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Islamic Extremism in Saudi Arabia and the Attack on Al Khobar

Review Draft – Circulated for Comment

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Introduction

This draft analysis is be circulated for comment as part of the CSIS "Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century Project." It will be extensively revised before final publication.

Those interested in commenting, or in participating in the project, should contact Anthony H. Cordesman at the address shown on the cover sheet at Acordesman@aol.com.

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Saudi Arabia does not face major political challenges from progressives, democratic reformers, human rights advocates, Arab socialists, Marxists or the wide range of different "progressive" political movements that shape the political debate and internal stability in most countries. Saudi Arabia certainly has its advocates in all of these areas, and some are quite active as individuals. There are many progressive Saudi individual businessmen, academics, and journalists. The fact is, however, that Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries in the world where the vast majority of politically conscious citizens are more conservative than a conservative regime.

While Saudi Arabia did face a challenge from Nasser and Arab socialism in the past, there is little evidence that such movements retain any political strength. Today, Saudi society is conservative, and Islam, Arab nationalism, and social tradition shape most public opinion. Most advocates of reform have no choice other than to work through the royal family, the government, and the Kingdom's technocrats. It is the royal family, Saudi Arabia's technocrats, and businessmen that had led virtually all of the Kingdom's efforts to modernize and reform Saudi politics and society. At the same time, even the most reform-minded members of the royal family and technocrats make Islamic values part of all their decision-making public speeches, laws, and decrees.

Saudi Islamic practices are also generally more conservative than those of other Islamic states. Both the Saudi interpretation of Islam and the Saudi clergy are still heavily influenced by the values of Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab**,** a conservative and fundamentalist reformer who reshaped the worship and social practices of virtually all elements of Sunni society in the mid-1700s. Wahhab's descendents still have great influence in the clergy, and Wahhabi practices and legal interpretations dominate the legal system and must be considered in shaping virtually every major public policy decision.

This conservatism is not a challenge to the Royal family or Saudi stability. In many ways, it is a binding force that holds Saudi Arabia together, and the Saudi government has long proved able to adapt to most of the challenges of modernization without having the engage in major confrontations with the Saudi clergy or Islamist. At the same time, Islamic conservatives have sometimes slowed the Kingdom's progress, and some aspects of Saudi Arabia's approach to Islam involve customs and practices that affect now affect key areas of reform. Examples are modernization of l the financial services sector, modernizing education, and expanding the role women can play in the economy.

While the West sometimes sees Islam itself as a source of terrorism, this is no more true of Islam in Saudi Arabia than any other country. No one who has had any prolonged contact with

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Saudis and Saudi Arabia can regard them as part of a violent society. The mainstream of Saudi preaching may be conservative, often critical of the government, and intensely critical of Israel and the West. It almost never advocates violence. Saudis do support Islamic causes, and individual Saudis sometimes support violent ones, but the Saudi government has never supported terrorist movements, or terrorist-like actions by causes it does support.

A case in point is the Palestinians. Sheik Abd al-Aziz bin Abdallah Aal al-Shaykh the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, publicly stated on April 21, 2001, that Islam prohibits suicide bombing. The Saudi government clearly inspired this statement, and it was issued in spite of the fact it provoked considerable opposition in the Arab world. Some senior Saudi clerics – such as Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Bin Baz and Muhammad Bin'Uthaimin -- had blessed Palestinian suicide operations in the past, and some senior Egyptian clerics, and groups like Hamas, had previously defended such actions as permitted by jihad (istishhad).[1]

Islamic extremism does, however, pose problems for Saudi Arabia, and this makes important to carefully distinguish between the almost universal Saudi support for Islam, and the relatively small number of Saudis who have adopted extreme political views in the name of Islam. Saudi Islamic rhetoric often is rarely a sign of active opposition to the government. Most Saudi supporters of the current Islamic revival simply support a strict interpretation of Wahhabi doctrine and pose no threat to the regime. The same is true of most of the ulema, the senior scholars and interpreters of Islam. Both groups may oppose or challenge some aspects of Western behavior and efforts to modernize the Kingdom, criticize some actions of the royal family, but they neither foment violence nor do they threaten the stability of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's Islamic Extremists

The political challenge to Saudi stability comes from a relatively limited number of Islamic extremists who tend to be radicals, or "Neo-Wahhabis." Many of these extremists oppose virtually all efforts to modernize the Kingdom. They see the Saudi royal family as corrupt in religious as well as political and social terms, and hypocritical in its professed religious beliefs and claims to be the guardian of the Islamic holy places. They see Saudi technocrats and the more cosmopolitan members of the Saudi business community as driven by Western or non-Islamic values. Many are strongly anti-Shi'ite and fear that there are Judeo-Christian conspiracies against Islam. For them, Western society is fundamentally corrupt and degrading and leading Saudi society away from the true faith of Islam. To such extremists, the US is a co-conspirator with a Zionist enemy that is has seized the third-most important Islamic holy place in Jerusalem. The US military is not securing Saudi Arabia but rather occupying it.

