaging their economic partnership even before it had fully begun. Nevertheless, as WWII drew closer, the need for U.S support greatly outweighed their concerns over Jewish migration to Palestine and became the central concern, especially as oil revenue became scarce. This rising concern over their future can be viewed as an internal threat, which derives from external actors. The Kingdom, would declare its neutrality early in the war, in an effort to preserve its fragile state. However, a drop in funds from oil in the years that would follow, greatly threaten their future. Thus, due to these concerns, Saudi Arabia would ultimately push for greater ties with the U.S, despite its disagreements over other regional issues. This would become a common a theme in U.S-Saudi foreign relations that continues today.

## **World War II-**

Much like during the Great Depression, WWII brought on severe financial hardship to the Saudi kingdom, as it had to other countries that had been drawn into war. In addition, with the arrival of Western experts, the Saudis had also become increasingly dependent on their expertise, which was now dwindling since the start of the war.<sup>39</sup> Without the western experts, the Saudis were no longer getting the technical support and guidance that they so desperately needed to continue their process of modernization. Thus, to meet their financial obligations and pressed by the alarming situation they were in, Saudi Arabia turned to the U.S for financial assistance, hoping

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid* p. 13.

they would support them until the end of war. However, the U.S had already provided \$425 million to the U.K, which had traditionally been in charge of overseeing affairs within the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, Roosevelt chose to reject the Saudi proposal and instead offered them agricultural engineers at no cost.<sup>40</sup> Up until the late 1930s, the U.S-Saudi alliance was still not considered particularly significant, however this would change drastically when the U.S entered the war in 1941. This policy shift towards stronger ties with the Saudis came in the backdrop of rising interest in potentially constructing one or more American Army airfields in the Kingdom as well as the growing need for Saudi air space to ship supplies to the Soviet Union for the war effort.<sup>41</sup> This is important, since we begin to see a clear interest building between the two countries, one that is linked not only to the strategic implications in a time of war, but also the economic factors incentives, such as increased oil exports, which was mutually beneficial. To the U.S and Saudi Arabia, this new enthusiasm would usher in the start of a steady dependence on one another, not only for the security concerns they shared, but also due to the lucrative oil market, which was beginning to grow. Consequently, in an effort to build on the U.S-Saudi partnership, the U.S provided the Saudi Kingdom financial assistance, \$2 million worth of silver for coinage, and also assisted them in building up their defense capabilities, with advanced military hardware and training. In March 1944, approximately 1,600 rifles, 350,000 rounds were sent to Saudi Arabia, which was soon followed by a twelve man-training mission.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, these improvements would also provide the foundation for future cooperation on a wide array of issues, particularly as the U.S began to take a stronger lead in world affairs and in response to the menacing tide of threats from Communism and Arab Nationalism.

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p.14.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* p. 24.

## External Threats- 1900-1950s

From the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia until the early 1950s, Saudi foreign policy was driven by the need to survive at all cost. The interwar period was a time of great instability, made easier with the financial capital the Kingdom would begin to get in the years after a lucrative oil contract it signed with the U.S.<sup>43</sup> This sixty-year oil contract marked the first major economic alignment between the Kingdom and a rising global power, providing the first major platform for future U.S-Saudi collaboration. For Saudi Arabia, the financial gains were only part of the greater security concerns that the Kingdom hoped to meet with greater ties with the U.S. Still wary of the colonial era and witnessing the experiences of its neighbors in light of Great Britain involvement, the Saudis preferred to gain rapprochement with an actor, which up until that point had no interests in the Middle East, but who had the physical capabilities and capital to support the Kingdom in their efforts for modernization and security. Although, Saudi Arabia had actually benefitted from its collaboration with Great Britain, unlike other Middle East countries, it made a conscious decision in hurdling its desires for expansion due to the risk it could have in instigating a response from Great Britain.<sup>44</sup> Thus, although the Great powers did not play a direct threat, Saud recognized that they could, particularly if they strengthened their economic ties with one another and oil became a direct interest. For Saud, this direct interest could lead to internal meddling from Great Britain, which ultimately led them to support an actor which was both a rising power and which had no interest in Middle East affairs at this time.

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<sup>43</sup> Hart, Parker: *Saudi Arabia and the United State: Birth of a Security Partnership*. Indiana University Press (1998) p.37.

<sup>44</sup> Badeeb, M Saeed: *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982*(1993)

Nevertheless, despite Saudi Arabia's declaration of neutrality at the beginning of the war, it had also encouraged other Arab countries to boycott the Axis powers and seek financial support from the U.S and Great Britain in the hopes that they could get financial support during the war. Moreover, due to their large oil wealth and the strategic interest the Persian Gulf represented for Great Britain, the Kingdom saw themselves as potential targets. Their effort to remain neutral during WWII nevertheless underpins the Kingdom's major aim of surviving through perilous times and attaching itself to major regional and global powers to ensure their survival.

### **Internal Threats- 1900-1950s**

From 1900 to the 1950s, Saudi Arabia experienced considerable financial pressure, which caused internal instability. The decision by Ibn Saud, not to expand into neighboring lands at a time when momentum and numbers were on their side, frustrated the most traditional (Wahhabis) elements of Saudi society. The Wahhabis would mount significant pressure against Ibn Saud, which momentarily put in jeopardy parts of his power base. However, ultimately the king refused, worrying about the risks such an expansion could have on its relationship with other regional actors, most notably Great Britain, who the Kingdom needed for financial support. Unlike, neo-realist theories which would generally focus on external elements as major driving forces for alignment, this decision by Ibn Saud was not made as a unitary actor, but based on clear weighing of concerns. Thus, in attempting to understand why Saud came to the decision that he did, we must look at the local actors involved, which is central to David's model in omni-balancing theory. In this particular case, the internal threats (Wahhabi forces) were considered far less important than the threat of instigating Great Britain and losing a valuable source of financial

assistance, as well as a potential partner against the Ottoman Empire and the Axis powers during WWII. In addition, Saud's decision to shift their attention from Great Britain to the United States, provided a greater insurance that collaboration would not amount to internal meddling.

