

Sheikh In Awe

How Changes in American Foreign Policy Have Strained the US-Saudi Relationship

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Introduction

In many ways, the United States (US) and Saudi Arabia are politically incompatible. The US sees itself as the champion of open, liberal democracies and the leader of the free world. Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by a dynastic royal family who uphold laws and traditions that most Americans would find draconian. Despite these differences, the two states have found that a partnership is conducive to achieving significant foreign policy objectives. The US has pursued two policy goals; to guarantee the state of Israel's security, and to continue the flow of oil from the region. In order to accomplish these objectives, the US has frequently turned to Saudi Arabia. However, on two key issues, Saudi Arabia has seen their American partners act in ways that differ greatly from what Saudi Arabian policymakers had expected. On the issue of Iranian nuclear disarmament, the US had appeared to be committed to a complete dismantling of Iran's nuclear program. Recently, Saudi Arabia has seen that its American partners are willing to strike a deal with Iran, and this has led the Saudis to believe that Iran could maintain some nuclear capability. Similarly, the Americans had seemed poised to become militarily involved in the Syrian Civil War against Bashir al-Assad, but changed their minds just as the situation became dire. Saudi Arabian policymakers have interpreted these actions as policy reversals and are astonished by them. Such an opinion leads Saudi Arabia to believe that the US is an unreliable partner, even questioning the commitment of the US to Saudi Arabia's security.

Saudi Arabian policy on both the Syrian Civil War and Iranian nuclear disarmament are based, in part, on the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both states compete for regional hegemony. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry stretches from the areas of oil production to military spending.²⁵¹ Today, however, the Kingdom sees the Americans and the West on the verge of striking a deal that could lead to dramatically eased US-Iranian tensions. The US-Saudi relationship is strained especially by how the West has approached a potentially nuclear Iran.

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry considerably increases the likelihood that an arms race would result from Iranian acquisition of nuclear weaponry. Saudi Arabian leaders fear that a nuclear Iran would pose an uncontrollable security risk that would force them to develop their own nuclear arsenal. Until that point, the Kingdom is content to remain under the American security umbrella against external threats. Saudi Arabians saw the quick response exhibited by the international community in reaction to the potential Iraqi invasion of their country in 1991, and remain convinced that the US and its allies can defend Saudi borders from aggressive attacks in a conventional conflict.²⁵² However, the dynamic changes when nuclear war is a possibility. In such a case, the Western security partnership appears less effective, especially when there is a chance that Iran's nuclear arsenal could fall into the hands of terrorists.²⁵³

²⁵¹Daniel L. Byman, "The Implications of Leadership Change in the Arab World," *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 1 (2005): 59-83.

²⁵²Mary Ann Tetreault, "International Relations," in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East 2008*, ed. Jillian Schwedler and Deborah J. Gerner (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 137-175.

²⁵³John Hannah, "Fear and Loathing in the Kingdom," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, last modified November 29, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/11/29/iran_saudi_arabia_nuclear_war_obama

In addition to these legitimate security concerns, the Kingdom is afraid of being left behind by the Iranians in terms of power projection. Saudi Arabian officials recognize that having the ability to launch a nuclear attack is an important symbol of power in a contested region.²⁵⁴ Saudi Arabia knows that development of a nuclear weapons program is costly and largely impractical. Therefore, the leadership is more inclined to pursue a policy that denies Iran nuclear capability, rather than becoming involved in an arms race.²⁵⁵ The optimal resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue for Saudi Arabia is to deny Iran nuclear capability.

In 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published its first resolution stating that it was concerned with the Islamic Republic's failure to report all aspects of its nuclear research program.²⁵⁶ The resolution stipulated that Iran had acted in a suspicious manner, so as to obstruct the full investigation of the agency and called upon Iran to become more transparent in its disclosure of nuclear operations.²⁵⁷ Resolutions regarding Iran's nuclear program continued to express concern that the Islamic Republic had violated the spirit and terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (commonly referred to as the NPT).²⁵⁸ Each time, the IAEA reported its findings to the United Nations Security Council.²⁵⁹ The Security Council swiftly acted upon the IAEA's resolutions by authorizing a rigorous sanction regime against Iran.