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While it is difficult to talk about Saudi Islamic extremism in terms of what changes extremists are for, as distinguished from what changes they are against, many believe that the nation's wealth should be shared more broadly and that religious charities and taxes should be a key factor shaping Saudi society. Like most extreme "reformers," Saudi Islamic extremists claim they advocate a return to a "pure" Islam whose laws and social standards were far more stringent and demanding than is now the practice in Saudi society. In terms of the relationship to pan-Arabism, Saudi extremists fall into two groups: extreme Wahhabis who are xenophobic and opposed to any form of pan-Arabism, and those who seek popular appeal by paying lip-service to both Islam and pan-Arabism.

Saudi extremists have little organizational unity, although they have gradually formed loose organizational links, some formal organizations, and a few covert groups for violent action. Many operate by giving sermons that attack the royal family and Saudi government by indirection. Others circulate cassettes, and fax or Xerox sermons and other writings. Some extremists test the limits of government tolerance but only a few court arrest. Some openly reject every aspect of the West. Others exploit Western concerns for human rights and "democracy" without any concern for the rights of their opposition. The end result is much more a network of critical voices, whose key members are known to each other and to most religious Saudis, rather than a formal movement.

These religious extremists have gathered substantial support in cities such as Buraida, and among the younger generation of Saudis. This support has proven to be greater among Saudis who had only recently become urbanized, who lived in the Najd, and who lived outside the mainstream economy. Some extremists, however, are descendants of established families and are well educated. There are also a growing number of extreme youth and student organizations. Many circulate literature and poems that are far more critical of the government and royal family than all but the most extreme religious figures. Some have organized informal cells, and have received training in Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, and elsewhere. A few of these groups seem to receive funding from wealthy and sympathetic Saudi businessmen. Osama bin Laden, is a case in point, although his family has disowned him for his extremism.

Islamic Extremism and Saudi Youth

It is difficult to generalize about the level of support that Islamic extremists have achieved among Saudi youth. In general, the youth are divided into those who enjoy favors and the success of elder generations, those who lack opportunities, and the extremists, who may or may not have access to advancement opportunities in society. Talk is almost certainly far more common than action and some of the support from Saudi youth is a matter of the inevitable

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frustrations of a new generation seeking to forge its own identity. However, the Ministry of Interior did find in a study it conducted in 1995 that at least 12,000 young Saudi men had spent some time training or serving as paramilitary extremists or "Afghani," and a few estimates of such training go as high as 25,000.

It is clear that for a growing number of Saudi youths, "traditional" Islam is the only ideological answer–that society offers to a lack of clear career opportunities, the alienation produced by social change, and the search for a cultural identity – although it is far from clear that they agree on what_traditional" Islam really means or that what they want is really "traditional." What is not clear is how many Saudi youths are so deeply alienated that they see violent and extreme political forms of Islam as offering answers to their economic problems, search for political causes, resentment of the royal family and the West, and rejection of reform and modern values. It is even less clear how many Saudi youths will ever act on such beliefs and cross the line between rhetoric and violence. The numbers still seem to be comparatively small, but there is no firm line between an Islamist and an Islamic extremist.

Unfortunately, the Saudi government tends to understate these problems, and has so far failed to realistically address the social and economic problems created by its "youth explosion." If anything, it has made the gap between Islam and modernism worse by encouraging Islamic education of a kind that does little to prepare youth for economic reality but which allows the teaching of relatively radical and hard-line views of Islam. Even members of the royal family who should know better from their own past sometimes ignore the fact that youth tends to be radical in every society.

There also is no doubt that many more Saudi youths resent at least some of the ruling princes and that see the Saudi royal family as over-privileged, lacking in social conscience, and corrupt. These attitudes are symbolized by the comments of one Saudi youth, who stated that, "There is no consistency in the law, and penalties that are set should be respected. The satellite (dish) is illegal but the king has the biggest satellite (dish) in Mecca." Another youth comments "They (the government) should have more fear of God. In the one hand they pray but in the other they pick up the bottle."[2] Unless further reform takes place, the combination of the economic and demographic pressures discussed earlier will steadily increase the number of young Saudi males who go from Islamic activism to Islamic extremism.

The Problem of the Modernizers

Modernization has been an ongoing reality in Saudi society for well over half a century, but its progress has been delayed by resistance from within a highly traditional society and by the

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active opposition of Saudi extremists and conservatives. Many of Saudi Arabia's princes, educators, technocrats, businessmen, and Western educated citizens favor social change. These elements in Saudi society reject a strict or extreme interpretation of Wahhabi doctrine. They support educational and economic reform, and Saudi Arabia's opening to the outside world – both Arab and Western. Many favor the creation of a more representative and active majlis, and the eventual creation of an elected national assembly. The modernists too, however, complain about nepotism and the abuse of power and legal rights by members of the royal family, other leading families, and technocrats. They are no more united over the details of what they want for Saudi Arabia's future than are Saudi conservatives, traditionalists, and extremists.