Nonetheless, the decision to refuse expansion was not in line with the traditional Saudi or Wahhabi custom up until that time, as it was considered a duty to spread Islam through jihad (holy conquest). Thus this angered many who had originally supported the King and led to the Ikhwan revolt in 1927-1928. Ibn Saud would quickly dismantle these groups, thereby ending the rebellion. This decision is noteworthy as Saudi Arabia's policy shift was crucial to the survival and maintenance of the Saudi kingdom. Moreover, it is a major feature of the Kingdom's foreign policy that remained till this day. These internal threats were a very minimal risk to the Saudi government, due to Ibn Saud's ability to integrate the tribes and subdue this traditional threat. Thus, with the exception of the Ikhwan rebellion of 1927-1928, there would be no other major internal challenge to Saud's power until the 1950s and 1960s.

#### **Chapter 4: 1950s- 1960s- The Rise of Arab Nationalism-**

##### **Pan Arabism: A Brief Historical Overview**

The 1950 and the 1960s were periods of great transformation and instability for the Middle East, as it experienced a gradual shift from colonial area mandates towards the rise of Arab Nationalism. It was also a period of immense bloodshed both throughout the Middle East and abroad. The start of the Cold War would result in countless proxy battles between the U.S and the Soviet Union. The wars post-Israeli independence would drastically transform the Levant region

and usher in the world's longest unresolved crisis to date. Thus, for Saudi Arabia the next two decades would be marked by three main concerns: the rise of Pan-Arabist movements primarily threats from Egypt and Yemen, the rising Soviet influence in the Middle East and the horn of Africa (Egypt, South Yemen, Somalia and so on) and Israel, which the Kingdom was in sharp opposition to.<sup>45</sup> However, the 1950s and 1960s was also a period of increased collaboration in light of growing threats, particularly in response to pan-Arabist movements, which sought aid from the Soviet Union. In few cases was the need for collaboration more necessary or clearer than between the U.S and Saudi Arabia during this period, as it sought to balance both Communist influence in the region and the destabilizing effects of Pan-Arabist movements, which put countries such as Saudi Arabia at risk. Despite their clear differences over the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Kingdom would try to maintain strong connections toward, and support from, the U.S throughout most of the this period, while also maintaining a cautious voice in the Arab Nationalist movements spreading throughout the region.

One of the cornerstones of Saudi foreign policy throughout the twentieth century, initially introduced by Ibn Saud, was the opposition to the creation of any pan-Arab or pan-Islamic political formations. However, events in the 1950s and 1960s made maintaining their neutrality very difficult. In the early years of the Saudi Kingdom, Ibn Saud had refused to endorse any plans that aimed to unify the newly independent Arab countries into a larger unitary actor. A clear example of this can be seen by Ibn Saud's rejection of the creation of a general Arab Union and a union of a limited number of Arab states. For much of the 1950s, Saudi Arabia remained resistant to Arab Nationalist movements in Syria or Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which formed in the 1930s. Saudi Arabia also rejected the establishment of Arab

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<sup>45</sup> Quandt, B William: *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Brookings Institution (1981) p.4.

League, which it felt would greatly rival national sovereignty. For the Kingdom any form of regional integration, which could weaken their influence, was rejected. Even the restoration of the caliphate was categorically rejected, despite its importance, for the continuation of the Islamic community.<sup>46</sup> This trend would remain a centerpiece of Saudi foreign policy for several decades, with many elements still remaining until today. It was also a major point of conflict for the Saudis, as it put them at odds with several popular movements that were gaining momentum across the Middle East, particularly Egyptian President Gamel Nasser's push for Arab unity. However, it was not just a matter of not being in control or that another country's leader would be at the helm of these prospective unions, but also the rejection of leading in their own right. Whether it was as leader of the Muslim world or as head of Arab nationalist movement, the Saudis showed little interest in pursuing such policies. In the most basic neo-realist terms of alliances, are the years, between 1902-1918, where Ibn Saud refused to assume a regional hegemonic role beyond the Saudi context and also showed no ambition to establish himself as the new caliph or sultan of an Islamic union.<sup>47</sup>

At the heart of the Communist threat in the region, as well as the rise of Arab Nationalism, was the rise of Egypt. With the rise of President Nasser, Egypt was catapulted into the spotlight as the face of Arab unity and defiance against the West. Ultimately, both the 1950s and 1960s would usher in an era of bandwagoning and balancing in the Middle East, as the U.S and the Soviet Union aimed at garnering support throughout the region.<sup>48</sup> For countries such as Saudi Arabia who were not particularly enthusiastic about the Pan Arabist wave flooding the region,

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<sup>46</sup> Goldberg, Jacob: *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918*. Harvard University Press (1986) p.181.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p.182.