Since the sanction regime was fully implemented, Iran's economy has quickly deteriorated. Petroleum exports are a major part of Iran's economy. Both GDP and government revenues are heavily dependent on the energy sector.²⁶⁰ The US not only banned its own citizenry from buying Iranian oil, but put into place additional sanctions on states that continued to do so. Other large oil importing states have enforced similar sanctions against Iranian oil exports. Inflation was reported by the Iranian Central Bank at 22%, although some economists have said that this number is probably underestimated and that real inflation is north of 30%.²⁶¹ Since Iranian companies do not have the ability to import raw materials needed for manufacturing and other activities, businesses are forced to lay off large percentages of their workforce, thus, causing unemployment to skyrocket to more than one third of the total participating labor force.²⁶² As Iran's economic situation became more dire, its leaders became more inclined to seek relief from the UN and other actors.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Gawdat Baghat, "Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East: Myth or Reality?" *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 1(2011): 27-40.

²⁵⁶ International Atomic Energy Agency, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Atomic Energy Agency*, last modified September 12, 2003, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-69.pdf>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ International Atomic Energy Agency, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards and Agreement and Relevant Provisions of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Atomic Energy Agency*, last modified November 18, 2011, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-69.pdf>.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ World Bank Group, "Iran: Overview," *World Bank Group*, last modified October 1, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>.

²⁶¹ Ibid. Sabrina M. Peterson, "Iran's Deteriorating Economy: An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Western Sanctions," *George Washington University International Affairs Review*, last modified July 2012, <http://www.iar-gwu.org/node/428>.

²⁶² Ibid.

In 2013, the newly elected President of Iran, Hasan Rouhani, engaged in a campaign to change Iran's image from that of a pariah state to one willing to negotiate and compromise with world powers. In a departure from the policy of his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Rouhani vigorously reached out to Israel to rekindle diplomatic negotiations. He used Iran's official Twitter account to wish the Jewish people of the world a happy Rosh Hashanah in September of 2013.²⁶³ Western officials welcomed the change from the hardline stance of the Ahmadinejad years to that of a more open and transparent Iran under Rouhani.

After preliminary negotiations, Iran agreed to a deal with the group known as the P5+1, which included the five permanent members of the Security Council; the US, France, the United Kingdom (UK), China, and Russia; as well as Germany, the EU's largest economy. The deal would allow some loosening of sanctions by the West in exchange for a more transparent uranium enrichment process.²⁶⁴ While the deal represents a step towards reconciliation to many, others view it as a capitulation by the world powers to Iran.

Saudi Arabia is discontent with the deal because it appears to be a sign of waning Western interest in Saudi security and a capitulation to its rival, Iran. These fears have stressed relations between Riyadh and Washington. The preliminary deal did not require Iran to fully cease the enrichment of uranium and still allowed the state to retain the right to use nuclear material for peaceful purposes.²⁶⁵ In return for what the Saudis view as limited assurances that Iran will not attain a nuclear weapon, the Security Council is expected to temporarily lessen some of the sanctions against Iran. The Saudi Arabian government does not believe that the US and its negotiation partners view Iran as a threat in the same way that the Saudis do. Since the IAEA reports began to circulate, both sides said the same thing about Iran's nuclear program: It should not be allowed to exist in any form. Now, the Saudi leaders see that Washington is willing to negotiate with what they thought was a common enemy. After years of strong talk from the US over not allowing Iran to become a nuclear power, the Saudi Arabians have seen the West bow to their regional rival.²⁶⁶

Understandably, the Kingdom feels betrayed when they see American policymakers shifting their stance on Iranian nuclear proliferation. While speaking in Monaco in 2013, Prince Turki al-Faisal, a member of the Saudi Arabian royal family and the former Ambassador to the US, accused the Americans of surprising the Kingdom with their stance on the Iran negotiations.²⁶⁷ In a separate interview, the prince asked the rhetorical question, "How can you build trust when you keep secrets from what are supposed to be your closest allies?"²⁶⁸ Riyadh believes that Washington is neglecting to acknowledge the interests of its Middle Eastern allies by altering its stance on the Iranian nuclear negotiations. Furthermore, the Saudi government has become frustrated with institutions that appear to be US-led and/or influenced. Such frustration

²⁶³Rick Gladstone and Robert Mackey, "Iran Signals an Eagerness to Overcome Old Impasses," *The New York Times*, last modified September 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/world/middleeast/iran-signals-an-eagerness-to-overcome-old-impasses.html?_r=0.