The Saudi modernizers also recognize that Saudi religious practices must change with time. Many of Saudi Arabia's technocrats and businessmen support the liberalization of Wahhabi restraints on subjects such as commerce, the role of women, and social custom. Modernists and reformers have petitioned the King, and Saudi women made protest for women's rights at the time of the Gulf War by driving their own cars. A few businessmen, technocrats, and Western-educated professionals have been arrested, or have had difficulties with the authorities, but such incidents are relatively rare and are considered only a minor problem for the government.

Trying to Co-opt Islamic Extremism

Islamic extremism is scarcely a new problem in Saudi society. The Saud family rose to power by first exploiting it against the Turks, and then against rival families in what became Saudi Arabia. King Abd al-Aziz carried out most of his conquests with a religiously inspired paramilitary force of Bedouin called the Ikhwan and then had to actively suppress them in the 1930s. Abd al-Aziz carefully controlled the Saudi clergy throughout his reign. His successors have had to place a number of religious figures under arrest over the years, and have broken up small extremist movements.

The royal family had to deal with a major uprising at the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979. This uprising resulted in weeks of fighting and a siege of the Mosque that cost 177 rebel and 127 government lives. It was led by Juhaiman ibn Muhammed ibn Saif al-Otaiba, a would-be Mahdi. Nearly all of the 500-odd insurgents came from clandestine groups formed within the most puritanical Wahhabi tribes like the Otaibas and Qahtani, although it had some support from individuals who had earlier shown sympathy for Nasser or radical Arab socialist movements.[3]

New Pressures for Extremism: The Failure of Co-option

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Extremism has become more serious, however, since the Gulf conflict. This is partly the result of the fact that secular Arab nationalism lost its attractiveness long ago while the break up of the Soviet Union has discredited the already weak socialist and Marxist movements in Saudi Arabia. Groups like the Arabian Peninsula People's Union and Voice of the Vanguard have never been a particularly serious force in Saudi politics, but the combined impact of the defeat of Saddam Hussein, the collapse of most Marxist governments, and Egyptian-Syrian cooperation with the US left little place for any opposition other than Islamic extremism.

At the same time, the presence of Western forces in Saudi Arabia gave Islamic extremists new reason to attack the "corrupt" Western influence over the Saudi government, and other factors have fed the extremist cause. Low oil prices and payments for the cost of the Gulf War have reduced both government welfare payments and the Saudi economy's ability to create new jobs while broadening the base of education and population growth has meant that younger Saudis have had to accept progressively less prestigious and well-paid positions. Further, the conflict between the modernists and traditionalists has been fueled by the spread of nearly one million satellite TV receivers in Saudi Arabia, and some 20 million VCRs. Western media is widely available, and many Saudis seem to see no contradiction between simultaneously watching such media and denouncing its influence.

These forces have led Islamic extremists to heighten their demands that Saudi Arabia conform to their particular definition of Islam. The Saudi royal family and Wahhabi leaders have increasingly become a target for those who wish to use Islam to serve their own ambitions**,** although some of those Wahhabi leaders have often been the most active in seeking to serve their own ambitions through religion. The Saudi government has responded by trying to defuse Islamic extremism, by increasing official and popular adherence to strict religious law and custom, and by strengthening the role of the religious police. Such actions have sometimes helped win popular support -- but each new accommodation of extremist demands has strengthened the hands of extremists at the cost of resentment among the many Saudis who favor modernization.

In the process, the Saudi government has often turned a blind eye to the increasingly violent and rigid actions of the religious police or Mutawwa'in and related actions by the civil police. The Mutawwa'in have always been a problem-- often going beyond religious custom and enforcing arbitrary interpretations of religious law. Since the Gulf War, they have increasingly been allowed to abuse women and foreigners, and detain and sometimes beat and torture Saudi men. There have been many sudden raids of private homes on the basis of suspicion alone, and

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use has been made of “fallaqa,” or beating the soles of the feet, and systematic beating of the body.

Although the situation has improved somewhat since 1996, the Mutawwa’in have increasingly been allowed to detain suspects for more than the legal maximum of 24 hours for violations of behavior standards and there have been growing reports of sleep deprivation and torture. Although current procedures require a police officer to accompany the Mutawwa’in before the latter makes an arrest, this requirement is often ignored. The Saudi government has also increasingly tolerated civil interpretations of Shari’a -- or Islamic law -- that seem far more designed to appease religious extremists than to enforce the traditions of Islam.