<sup>48</sup> Peterson, J.E.: *Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security*. Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2002) p.24.

due to their concerns of what such a coalition or unification would look like, their support went to the U.S, who sought to contain the rapidly growing communist and nationalist threats. Under Truman, the U.S pledged its support for Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity; this was continued during the Kennedy administration as well.<sup>49</sup> However, the Saudi Kingdom received the U.S containment policy, which was made apparent through the signing of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, with hostility, particularly in the aftermath of the 1956 war. For the Kingdom, this alliance would only divide the Arab world, and weaken its role in the Middle East. Thus, as Walt points out the Saudis sought to make their own pact with Egypt and Syria (The Arab Solidarity Pact), which would rival the Western sponsored Baghdad pact.<sup>50</sup>

However, the Kingdom and Egypt would soon find themselves on conflicting sides. Under President Nasser, Egypt tried to export its brand of Pan-Arabism (Nasserism), this threatened the Saudi Kingdom and their efforts to remain outside the Pan-Arabist alignment. Ultimately, their confrontation would culminate in their undertakings in the rising instability in Yemen, the Kingdom's southern neighbor, which had split due to civil war, and was aggravated further by the arrival of Egyptian troops, which resulted in Egyptian bombings on Saudi territory.<sup>51</sup> This resulted in Saudi Arabia once again seeking the support of the Kennedy administration, which accepted, with the understanding that the Kingdom would initiate human rights reforms, such as the abolishment of slavery.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the 1950s and 1960s, was marked by a period of balancing against the threat of Pan-Arabism and Communism, which was threatening the futures of many

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<sup>49</sup> Hart, Parker: *Saudi Arabia and the United State: Birth of a Security Partnership*. Indiana University Press (1998) p.114.

<sup>50</sup> Walt, Stephen: *The Origins of Alliances*. London: Cornell University Press. (1987) p.71.

<sup>51</sup> Peterson, J.E.: *Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security*. Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2002) p.24.

<sup>52</sup> Hart, Parker: *Saudi Arabia and the United State: Birth of a Security Partnership*. Indiana University Press (1998) p. 115.

across the region, including Saudi Arabia but also other actors such as Iran and Israel, which Arab actors contributed to throughout the numerous regional wars that would occur between 1949 and 1967.

## External and Internal Threats

During this time period internal threats remained low, despite the concern that war would spillover from Yemen, or that the Kingdom would be drawn into war again, due to the Arab Israeli conflict. However, a central theme of this period, was the external threats, which came from various directions. Along with the Kingdom's strong support for the Palestinians and the inherit risks that had, the rise of Pan Arabist movements, forced the Kingdom to show support for alliances, which it generally disapproved of, particularly Egypt and Syria. Moreover, with the rising threat of communism in Africa and the Middle East, the Kingdom, felt encircled. However, at this time, the U.S' support for Israel made having visible signs of a U.S-Saudi partnership very difficult. Thus, the partnership with the U.S also risked damaging their credibility both for their own pan Arab and Islamic credentials. Nevertheless, this sharp rise in external threats pushed the Kingdom to seek strong ties with the United States; despite the effects such an arrangement could have to its prestige in the region. Ultimately, their need to preserve their territorial integrity outweighed the internal concerns that increased U.S collaboration could foster. However, this would drastically change in the coming decades, as the U.S would be called upon to a play an even closer defensive role, within the Kingdom. Nevertheless, after the 1967 war, Egypt would no longer play a threatening role due to its immense defeat. However, "Radical ideologies [such as] Nasserism, Baathism, socialism and communism" still concerned the Kingdom, as it was seen a possible platform for future Soviet incursion.<sup>53</sup> However, for much of the 1970s these concerns would not be reinforced by U.S action, which greatly diminished their partnership.

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<sup>53</sup> Quandt, B William: *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Brookings Institution (1981) p.65.

## Chapter 5: 1970s- Collaboration and Contempt-

### The Decline of the U.S-Saudi partnership?

The 1970s was a very turbulent period for the Middle East, particularly between the U.S and Saudi Arabia. In light of the U.S' support of Israel in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War as well as the subsequent efforts to reach a peace settlement that would soon follow, the U.S and Saudi Arabia would find themselves on opposite sides. This disagreement would culminate at a major high point of tense relations, a peak since their humble beginnings. The tension derived from Saudi Arabia's 1973 oil embargo, which was the first time, oil would be successfully used for political leverage. For the Saudis, the maneuver was an effort to coerce the international community into paying more attention to the grievances of Palestinians and a way for Saudi Arabia to maintain its prominence in the Palestinian Israeli dialogue.<sup>54</sup>

U.S and Saudi relations in the 1970s can be divided into four main parts. The first, between 1970 and 1975, was a period of immense hostility, particularly over the U.S' support of Israel during the Yom Kippur war and due to the 1973 oil embargo, which was a Saudi tactic used to put pressure on the international community. The next three phases, have best been presented by Nadav Safran, in his book "Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security". The second phase, according to Safran was between 1975-1977, in the aftermath of the assassination of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. According to Safran, this is a period of renewed collaboration, not only between the U.S and Saudi Arabia but<sup>55</sup> with other regional actors as well, such as Syria, Egypt and Iran, a

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<sup>54</sup> Badeeb, M Saeed: *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982*(1993)

<sup>55</sup> Safran, Nadav: *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*. Cornell University Press (1985) p.296.

long time rival. The Third phase between late 1977 and January 1979, according to Safran, is a period of mounting tension, particularly in light of differing views over the managing of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>56</sup> The last phase, takes place between January and April of 1979, in which the U.S and Saudi Arabia reach the greatest low point to date, due to the inaction by the U.S to support the Shah of Iran, in light of the Islamic revolution in Iran.<sup>57</sup>