²⁶⁴Anne Gearan and Joby Warrick, "World Powers Reach Nuclear Deal with Iran to Freeze its Nuclear Program," *The Washington Post*, last modified November 24, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-in-geneva-raising-hopes-for-historic-nuclear-deal-with-iran/2013/11/23/53e7bfe6-5430-11e3-9fe0-fd2ca728e67c_story.html.

²⁶⁵Amos Harel, "Nuclear Deal's Aftermath: Obama's Problem, Saudi Arabia's Concerns and Israel's New Goals," *Haaretz*, last modified November 30, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/.premium-1.560906>.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷Jay Solomon, "Saudi Royal Blasts U.S.'s Mideast Policy," *The Wall Street Journal*, last modified December 15, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303949504579260510644966826>.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

culminated in the Kingdom's rejection of a seat on the UN Security Council in late 2013.²⁶⁹ It is clear from the statement that Saudi officials see the Security Council as failing in its mandate to maintain global peace and security.

In a similar way, Saudi Arabia has reached a point of frustration with its American allies over their continued mishandling of the Syrian Civil War. The regime of Bashir al-Assad in Syria is a close ally of Iran. When the civil war broke out, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Sunni Muslim Gulf States - Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - armed and supported the rebel forces. The Saudis in particular were quick to seek a way to lessen Iran's influence and power in the region.²⁷⁰ The internal conflict, brought about by the Arab Spring, provided a good opportunity to do just that. In many ways, the Syrian Civil War resembles a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. When American President Barack Obama stated the Assad regime had used chemical weapons in 2013, he made a case to the American people for military intervention in the conflict. The Saudis welcomed the introduction of American military action in support of their side. However, as the public backlash against military involvement became more prevalent in the US and as Russia opted in with a face-saving political solution, the Saudis watched the prospect of Western-enforced regime change in Syria decline.

In 2011, the world saw a series of uprisings take root across the Middle East and North Africa. Syria quickly escalated into a state of chaos as rebel groups, funded largely by foreign actors, returned violence against the regime.²⁷¹ Saudi Arabia notes the formal nature of the Syrian-Iranian alliance has caused them to back any challengers to the Assad regime.²⁷² The Syrian Civil War has since become folded into the preexisting regional rivalry between the Kingdom and the Islamic Republic.

As the situation in Syria was escalating, President Obama stated at an impromptu press conference that the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime would be a "red line" that would, at the very least, cause the US to reevaluate its position on the conflict.²⁷³ Until then, it was entirely unclear what it might take for the US to concern itself with what the American people saw as another squabble in the Middle East. In late August 2013, reports began to surface that Assad used chemical weapons to kill more than 1,400 people in a rebel-controlled district. On September 16th, the UN Mission to Syria confirmed that a chemical attack had taken place in a residential area near Damascus.²⁷⁴ Under pressure from both its regional allies, namely Israel and Saudi Arabia, and domestic political rivals to keep to his word about the "red line," the Obama Administration began to shift away from its stance of neutral isolationism.

On 31 August 2013, President Obama made a statement from the Rose Garden of the White House urging the US Congress to authorize a military strike against the Assad regime,

²⁶⁹“Full Text: Saudi Statement Rejecting UN Security Council Seat,” *www.unwatch.org*, last modified October 13, 2013, <http://blog.unwatch.org/index.php/2013/10/18/full-text-saudi-statement-rejecting-un-security-council-seat/>.

²⁷⁰Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly, “Syrian Rebels get Influx of Arms with Gulf Neighbors’ Money, U.S. Coordination,” *The Washington Post*, last modified May 15, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-rebels-get-influx-of-arms-with-gulf-neighbors-money-us-coordination/2012/05/15/gIQAds2TSU_story.html.