Education as a Self-Inflicted Wound

The government’s efforts to co-opt Islamic extremism have compounded Saudi Arabia’s demographic, modernization, and economic problems. Saudi Arabia’s forms of Islamic extremism -- like most forms of such extremism in the Muslim world -- have the practical impact of encouraging students to pursue patterns of education for which there are no real jobs. They create the illusion that faith can substitute for economic realities and create serious problems in terms of investment and the modernization of the economy. They also present problems in terms of efforts to reduce the Saudi birth rate, make productive use of female labor, reduce dependence on foreign labor, encourage labor mobility among the natives of the GCC, and integrate the economy of the Southern Gulf. Like most forms of extremism, regression neither serves the purposes of religion nor of realism.

The government, however, seems to see no reason for any basic change in its version of Saudi Islam: As one long-time observer comments, “The government know exactly what “Saudi Islam” should be and see neither reason nor need for a change in their religion. As ever following the precepts of Ibn Saud, they ponder not on how to adapt Wahhabism – their way of life -- but how to apply it.” The government has also tolerated a decline in educational standards in the name of Islam. The ulema have been allowed to increase their influence over the curriculum, and more and more students are encouraged to pursue Islamic studies, which do not offer any career opportunities and increase the disaffection of Saudi youth. The government has thrown money at education in recent years, but it has not made meaningful efforts to improve its quality and relevance. Far too much teaching is still done by relatively low quality foreign instructors, and there is far too much rote learning and focus on Islam without concern for developing career related skills and training the labor force to work.

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Saudi Arabia has a highly educated elite, much of it educated in the West. Its basic educational system, however, relies on rote learning through the completion of high school. As a result, much of the teaching at Saudi universities has to be remedial. The focus of learning is also still the Quran and Hadith (the sayings and examples of the Prophet). About one-third of the curriculum is religious, one-third is Arabic, and one-third covers other subjects- often paying little attention to the sciences and business. There is little emphasis on discussions, original writing, and creative activity. Even technical schools and specialized academies spend a great deal of time on Islamic culture.

These problems are not apparent from Saudi Arabia's basic educational statistics. Saudi Arabia spends roughly 7% of its GDP on education, or roughly the same percentage as the world's high-income countries. It also claims a pupil to teacher ratio of 14:1 in its primary schools, one of the lowest ratios in the world.[4]

Unfortunately, Saudi education only becomes more relevant and marginally higher in quality in the secondary school and university level. The rapid expansion of the Saudi education system was closely tied to the Wahhabi religious establishment even at the university level. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is failing to create a native-educated elite that is competitive in skills with the output of secondary schools and universities in East Asia and other leading developing countries. Furthermore, far too few students receive the kind of education that trains them to play a leading role in Saudi Arabia's economy. The futility of such education is exemplified by a glut of degrees in Islamic studies whose degrees are not taken seriously by Islamic scholars in other Arab countries and who have often become the opponents of the government that has educated them.[5]

Making Women Part of the Problem, Rather than Part of the Solution

The role of women in Saudi society does not present the same problems as dealing with young males in terms of Islamic extremism and political unrest, but there is a growing gap between the ongoing education of women and the failure to provide a meaningful role for women in the Saudi economy. Women have the right to own property and are entitled to financial support from their husbands or male relatives. They have access to free education through the university level, although this education is always segregated from that of men.

As has been touched upon earlier, women make up 58 percent of all university graduates in a male dominated society, although they are excluded from studying such subjects as engineering, journalism, and architecture. Men are freely able to study overseas. In theory, women may do so only if accompanied by a spouse or an immediate male relative, although

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some young women in Western-educated families are simply escorted to the West and then study on their own.

There are no active women's rights groups. Women, including foreigners, may not legally drive motor vehicles and are restricted in their use of public facilities when men are present. Women risk arrest by the Mutawwa'in for riding in a vehicle driven by a male who is not an employee or a close male relative. Women are not admitted to a hospital for medical treatment without the consent of their male relative. By law and custom, women may not undertake domestic and foreign travel alone.

In public women are expected to wear the abaya, a black garment covering the entire body. A woman's head should also be covered. The Mutawwa'in generally expect women from Arab countries, Asia, and Africa to comply more fully with Saudi customs of dress than Western women. They do however, instruct Western women to wear the abaya and cover their hair. Some government officials and ministries bar accredited female diplomats in Saudi Arabia from official meetings and diplomatic functions.

US State Department report on human rights indicates that women are subject to discrimination in Islamic law, which stipulates that daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers. In a Shari'a court, A woman's testimony does not carry the same weight as that of a man. In a Shari'a court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women. Although Islamic law permits polygamy, it is becoming less common. Islamic law enjoins a man to treat each wife equally but in practice such equality is left to the discretion of the husband. Some women participate in al-Mesyar (or "short daytime visit") marriages, where the women relinquish their legal rights to financial support and nighttime cohabitation. Additionally, the husband is not required to inform his other wives of the marriage, and the children have no inheritance rights. The government places greater restrictions on women than on men regarding marriage to non-Saudis and non-Muslims.