### **Collaboration and Support towards the Communist Threat**

According to Badeeb<sup>58</sup>, Saudi Arabia's concern over the growth of Soviet influence and power throughout the Mediterranean and the Arabian and Persian Peninsula stemmed from the rapid success the Soviets had had, in using the U.S-Israeli association to gain support in the region. In addition, the Soviet Union had managed to make considerable progress in other parts of Asia and several parts of Africa. Badeeb points in particular, to the creation of a military base in Somalia in 1972 and Angola in 1977 as highly concerning to Saudi security. While the U.S was made aware of these concerns, particularly in the aftermath of the encroachments in Somalia and Angola, the tense relations between the two nations in the early part of the 1970s resulted in very little consideration for these concerns. However, this would change in the 1980s, with the robust anti-Communist policies of the Reagan administration.

### **External Threats and Internal Threats**

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p.298.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* p.307.

<sup>58</sup> Badeeb, M Saeed: *Saudi-Iranian Relations 1932-1982*(1993)

Throughout most of the 1970s, internal threats remained very low. However, this would change drastically in the aftermath of 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, in which the newly instilled government would question the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy over the holy city of Mecca and would launch an aggressive campaign to destabilize and delegitimize the Saudi royal family. However, more pressing were the external gains and threats that were available. With the oil boom of the 1970s, and limited external threats to its security, the Kingdom undertook a growing role in the international arena. These limited external and internal threats explain why the U.S-Saudi collaboration was limited during this time and is in line with neo-realist theories. This reinforced even further however, when we analyze popular perception of the U.S at the time and why it was imperative for Saudi Arabia to play a more active role in the Middle East. Instead of increased relations with the U.S, the 1970s was marked by its increased relations with the Shah of Iran, who had traditionally been a major regional rival. However, the two nations had two very important things in common, their favorable views towards the U.S as well as its support and the mutual concern over the rising activities of the Soviet Union, which both felt the U.S was not doing enough about it. Thus, as the U.S was not seen as a very reliable partner at the time, Saudi Arabia sought to achieve its own objectives. This feeling of unreliability would hit a major high point, after the overthrow of the Shah and with U.S inaction, which is often compared to recent events following the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, internal threats and external threats would both increase after the Islamic revolution of Iran. As propaganda from Iran would seek to engage with the Saudi Shia, the Saudi government mount an aggressive response against protestors, which would increase its internal security in the coming years.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Peterson, J.E.: *Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security*. Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2002) p.39.

<sup>60</sup> Bradley, John: *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan (2005) p. 81.

However, external concerns had also decreased for a greater part of the 1970s, as Saudi Arabia began its disengagement with the Arab Israeli crisis following the oil embargo of 1973 and its efforts to reengage the U.S after the death of King Faisal in 1975. This change is reinforced by my assumptions towards the U.S-Saudi alliance about a decrease in external threats resulting in less cooperation. Moreover, this is reinforced by David's theory, in that explains how popular perception and the leadership's perception impacted this shift. Nevertheless, the 1980s and 1990s would result in the opposite effect, internal threats would continue to increase. However the external concerns would still remain the dominant factor throughout the next two decades.

## **Chapter 6: 1980s- 1990s- The Height of U.S- Saudi Alliance and Triangular Balancing in the Middle East: Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia**

On Oct. 1, 1981, Ronald Reagan reinforced U.S commitment to Saudi defense when he stated that “The US would not permit Saudi Arabia to fall into the hands of any group, whether it is foreign or domestic, which could jeopardize the flow of oil to the West.”<sup>61</sup> This shift in U.S-Saudi relations would usher in a new era for the U.S-Saudi alliance with considerably more collaboration and support for their respective security concerns. In addition to Reagan’s words of support, the Kingdom favored Reagan’s strong and vigorously anti-Communist foreign policy, which was also a major change from previous administrations. In the 1970s for instance, the Kingdom had been concerned about the inadequate funding the U.S was allocating to countries in combatting the Communist threat in places such as Somalia, Angola, Ethiopia, to name a few. However, under Reagan, this would greatly change. In Saudi Arabia, Reagan saw an ally that could help them get funds to places of concern, while for the Saudis; the U.S could help them with their security concerns, by providing them protection and defensive weapons when needed. Due to this major setback, the Reagan administration turned to Saudi Arabia to support the contras with financial assistance, while the Reagan administration would also increase its support towards areas of strategic interest for Saudi Arabia, such as Africa and later Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Quandt, B William: *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Brookings Institution (1981) p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Bronson, Rachel: *Thicker Than Oil: American’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford University Press (2006) p.168.

According to Lacey<sup>63</sup>, if one were to calculate the amount of financial support Saudi Arabia provided to countries such as: Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia Sudan, and Chad to counter the Soviet Union during the 8 years of Ronald Reagan's presidency, between 1981-1989.<sup>64</sup> One would see that Saudi Arabia actually provided more financial and material assistance than even the United States towards sponsoring anti-communist forces across the globe. Although, this is a very bold claim, the poor estimates released in the aftermath of the Contra scandal, provided little evidence of the immense impact that Saudi Arabia had played in combating Communism on behalf of the Reagan administration. Nevertheless, along with the global implications and collaborations that the U.S and Saudi Arabia experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, the most pressing concerns for the Saudi kingdom, were found along its periphery, due to menacing external actors found in Iran in the 1980s and Iraq in the 1990s. The next two decades, would be marked by the triangular balancing of the region's three most influential regional powers at the time: Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. These next two decades would also signal a major shift in Kingdom's foreign policy in the Gulf, not only for its heightened cooperation with the U.S, but also for its role in the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981.