²⁷¹Annie Bernard, “Syrian Rebels Say Saudi Arabia Is Stepping Up Weapons Deliveries,” *The New York Times*, last modified September 12, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/13/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-say-saudi-arabia-is-stepping-up-weapons-deliveries.html>.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³Mark Landler, “Obama Threatens Force Against Syria,” *The New York Times*, last modified August 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/world/middleeast/obama-threatens-force-against-syria.html>.

²⁷⁴“Clear and Convincing’ Evidence of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, UN Team Reports,” *www.un.org*, last modified September 16, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45856#.VHQUfnF-So>.

saying, “this menace must be confronted.”²⁷⁵ However, public support in the United States for an attack on Syria dwindled. It seemed increasingly unlikely that Congress would authorize any action that might draw the country into a prolonged conflict. When asked about what the Assad regime could do to avoid an American attack, Secretary of State John Kerry made a distant ultimatum: Assad must give up his chemical weapons to an international authority.²⁷⁶ At the time, the statement seemed to be nothing more than a long-shot response to a reporter’s question. However, days later, the foreign ministry of the Russian Federation, one of Syria’s supporters (and perhaps more importantly, a veto-wielding member of the Security Council) issued a statement calling Kerry’s solution “workable.”²⁷⁷ Within days, Assad, Russia, and the US had agreed to a framework deal to relieve Syria of its chemical stockpiles in order to avoid American military intervention.²⁷⁸

Since the beginning of the conflict, the Saudis had known that their best hope of toppling Assad and weakening their Iranian rivals was to force the West, who preached about spreading democracy in the region, to use its military against the regime.²⁷⁹ When it had become clear that the Assad regime had crossed the “red line,” the Kingdom expected the US to make good on its promise to reevaluate their neutral stance. Fortunately for Assad, the American public was too war-weary to engage in a bombing campaign against another Middle Eastern dictator. This apparent reversal of policy and rhetoric from “red line” to a slap on the wrist angered Saudi Arabian officials. In response to the announcement of the deal, the Saudi government briefly severed diplomatic ties with the US.²⁸⁰ As reports of chemical attacks were becoming more credible, the Arab League, led by the Saudi delegation, congregated and voted overwhelmingly to support military action in Syria.²⁸¹ The Kingdom saw the deal as another example of the US betraying Saudi interests in the region in favor of isolationist tendencies.²⁸²²⁸³

Just as on the Iranian nuclear issue, Saudi Arabia sees a clear contrast between American rhetoric and American action. In Syria, the Saudis saw Obama’s red line as a sign of commitment to military involvement if the situation on the ground deteriorated to a point where weapons of mass destruction were used. However, when that time came, the Americans did not behave in the way that Saudi Arabia expected. The discrepancy between the expected actions and the actual actions sowed mistrust into the Saudi-American relationship.

²⁷⁵Barack Obama, “Statement by the President on Syria,” *White House*, last modified August 31, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>.

²⁷⁶Josh Voorhees, “Did John Kerry Just Accidentally Find a Workable Solution for Syria?” *Slate*, last modified September 9, 2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2013/09/09/syria_chemical_weapons_did_john_kerry_just_accidentally_find_a_workable.html.

²⁷⁷Ibid.

²⁷⁸Karen DeYoung, “How the United States, Russia Arrived at Deal on Syria’s Chemical Weapons,” *The Washington Post*, last modified September 16, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-united-states-russia-arrived-at-deal-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/2013/09/15/c851cd1e-1e5b-11e3-8459-657e0c72fec8_story.html.

²⁷⁹Jackson Diehl, “Lines in the Sand: Assad Plays the Sectarian Card,” *World Affairs*, last modified June, 2012, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/lines-sand-assad-plays-sectarian-card>.

²⁸⁰Amena Bakr and Warren Strobel, “Saudi Arabia Warns of Shift Away from U.S. Over Syria, Iran,” *Reuters*, last modified October 22, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/22/saudi-usa-idUSL5N0IC2CP20131022>.

²⁸¹David D. Kirkpatrick, “Arab League Endorses International Action,” *The New York Times*, last modified September 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-syria-military-action.html>.