Women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce, but men may divorce without giving cause. If divorced or widowed, a woman normally may keep her children until they attain a specified age: 7 years for boys, 9 years for girls. Children over these ages are awarded to the divorced husband or the deceased husband's family. Divorced women who are foreigners are often prevented by their former husbands from visiting their children after divorce.

Despite these limitations, women are continually widening their role outside the home. Some women have made use of the internet to manage and run their own businesses. [6] The Majlis al-Shura has also spent considerable time debating and studying the role of women and

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women are now allowed to attend Shura Council meetings.[7] Crown Prince Abdullah has been a particular supporter of expanding women's rights in Saudi Arabia, though he has also faced pressure from the conservatives for this stance.[8]

There is no reason that Saudi society has to treat women in the same way as the West, but these restrictions on women do have serious economic consequences. According to US State Department estimates, women now make up only 5 percent of the work force.[9] They usually do not receive the same salary and other benefits as men and their primary goal in working is often simply to find some job or position in the private or public sector. Most employment opportunities for women are in education and health care, with lesser opportunity in business, philanthropy, banking, retail sales, and the media. In 1997, the government authorized women to work in a limited capacity in the hotel industry.

All work places are segregated, and women can only accept jobs in rural areas if they live with their families. Contact with male supervisors or clients is only allowed by telephone or facsimile machine and the level of segregation is growing worse as the level of female education improves. The Ministry of Commerce announced in 1995 that women would no longer be issued business licenses for work in fields that might require them to supervise foreign workers, interact with male clients, or deal on a regular basis with government officials. A substantial amount of Saudi Arabia's private capital is held by women. Women remain free to inherit and manage property, but they must do so through specialized financial institutions if they keep their capital in Saudi Arabia. The end result is to create a series of cultural barracks that limit the productivity of what is becoming the best educated half of the Saudi work force. Regardless of how one feels about women's rights and feminism, it is far from clear that Saudi Arabia can afford to continue this sacrifice.

In summary, Saudi Arabia is currently at best dealing with the symptoms of Islamic extremism while failing to meaningfully modernize Saudi society and the role of Islam in it. There is a growing imbalance between the calls that Saudi Arabia's Sixth Plan for Development makes for more diversified economy and Saudi Arabia's human resources.[10]

The Saudi government needs to fundamentally rethink its educational policy towards both men and women, just as it needs to recognize the need for policies that encourage smaller families. It needs to firmly tie its educational policies to its economic policies. It needs to face the fact that it is turning "Islamic" education into a societal dead end that will do nothing but encourage further unrest. This is not a matter of undermining religion and traditional Saudi social values, but rather a failure to recognize the need for social evolution and economic reality. It is particularly troubling because the Saudi economy already is failing to absorb the more than

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170,000 males that enter the labor force each year, and has no clear policy for dealing with the roughly similar number of educated women.

Religious Extremism and Active Political Opposition

Religious extremism is the source of the most serious opposition to the Saudi government. At present, the opposition to the Saudi government can be categorized into three major groups: individual intellectual non-violent criticism, organizations that may or may not be peaceful, and groups that clearly use violence to achieve their ends. Each group presents a very different level of threat to the Saudi regime. It also is not clear whether Saudi Arabia's most visible Islamists and Islamic extremism are really the most serious threat. They are certainly symptoms of serious elements within Saudi Arabia, -- and some already pose a terrorist threat. At the same time, no given figure or group now has much power to challenge the government.

It is the overall mix of different advocates and groups that poses a potential serious cumulative problem. It is certainly possible to discuss case examples of opposition figures, but the internal problems in Saudi society must become far more serious for Islamic extremists to pose any real threat, and it is highly likely that new leaders and figures would emerge in a crisis and become the most serious problem.

While individual critics like al-Hawali and al-Auda have gained some regional support for their views, their ability to threaten the Saudi regime has been sharply constrained by the fact that they are operate within Saudi Arabia and are subject to any actions the government may take to repress their movements. Both have been arrested in the past and face future arrests if the government chooses to act. However, the regime faces the constraint that arrest and imprisonment often make martyrs of opposition figures. If their criticism is not highly provocative, it is likely that the government will continue to monitor such closely but will rarely take stronger action.

Organized movements such as the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) have represented a different line of Saudi dissent, and raised a different set of concerns. Because this movement, and others like it, eventually ceased to operate from Saudi soil, it was not been subject to the immediate repression that internal critics face. Physical distance from Saudi Arabia can mean partial isolation, and remove such groups from direct involvement in the problems, aspirations, and views of native Saudis.

At the same time, such organizations have advantages. By operating on foreign soil and using modern communications media, they can seek to influence foreign relations between

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outside countries and Saudi Arabia. They can exploit the West's concerns for human rights as a political tool. If they do not covertly support violence, They can indirectly encourage violence by showing their public "understanding" of terrorist incidents. At the same time, some have found they can also simultaneously use more extreme religious rhetoric, and conduct hard political attacks on democracy and human rights in Arabic without the Western media noticing the contradiction in hiding behind a rhetorical shield of democracy and human rights while attempting to deny both sets of values to others.