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<sup>63</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p.107.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* p.107.

## Iran-Iraq War

In 1980, expecting a significantly weaker Iran, Saddam Hussein ordered an unprovoked attack on the newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>65</sup> However, instead of splintering, as he had expected, the country ultimately came together faster than could have been predicted.<sup>66</sup> During the war, the U.S and Saudi Arabia would favor Iraq, as they considered it the greatest threat at the time towards regional stability in light of the Islamic revolution of 1979. Between 1980 and 1988, Iran and Iraq would conduct a devastating war, which greatly threatened the regions security. However, amongst the most concerned by the outcome of the war was the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which was particularly worried over the mounting propaganda coming from Iran into the Kingdom as well as the Islamic Republic's continuous efforts towards exporting its revolution to neighboring states across the region.<sup>67</sup> In addition, in the years that would follow, Iranians would use the yearly pilgrimage as an opportunist to funnel in propaganda against the Saudi regime.<sup>68</sup> However, the most damaging incident to Saudi-Iranian affairs occurred in August 1987 during the hajj (Islamic annual pilgrimage) in Mecca, when 275 Iranians, 85 Saudis and 42 pilgrims of varying nationalities died and where another 303 were reported wounded after security forces clashed with armed demonstrators and a stampede of fleeing pilgrims trampled other attendees. For the Saudis, these incidents greatly put into question their legitimacy as well as risked sparking sectarian divisions amongst its Shia population in Eastern Saudi Arabia. Due to these mounting concerns, the kingdom had no choice but to support Iraq, as it considered Iran a direct threat to its internal security as well as a potential threat to its external security. Saudi support

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid* p. 109.

<sup>66</sup> Quandt, B William: *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil*. Brookings Institution (1981)

<sup>67</sup> Kechichian, J.: Trends in Saudi National Security. *Middle East Journal*. Vol53. No.2. (1999) p.234.

<sup>68</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p.101.

came both in political and economic terms, with the Kingdom offering Iraq \$40 billion to strengthen its military apparatus against the Iranian threat.<sup>69</sup>

In terms of external security concerns, the Kingdom also felt threatened due to the rising tenacity and devastation of the Iran-Iraq, particularly in light of their limited defensive capabilities at the time. In 1985, the War of the Cities, as it came to be known, ushered in a period of catastrophic destruction as Iran and Iraq exchanged Scud missile attacks between one another. This reinforced Saudi Arabia's need for air defenses since the Kingdom did not have any missiles to defend itself with or to use as a possible deterrent. Although, the Kingdom had attempted to get Lance missiles from the U.S, Congress blocked the deal and the Saudis ultimately turned to Communist China who offered to sell them CSS-2 Dongfong missiles which have a higher range (approx. sixteen-hundreds miles in total) and which can hold a nuclear war head.<sup>70</sup> Traditionally, the Saudis had always remained distant to anything Communist; however, their need to ensure their security came as the main priority. Nevertheless, this deal between Saudi Arabia and China would momentarily damage U.S-Saudi relations, as these superior Scud missiles could tip the balance of power of the Middle East drastically. However, according to Lacey, the Saudis assured the U.S State Department that the missiles had not been configured with nuclear warheads, which made them considerably less effective, due to their reduced targeting capabilities.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, Iran would be deemed a central threat for Saudi and Gulf security, while Iraq would be bolstered as the Sunni protector on the periphery, which was given financial support for the war effort. For the Saudis, the rise of Iran as a Shia led nation, would not only put

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<sup>69</sup> Reza, Amiri: The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy towards Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol.46. No.6 (2011) p.680.

<sup>70</sup> Peterson, J.E.: *Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security*. Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2002) p.31.

<sup>71</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p.112.

into question their legitimacy as protector of Islam's holy sites in Mecca and as the frontrunner of the Muslim world, but it would also lead to immense concerns over the stability of Saudi Arabia and other neighboring countries. A statement made by the former GCC Secretary General Abdullah Bishara in 1982 reinforces this, "Iran's quest for supremacy in the Gulf was the primary threat to the stability of the GCC."<sup>72</sup> It is thus no surprise that the GCC, which consists of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, would come together shortly after the start of the Iran-Iraq war. Although, the Saudis had traditionally preferred to not align itself in regional pacts, this new alliance was uniquely beneficial to the Kingdom's aspirations for Gulf security and regional influence. Moreover, following a combination of balance of threat and balance of interest with a modification surrounding the time span of alliances, their actions were entirely justified in life of the perceived threat (fear) Iran posed as well as the mutual benefits of that this arrangement upheld. Moreover, it made their joint effort to flood the oil market between 1985 to 1986 all the more effective. This increased output resulted in a drastic reduction in the price of oil, which greatly damaged Iran's defense budget, while also greatly benefitting the West and the U.S-Saudi alliance in particular.<sup>73</sup> In addition, these external elements, which also endangered their internal security, greatly explains why Saudi Arabia took every possible measure to counter Iran.

Nevertheless, by the 1988, the Iran-Iraq war would end in a near stalemate, and while Iran had been a central concern for most of the 1980s, the 1990s, would become a period of gradual rapprochement between Iran, the Kingdom and other Gulf states, particularly in the aftermath of

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<sup>72</sup> Okhrulik, Gwenn: Saudi-Arabian-Iranian Reactions: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation. *Middle East Policy*. Vol.10 No.2. (2003) p.116.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid* p.116.

the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Moreover, despite, traditional neo-realist assumptions about alliances, the GCC, much like the U.S-Saudi alliance would only continue to prosper.