²⁸²Ibid.

²⁸³Amena Bakr and Warren Strobel, “Saudi Arabia Warns of Shift Away from U.S. Over Syria, Iran,” *Reuters*, last modified October 22, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/22/saudi-usa-idUSL5N0IC2CP20131022>.

What the Saudis fail to take into account is that toppling Assad is not in the best interest of the Americans. In many ways, the Saudis expected the US to behave in a similar way that it did in Libya and Yemen, when their civil conflicts forced Western involvement. Obama's red line statement only served to strengthen that belief. However, this reading of American interests in the region was incorrect. The Obama Administration has said multiple times that it will not support active regime change in Syria.²⁸⁴ It has been vocal about Assad stepping down on his own terms, but doing so has legitimized the Assad regime in a way that means the West is unwilling to depose him.²⁸⁵ The US has problems with intervention in Syria because it is concerned with what kind of government would emerge after Assad left.

The rebel opposition in Syria is deeply fragmented between moderate groups and political extremists. Unlike in Libya, there is no National Transitional Council that speaks for all the many factions.²⁸⁶ It is very unclear as to what kind of state will emerge from the power vacuum after Assad leaves. American officials are especially concerned that certain parts of the rebel alliance, namely the al-Nusra Front, have direct connections to terrorist groups like al-Qaeda.²⁸⁷ More recently, the possibility that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) would flourish in an Assad-less Syria, has weighed heavily on American policymakers. In addition to the concern over the future of Syria itself, the Americans are preoccupied with the broader geostrategic repercussions of a military strike. Russia is extremely opposed to what it sees as Western meddling in the Middle East. Syria is a client state of the Russian Federation. Attacking Syria would surely jeopardize the potential diplomatic reset that the US has constantly been attempting to make with Russia.²⁸⁸ These reasons, as well as the lack of political will to become entangled in another Middle Eastern war, combine to prevent American involvement in the Syrian Civil War, much to the chagrin of the Saudi Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia's mistrust of the US is due to a sharp difference between how Saudi officials believed that the US would behave and how the US actually behaved. In the Syrian situation, Saudi Arabia interpreted Obama's red line as a signal of American willingness to become militarily involved in the conflict, provided that the conflict became so destabilizing to the region as to include the use of weapons of mass destruction. After the UN confirmed that chemical weapons had been used against civilians in Syria, Saudi Arabian officials believed that Obama would fulfill what they saw as a promise to get involved. Much to Saudi Arabia's dismay, they had misinterpreted a variety of factors, mostly in the American domestic political scene, and their expectations were not fulfilled. Similarly, Saudi Arabia believed that the US would not back down from its position that Iran should not be allowed to enrich any uranium. In the past, American rhetoric on the issue had centered on isolating Iran with sanctions and pressure until the Islamic Republic unilaterally dismantled its nuclear program in its entirety. The Saudis enjoyed American support on this issue because both parties had identical goals.

²⁸⁴Thomas L. Friedman, "Threaten to Threaten," *The New York Times*, last modified September 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/11/opinion/friedman-threaten-to-threaten.html>.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶Maya Bhardwaj, "Development of Conflict in Arab Spring Libya and Syria: From Revolution to Civil War," *The Washington University International Review* 1. (2012):88, last modified 2012. <https://pages.wustl.edu/wuir/development-conflict-arab-spring-libya-and-syria-revolution-civil-war>.

²⁸⁷Tim Arango, Anne Barnard, and Hwaida Saad, "Syrian Rebels Tied to Al Qaeda Play Key Role in War," *The New York Times*, last modified December 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/world/middleeast/syrian-rebels-tied-to-al-qaeda-play-key-role-in-war.html?pagewanted=all>.

²⁸⁸Richard Weitz, "Russia-U.S. Relations after the Reset," *Diplomaatia*, last modified December 2012, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/russia-us-relations-after-the-reset/>.

However, since the beginning of the P5+1 nuclear negotiations, the US has appeared willing to lift certain sanctions in exchange for what Saudi Arabia believes are merely cosmetic changes to Iran's nuclear project. In both of these events, American policy has differed substantially from previous American rhetoric, leading Saudi Arabia to mistrust their American allies.