Openly violent opposition figures like Osama bin Laden create a serious threat whether they operate inside the Kingdom or outside. The damage done by these oppositionists goes far beyond any physical destruction caused by the actual terrorist incidents. Each incident of international or internal terrorism places more political pressure on the Saudi government. Sometimes, the international criticism that follows such incidents creates problems between Saudi Arabia with other nations and again tends to embarrass the government in ways that encourage a hard-line response or support of the status quo, rather than reform. Any additional suppression of more open forms of opposition may lead the leaders of these groups to the harder-line stands in reaction. It also can lead expatriate groups to take more extreme stands

Violent opposition movements can also exploit the fault lines between Saudi Arabia and the US, and Saudi modernizers and traditionalists. Targeting US and Western facilities, or facilities which a joint Saudi and Western presence, allows extremists to use Western targets as a non-Islamic, non-Arab proxy for their real target – the Saudi regime. The same is true of less violent attacks on Saudi modernization and reform which charge that necessary change is non-Islam or an affront to Saudi and Arab traditions. Attacking the West as an alien and foreign presence, exploiting the political backlash from the US alliance with Israel, and claiming that the regime has become a US tool threatened the Saud families' cultural and religious legitimacy. It also offers extreme oppositionists their best hope of isolating the regime from the Saudi people.

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Moderate Opposition: Religious Fundamentalism

The dilemma the government faces in dealing with religious opposition is that it must respect and respond to legitimate religious opposition and criticism while no action the government can take can hope to meet the demands of the more radical Islamic extremists. Religious fundamentalists like Sheik Safr al-Hawali illustrate this point. They rejected King Fahd's reforms in a manner that posed a more serious challenge to Saudi internal stability than any of the efforts of Saudi moderates. Even more mainstream religious leaders like Sheik Abdul Aziz ibn Baz, a venerated blind leader who publicly condemned the circulation of cassettes with Islamic fundamentalist messages, have opposed some of the government's efforts to suppress political opposition by the clergy.

This religious criticism of past efforts at reform reached the point in 1992, where 107 leading clerics signed a petition -- or "Memorandum of Advice" -- which called for the strict enforcement of Islamic law, severing relations with all non-Islamic countries and the West, and the punishment of all who gained wealth through illegal means, "whoever they are and without any exception of rank." This memorandum called for a majlis al-shura that was certain to be dominated by religious figures, a separate review body of ulema to review every state regulation and edict to ensure compliance with the Shari'a, the creation of a religious supreme court with the power to invalidate any law or treaty found to be in conflict with the Shari'a, and making the ulema a separate and co-equal branch of government with its own budget and sources of revenue.

The Saudi government has shown, however, that it can deal with most such criticism. It responded to the memorandum by forcing other senior members of the ulema to condemn it, and by stepping up surveillance of the ulema by the security forces. In December 1992, King Fahd dismissed seven elderly religious leaders from the Supreme Authority of Senior Scholars, the most senior clerical body in the country. This was in reaction to the fact that they would not join the other 10 members of the council in denouncing the "Memorandum of Advice." King Fahd also gave a speech in December 1992 that attacked the use of mosques for political proselytizing. He stated that, "The pulpit was only made for certain limited things." He attacked the role of Iran and Islamic fundamentalists from other countries in supporting Islamic extremism:

> "Two years ago, we started seeing things unfamiliar to us that were non-existent here...Do we accept that somebody comes to us from outside our country and directs us? No....Has it come to the point where we depend on criticism and cassette tapes that do us no good?...We should not follow the path of foreign currents, foreign to our country."[11]

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The Saudi government has since engaged in a series of actions designed to handicap opposition movements and extremist organizations. The first of these involved the imposition of limits on the funding of Islamic extremist movements overseas. Private and public Saudi money played a key role in supporting the Afghan freedom fighters in their struggle with the Soviet Union, and has recently aided the Muslims in Bosnia. At the same time, it has contributed to hard-line Islamic movements in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and the Sudan -- largely because the government made no effort to control the flow of private funds to charities and Islamic movements until late 1992. In April 1993, the Interior Ministry required Islamic civic and religious groups to obtain government authorization before soliciting funds. The Ministry actively started to prevent the flow of funds to groups that may have used Islam as their rationale, but who sought political power -- sometimes with Iranian and Sudanese support.[12]

In addition, the Saudi government has engaged in the systematic arrest of individuals suspected of supporting terrorists and extremists.[13] The government also arrested Sheik Salman al-Audah and Safr al-Hawali, two radical clerics, in 1994. Their detention incited a rare instance of open civil unrest in the northern city of Buraida, which resulted in a large number of additional arrests.