### **First Gulf War- The Continuation of U.S-Saudi Cooperation**

In 1990 Iraq would invade Kuwait, to the surprise of the entire Arabian Peninsula. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to call on the United States for support, in the event that Iraq would continue their expansion into the Kingdom or other neighboring Gulf countries. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its subsequent invasion of Saudi territory would be the first time a foreign invader had entered its territory and led the Saudis to establish a closer relationship with the United States. Following my modifications to neo-realist theory, this increased collaboration can be explained by the gravity of the external concerns both Walt's balance of threat and Schweller's balance of interest would suggest that, Saudi Arabia's decision to counter Iraq was an effort to balance against this threat out of both fear (Schweller) and the perceived hostile intent of Saddam's Iraq (Walt).

However, the mission in many respects was flawed. Amongst several reasons, was the lack of a clear consensus about how the coalition should determine a successful completion of the mission. Should victory be determined by the removal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, or should it also include the removal of Saddam Hussein from power? For the Saudis, further intervention, would have left Iraq vulnerable to attack or internal manipulation from Iran, which would also be

counter productive, as Iraq provided a buffer to Iran.<sup>74</sup> Although relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia would normalize, this was still seen as highly risky. In retrospect, these concerns were entirely warranted, in light of the continued Iranian involvement in Iraqi affairs in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War. Nevertheless, any plan to intervene or occupy Iraq at the time, would have resulted in strong rejection, which would have delegitimized the coalitions efforts.

### **External Threats-**

During the 1980s and 1990s, external threats came to the forefront of Saudi concerns. This increased level of threat first from Iran and then by Iraq, led Saudi Arabia to seek support from the United States, in the form of verbal declarations, military intervention and access to defensive military hardware. This renewed rapprochement in light of these recent threats to Saudi Arabia security as well as the threat that it could have oil production, hastened the need for collaboration for both nations. Following both Walt and Schweller, this rapprochement is entirely justified if analyzed individually. However, in light of the turbulent decade the two countries had just experienced, one could argue that neither would have favorably considered the continuity of a U.S-Saudi partnership, even less, a prospering one. However, while these neo-realists would struggle to answer the longevity, both Walt and Schweller could accurately explain, why the U.S and Saudi Arabia sought to balance against regional actors. During the 1980s and 1990s, Iran and Iraq respectively were perceived as imminent threats to strategic interests (combination of Walt and Schweller) and thus, the U.S and Saudi Arabia sought to balance against these regional actors, which could destabilize the status quo. Yet, ultimately, the external considerations were

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<sup>74</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p.112

not the only motivations for Saudi Arabia's decision for a re-approachment with the U.S., as internal elements also contributed to their decision.

### **Internal Threats-**

As pointed out throughout this chapter, Saudi Arabia experienced considerable internal threats, which derived from external actors, most notably from Iran and Shia minorities in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and Iraq in the 1990s with some continued concerns over Shia minorities revolting within the kingdom.

In the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, and due to protests, demonstration and bomb attacks within Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom's military took a hard stand against its Shia minorities imprisoning anyone who might be seen potential Iranian collaborators. Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Shia community in the Kingdom experienced immense repression, which led many war, senior community leaders had begun to flee the kingdom to avoid further persecution.<sup>75</sup> During the rise of Khomeini in Iran, the Wahhabis destroyed Shiite shrines in the Eastern provinces, which would result in demonstrations calling for greater support for Khomeini. This caused Saud to send in the Saudi National Guard to end the protests. However, by the mid 1980s it was clear that continued repression was not going to address the problem. Thus the Kingdom took a new direction, which aimed to strengthen its ties with its Shia minorities, particularly in places such as Qateef and Sayhat, in the Eastern provinces of the

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<sup>75</sup> Bradley, John: *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan (2005) p.81.

Kingdom<sup>76</sup>. To accomplish this, the royal family began development projects, such as the creation of new roads, schools, jobs and a modern infrastructure for the Shia community. The royal family also released hundreds of prisoners through a general amnesty initiative in 1993, releasing protestors and allowing exiled Shia leaders back into the Kingdom.<sup>77</sup>

In 1984, the same year that King Fahd would begin his campaign for reconciliation with the Shia population of the Eastern provinces in the Kingdom, another pressing internal issue presented itself when an Iranian pilot crossed the Fahd line and was shot down after numerous warnings, which would result in what many now refer to as the Tanker Wars, in which Iranian planes would attack ships that were carrying oil to or from Saudi or Iraq to the global market. These attacks represented a clear internal attack to the Kingdom's central source of income, but it also was a major concern for the U.S and the entire world economy, particularly in light of the devastatingly high prices that were experienced in the 1970s. Acknowledging that any setback or problems in the Straits of Hormuz could disturb oil shipments for long periods of time, King Fahd sought support from the United States. This resulted in the shipment of 400 short-range ground-to-air Stinger missiles to Riyadh as well as an air force aerial tanker that would enable the Saudis to better guard against future incursions.<sup>78</sup>

The U.S' prompt response to Saudi Arabia's concerns shows the interchangeable nature of their mutual interests, particularly when it pertains to oil exports.

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<sup>76</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p. 98.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley, John: *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan (2005) p.82.

<sup>78</sup> Lacey, Robert: *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia*. Random House (2009) p. 106.