Mistrust has strained the US-Saudi relationship because it makes the US seem like a less reliable and less predictable strategic partner. The current Saudi-American relationship has been formed over years because both states have had their goals aligned. Since the end of the Cold War, the Americans have used their military presence in the region to defend Saudi Arabia.²⁸⁹ American foreign policy is focused on maintaining the oil flowing out of the Middle East and since the Kingdom has the largest oil reserves, its cooperation is important in accomplishing that goal. During the First Gulf War, the US and its allies deployed troops to Saudi Arabia to ensure that the Kingdom was protected from Saddam Hussein's potential aggression. This historic intervention was a foundational moment in the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia. The event illustrates how the two states are mutually committed to the same goal of regional stability under Saudi Arabian hegemony. Saudi Arabia has relied on this interpretation of American strategic goals and has acted accordingly. If the US appears to be an unreliable partner on the issues of Iranian nuclear disarmament and the resolution of the Syrian Civil War, it calls into question other assumptions about American priorities in the Middle East. To Saudi Arabia, the most important of these factors is the US's commitment to Saudi security.

Saudi disapproval of the US and the peace processes it championed culminates in its rejection of its seat on the UN Security Council.²⁹⁰ In a statement made before its withdrawal, the Saudi representative accused the Security Council of supporting a "double-standard" that "prevent[s] it from carrying out its duties and assuming its responsibilities in keeping world peace."²⁹¹ The body failed to act against violators of international law, while simultaneously paying lip-service to the same international norms of conduct. This symbolic damning of the Council illustrated how the Kingdom feels betrayed by its American allies who drew a line in the sand against a known enemy of the Saudis, and then failed to act when the time came.

The most immediate challenge for American policymakers is that Saudi Arabia is one of the US's most important security partners in the Middle East. Without assistance from the Kingdom, it would be more difficult for the US to project its power and continue military and counterterrorism operations. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is the keeper of oil, the most important strategic natural resource for the US. The proven oil reserves within the country are the largest in the world and the Kingdom is the largest exporter of petroleum and petro-byproducts.²⁹² The US has prioritized maintaining the flow of oil from the region during recent decades. If the US-Saudi Arabian relationship were to deteriorate enough, it is conceivable that inexpensive oil from the Ghawar Reservoir may become rarer. However, in addition to these immediate consequences of growing mistrust between the two states, the US faces other long-term consequences that are more difficult to foresee.

²⁸⁹Henner Fürtig, "Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4(2007): 627-640.

²⁹⁰"Saudi Withdrawal Stuns UN Security Council," [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/10/saudi-arabia-rejects-un-security-council-seat-20131018126284479.html), last modified October 19, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/10/saudi-arabia-rejects-un-security-council-seat-20131018126284479.html>.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹²"About Saudi Arabia: Oil," *Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia*, last modified November 29, 2014, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/energy/oil.aspx>.

Trust is an important concept in the international system. For a variety of reasons, states are more likely to cooperate when they trust one another.²⁹³²⁹⁴ The major reason why the US and Saudi Arabia are experiencing deteriorating relations is because the Kingdom perceives the US as less trustworthy. During two regional conflicts, the US has shifted its policy position from one overlapping with Saudi Arabian interests to one that is only congruent at certain points. Therefore, Riyadh will be more hesitant to trust the Americans when they draw the next red line. The consequences of the reduced degree of trust between the two states could range from trivial to dangerous. What makes the lack of trust between the US and Saudi Arabia even more perilous is that mistrust is contagious. When one actor betrays another, any who see that betrayal take place will become skeptical of the traitor. The implications of a perceived American betrayal of Saudi Arabia will extend to the US's relationships with other states as well, causing many other actors to lose faith in the word of Washington officials. Trust between states is difficult to build, but incredibly easy to shatter. Since there is potential for the US to experience negative consequences if their relationship with Saudi Arabia continues to deteriorate, American policymakers should work to repair the damage before it is too late.

²⁹³Michael P. Jasinski, *Social Trust, Anarchy, and International Conflict* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁹⁴Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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