It has proven virtually impossible, however, to prevent religious opposition movements from growing and to control the flow of private money to all elements of the Islamic opposition outside Saudi Arabia. Many of the Saudis involved have large foreign investments, or handle large flows of transfers as part of their business. The government also cannot clearly identify which movements are legitimate religious efforts, and which are cover organizations for extremist movements. There has also been a growth of support for religious opposition movements among Saudi young men and students. Islamic education, massive population growth, economic problems, and large-scale unemployment create conditions that make such growth almost inevitable.[14]

Hardline Peaceful Opposition: Sheikh Safar al-Hawali

Sheikh Safr bin Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali provides a good case example of peaceful intellectual opposition to the government. He was born in 1950 in the al-Baha region, south of Taif. He comes from a minor, but reputable tribe, which, along with his credentials as an Islamic scholar, makes him the most mainstream of all critics of the Saudi regime. A graduate of prominent Islamic universities in Mecca and Medina, Hawali’s lectures and writings reveal his belief that modernism and reform is a Western way of undermining Islamic society from within.

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According to Hawali, the most serious threat facing Saudi Arabia is "the imposition of Israeli and American hegemony over the whole area." The Arab world is unprepared to meet this threat due to their political disunity and military and economic dependency on the West. To combat the Western threat, Arabs and Muslims must unite in one Islamic cause, withdraw all assets from Western financial institutions and reinvest in Islamic countries, and more strictly control media and communications to prevent the weakening of Arab and Islamic culture by Western secularism. Hawali is deeply distrustful of the policies and influence of the United States in the Arab world. He believes that the Gulf War was merely a means for the United States to subdue any regional power that opposes the West and to bind the region into a security arrangement of dependency.

Hawali's views are ultraconservative, but they are shared by many other Islamic figures in the Gulf region and elsewhere in the Arab world. Many Arabs are confused by America's failure to remove Saddam Hussein from Iraq and support of sanctions that have hurt the Iraqi people, and by the continual cat and mouse game between Washington and Baghdad. To many, America's role in the Middle East and foreign policy blunders in both rhetoric and tactics, support Hawali's view of the West. Hawali's ideas also seemed reasonable to many Saudis because he was a respected member of the religious establishment before becoming a highly visible political critic. In addition, he provides answers and explanations to questions about foreign policy and regional events that many Saudis find convincing.

Hawali represents a kind of Saudi nationalism more than he represents a kind of Islamic extremism. His main grievances are not based on direct criticism of the Saudi government and the royal family, but rather on external components such as Western domination and neocolonialism. He does not question the political or religious authority of the Saudi state, but criticizes its subordination to "its enemy"- the United States. In Hawali's view, Saudi Arabia is not doing enough to propagate Islamic faith or preserve it from the onslaught of Western secularism and the kind of reform and modernism opposed by Saudi Arabia's religious traditionalists. Now that Hawali's ideas are echoed in newspapers all over the Middle East, he no longer represents an extreme view and is an unlikely threat to the Saudi state itself. His continued imprisonment is more likely the reaction of a government unaccustomed to public criticism rather than a response to a dire threat.[15]

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Hard-line but Peaceful Opposition: Salman al-Auda

Salman al-Auda is another example of the ideas that help shape internal opposition in Saudi Arabia. He was born in the province of Qasim, a poor, conservative, agricultural area that has long been a fertile ground for religious discourse. His worldview is very much linked to the area's social, economic, and political problems. In his early taped sermons, his criticisms of the government were general and included no direct mention of the royal family. He rose to prominence during the Gulf war and his sermons have since become more hostile towards the government. Al-Auda used the Gulf War and the media's focus on Saudi Arabia to popularize his criticisms of the government and society at large.

Al-Auda believed that the political violence seen in Egypt and Algeria is a result of dictatorship and the muffling of counter opinion and voices of dissent. According to al-Auda, any government that is not based on justice and the Shari'a will meet the same fate. He urged Saudi Arabia to speed the process of reform and dialogue, lest the country descend into violence. He also advocated a return to the original contract and alliance between the state and religious forces on which the foundation of the modern Saudi state was based. He advanced claims to racial superiority, unprecedented in Saudi revivalist thought, and claimed that the Saudi people were strong in physique and mental abilities because of environmental conditions and part of an Arab nation that is better because of language, its approach to reasoning, and emphasis on the ability to memorize. Although al-Auda echoed other Islamists in disapproving of modern education and financial extravagance, he also mentioned the need for economic restructuring and privatization.