While the 1980s, was a period of heightened internal concerns due to the threat of Iran and its aggressive propaganda against the Kingdom. The 1990s, which was a period of rapprochement and appeasement between Saudi Arabia towards Iran, reduced the internal threats from the Kingdom's Shia population. Although, the Shia minorities still sought greater rights, the modernization projects under King Fahd had greatly reduced traditional tensions within the country by the mid 1990s and relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran would show signs of improvement up until 2001. However, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the risk it could have on its own oil fields would push the Saudis to once again seek U.S support. Thus, during the 1990s, the clear concern for Saudi Arabia would lie on its external concerns, as perceived as an internal threat to its livelihood. However, much like during the proxy war with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the cold war, the First Gulf war mounted their prestige on the world stage, even if it had lowered it at home. Unlike in Afghanistan where Saudi support was seen as a clear sign of leadership and a reinforcement of its commitment and role in the Islamic community, the arrival of U.S troops in the Kingdom greatly lowered the Kingdom's support within the country.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, this notion reinforces my earlier claims that heightened external threats, would lead to increased collaboration and would coincide with less internal concerns. However, as previously pointed out, this increased collaboration would not last as can be witnessed in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, which would once again put a spotlight on the U.S-Saudi connection and its paradoxical nature.

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<sup>79</sup> Hegheimer, Thomas: *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. (2010)

## Chapter 7: 2000s- The War on Terror: The Partnership of Inconvenience?

### The Dysfunctional Alliance

Much like during the 1970s, the years that followed the September 11 attacks, would mark a major low in U.S-Saudi relations. For the U.S, relations with Saudi Arabia became all the more difficult due to evidence that Saudi nationals had orchestrated the attacks, and that numerous sources of funding had derived from Saudi sources. For the Saudis, these attacks threatened not only their role in the Middle East, but also their partnership with the U.S and other Western allies. However, in an effort to rebuild these broken ties, the U.S and Saudi Arabia would enhance their intelligence sharing and joint operations to dismantle and contain terrorist networks and funding both within Saudi Arabia and abroad.<sup>80</sup> Yet, this increased collaboration would only heighten the Kingdom's internal security, as can be witnessed from the terrorist attacks and gun fighting that would occur on the streets of Riyadh from 2003. Unlike prior to the September 11 attacks, these new challenges within the Kingdom were taken considerably more serious and resulted in reforms in education, charities going abroad and intelligence gathering. The Saudis had highly underestimated the full extent of the insurgency, however, this change with the discovery of a growing number of weapons and explosives which had been coming in through Yemen. Nevertheless, despite their mutual differences, on how to combat the war on terror, both the U.S and Saudi Arabia would go to great lengths to preserve their fragile alliance. However, the 2000s would be marked by the immense controversy surrounding their partnership. In addition, while the Kingdom clearly saw these terrorist cells as risks to their security, continued

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<sup>80</sup>Bronson, Rachel: *Thicker Than Oil: American's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford University Press (2006)

support for U.S policies particularly in the light of the Iraq and Afghanistan war could only further escalate tensions within the Kingdom. Thus, the Kingdom began to take a more assertive role against U.S policy, particularly as it had the warranted concern about what such an invasion would do to the region and their security, once Saddam was eliminated. Frutig points to an unintended consequence of the removal of Saddam Hussein, he states “the U.S undoubtedly did Iran a great favor when it defeated Saddam Hussein while simultaneously doing great damage to its own creditability in the region by proving itself unable to control and stabilize Iraq.”<sup>81</sup>

### **Internal and External Threats**

In the 2000s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia experienced a considerable rise in internal threats, although external threats would be the lowest since the 1970s, particularly as it showed solidarity for the U.S. However, while many in the Saudi Arabia’s royal family and particularly King Abdul recognized the need to support the U.S on their global war on terror, they also acknowledged the intense battle this would cause for them at home. For 2 years, between 2003 and 2005, the Kingdom would burst into sporadic fighting and car bombings. The Kingdom, in an effort to both contain these forces took a hard stand against extreme groups within the Kingdom. However it also attempted to engage other portions of its society, such as Shia and moderates through its “National Dialogue” campaign, which were televised debates which were

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<sup>81</sup> Frutig, Henner: Conflict and Cooperation the Persian Gulf: The Integrational Order and US Policy. *Middle East Journal*. Vol.61. No.4. (2007) p.634.

meant to harmonize and address rising concerns in Saudi society.<sup>82</sup> Amongst them were increased minority rights for Shia and women, representation, job creation and so on.

## **Chapter 8: Contemporary Problems and the Future of the U.S-Saudi Alliance**

### **Analysis of Internal and External Threats in the Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings**

In the aftermath of Arab Uprisings that drastically reshaped the Middle East, three main events have greatly impacted the U.S-Saudi alliance. In 2009, due to the tenacity of the Tahrir square protests in Cairo, the Mubarak regime was forced to step down. Yet, to the surprise of Saudi Arabia, the U.S had sat idly by, while the Mubarak regime was overthrown. This sent chilling reminders of 1979, when the Carter administration had not supported the Shah of Iran, when popular uprising also led to his demise. Instead of supporting this important regional ally, in both cases, the U.S had stood silent. Moreover, like the 1979 revolution, the lack of support the U.S, was a reminder to Saudi Arabia and other regional allies, of how unreliable its Western power can be when faced with its own internal concerns. Nevertheless, the lack of involvement in Egypt would only be one of many disagreements that would derive from the Arab uprisings. For the next three years, Saudi Arabia along with other regional actors would criticize the U.S on its lack of leadership throughout the Arab uprisings, particularly on its unwillingness to support the Syrian people who were being massacred by the Al Assad regime as well as its rapprochement with Iran.

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<sup>82</sup> Lippman, Thomas: *Saudi Arabia on the Edge: The Uncertain Future of an American Ally*. Potomac Books (2002) p. 139.

For Saudi Arabia, the Syrian crisis, represents one of the boldest open statements to date. As Petersen affirms, the Kingdom has traditionally preferred to conduct its foreign policy behind closed doors and has reacted to threats with “subdued responses, hidden diplomacy and reliance on loyal allies”<sup>83</sup> However, in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, and the lack of a clear regional leader due to the absence of Iraq, Egypt or Iran, the Kingdom, has had to fill the void. Yet, in doing so, it has further put it at odds with its longest and most important ally, since close ties with the U.S, have traditionally reduced their legitimacy. Yet, this has also come in light of its concerns over Iran’s nuclear ambitions, and the U.S’ perceived appeasement. However, its own recent rapprochement with Iran, has momentarily subdued concerns by scholars such as Cordesman, who have often pointed to the Kingdom’s willingness to acquire nuclear weapons if Iran continues its nuclear project.<sup>84</sup> In addition, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement also means that the last major external threat to its security is less of a concern at this time. While, there still remain some external concerns that could threaten or spillover into Saudi Arabia, traditional concerns such as Egypt has been weakened in light of the Arab uprising, Iran has been weakened due to sanctions over its nuclear ambitions and Iraq has been subdued in light of the robust U.S invasion in 2003. Although, Iran still plays the greatest threat to its security, particularly as it continues to meddle in Iraqi politics as well as within the Shia populations of Bahrain and Kuwait, this new rapprochement has removed one of the greatest concerns to Saudi security. This is particularly important, considering the need for Saudi troops in Bahrain in light of the devastating protests that were undertaken by disgruntled Shiite population.

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<sup>83</sup> Peterson, J.E.: *Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security*. Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2002) p.30.

<sup>84</sup> Cordesman, H. Anthony: *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* Praeger Security International (2009) p. 252-254.

Thus, without any imminent threat to its territorial integrity, and without any other clear leader in the Middle East, with both the military capabilities and prestige to lead, the Kingdom now remains free to plot its own course. It has begun doing this by supporting the military in Egypt and denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood, as well by financing countries as Lebanon to bolster their militaries. In addition it has provided funding and equipment for Syrian rebels, to combat a rising threat of Islamist insurgents. Most notably however, has been the increased military spending of Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the U.A.E, which have increased drastically.<sup>85</sup> This increased spending combined with a strong collaboration with the GCC and Saudi Arabia as the clear leader, has greatly strengthened the Kingdom's regional power and prestige in comparison its traditional rivals.

These new developments in the region have led to a reduced concern over external threats and a greater focus on enhancing their internal problem. Nevertheless, despite this sharp drop in internal concerns, there still remain several issues within the region, which warrant greater attention and leadership, which can only be accomplished with greater collaboration between the U.S and Saudi Arabia. Although U.S interests might appear to be more critical in East Asia with the rise of China, it remains crucial that the U.S not disengage from the Middle East, particularly from Saudi Arabia.<sup>86</sup> That is why the most recent visit by President Obama administration represents an important first step towards maintaining and building upon the U.S-Saudi alliance, in an effort to overcome regional crises in an effective manner. The U.S-Saudi alliance remains

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<sup>85</sup> Saab, Bilal Y. "Arms and Influence in the Gulf." *Global*. 5 May 2014. Web. 03 June 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Pollack, Kenneth M., and Ray Takeyh: *Near Eastern Promises*. June 2014. Web. 03 June 2014.

one of the world's most important and strategic alliances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future so long as both countries continue to account for nation's internal and external concerns.

### **Conclusion:**

The aim of this thesis was to assess the gradual transformations of the U.S-Saudi alliance since its humble beginnings, by deconstructing external and internal concerns, which have impacted their exchanges. Through an analysis of the time periods between the early 1900s till the present day, I was able to point to key periods in which the U.S and Saudi Arabia experiences a heightened increase or decrease in collaboration due to regional concerns or other internal factors. For instance, between the 1950s and 1960s as well as during the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S and Saudi Arabia experienced increased collaboration, due to the Kingdom's increased external threats and the need for U.S support. However, in the 1970s and the 2000s, internal threats as well as a reduced concern over external threats led to a decrease in collaboration. These findings have been reinforced by the use of David's "omni-balancing" theory, which argues that both internal and external elements are central to balance formation and their durability. Nevertheless, I believe that continued research could be made on not only the U.S-Saudi alliance, particularly in the years to come, but also on other alliance formations, by incorporating David's approach.

Based on my findings, external threats do play the primary role in alliance formation, which is reinforced by neo-realist theory. However, as the U.S-Saudi case has pointed out, internal concerns can often play an even greater role, which can offset a decline in alliances.

It remains unclear whether the U.S-Saudi alliance will continue to decline, due to the Kingdom's increased influence in light of no major threat to its security. However, if the neo-realists are correct, the Kingdom's rising position will soon be countered by other regional actors. However, since the Kingdom has not had a history of expanding into other nations, this concern may not come to fruition. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the U.S-Saudi alliance remains one of the most important partnerships of the century and will continue to do so, if they can find a common global objective as they had during the Cold War.

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