Al-Auda is considered one of the harshest open critics of the government, but he too is as much a Saudi nationalist as an Islamist. His views have seemed to hover between extremes. At one extreme, he has seen the future of Saudi Arabia as heading towards the political violence and strife present in countries like Egypt and Algeria, while at the same time he has presented Saudi Arabia as a nation of peace, full of invincible people, willed by God to be unshakable. While he criticized the government, he also held the nation as a whole responsible for Saudi Arabia's problems. He is typical of a powerful oppositionist preacher with considerable public support..[16]

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Hard-line “Quasi-Peaceful” Opposition: The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) and Mohammed al-Mas’ari

Individual critics like al-Hawali and al-Auda represent broad schools of thought within Saudi Arabia. Other opposition figures, however, have organized formal opposition movements, and have foreign as well as domestic support. The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) is a good case in point and shows what happens when opposition goes from intellectual criticism to an organized movement. Six Saudi citizens established the CDLR in 1993. It was headed by Mohammed al-Mas’ari, a former physics professor whose interviews and writings indicate support for both fundamentalism and the far left, with little demonstrated regard for human rights or democracy except as a rhetorical device to achieve his goal of overthrowing the Saudi government.[17]

While the CDLR claimed in the West that it was formed for the purpose of supporting human rights and democracy in Saudi Arabia, it supported an extreme interpretation of the Shari’a and Islamic custom, opposed most modern rights for women, has made strong anti-Shi’ite statements, opposed the Arab-Israeli peace process and has denied Israel’s right to exist. It has never supported the need to protect the kind of human rights recognized in the West and took a rigidly Islamic fundamentalist approach. [18]

The CDLR began to be treated as an extremist group after it openly criticized the Saudi government in the international press in 1993. The security forces detained 38 of its members, including al-Mas'ari, confiscated their passports, and forbade them to travel or speak publicly. al-Mas'ari was released in November 1993, but only after spending 6 months in detention. The security forces subsequently released the rest of the detainees, but only after they signed statements promising not to discuss the Government's policies or communicate with anyone outside the country by telephone or facsimile machine. The authorities also dismissed several founding members of the CDLR from their government jobs.[19]

In 1994, al-Mas'ari secretly fled to the United Kingdom, where he sought political asylum and established an overseas branch of the CDLR. He then continued to disseminate tracts critical of the Saudi government from the UK. He was particularly critical of King Fahd, the Interior Minister Prince Naif, and the governor of Riyadh, Prince Salman. He continued to express opposition to peace with Israel and to Saudi support for the peace process.

After al-Mas'ari fled to England, the Saudi security forces arrested 15 to 20 of his relatives and supporters. The Saudi government released several of these detainees in late 1994,

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including Dr. Fouad Dahlawi, al-Mas'ari's brother, Lu'ay al-Mas'ari, and al-Mas'ari's brothers-in-law, Rashad and Nabil Al-Mudarris. However, the government did not publicly acknowledge any such detention of CDLR supporters until 1995.

The CDLR made repeated claims during 1995-1996 that more than 300 clerics were being detained for political reasons, but such detentions were impossible to confirm. The Saudi authorities continued to detain Salman Al-Auda and Safar Al-Hawali, the Muslim clerics arrested in September 1994 for criticizing the government. The Saudi government continued to detain 27 men out of the 157 persons it had arrested for antigovernment activities in October 1994. While it released thousands of prisoners and detainees it released as part of the annual Ramadan amnesties in 1994-1996, these do not seem to include any political dissidents. However, the US State Department reported in 1998 that the total number of political detainees could not be accurately determined but was probably less than 50. [20]

Supporters of the CDLR seem to have made occasional use of violence. The Saudi government announced in August 1995, that it had executed Abdullah Bin Abd al-Rahman Al-Hidaif for assaulting a security official with acid. At the same time, however, sentenced one Saudi man to five years in prison in part for possessing leaflets and posters mentioning the CDLR, and another to three years in prison for attending meetings in support of the group and its exiled spokesman, Mohammad al-Mas'ari. Both were associates of Abdullah Bin Abd al-Rahman Al-Hidaif.[21]

These Saudi actions made the CDLR focus on activity outside Saudi Arabia. From 1994 onwards, al-Mas’ari issued a flood of faxes and press releases attacking the Saudi royal family and government from his new headquarters in Britain. He also did his best to make the CDLR seem like a Western-style democratic and human rights movement in order to win Western support. He down played the CDLR’s Islamic extremism, and in the process the fact that the “legitimate” in its title referred to religious legitimacy in Arabic. He also took an ambiguous attitude towards violence. While, he expressed the CDLR’s “understanding" of the National Guard headquarters bombing in 1995, he also disassociated himself from the violence involved.

These activities caused the Saudi government to put intense pressure on Britain to deport Mas’ari. The Conservative Party government of then Prime Minister John Major responded by trying to expel Mas’ari to Dominica, but Mas’ari appealed the decision in courts and was eventually granted permission to remain in the United Kingdom for four years, with the option of applying for permanent residency at the end of that period.[22]

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During this period al-Mas'ari expressed the CDLR's "understanding" of two fatal terrorist bombings of the US Air Force housing compound at Al Khobar and sympathy for the perpetrators. They also continued to criticize the Saudi government, using computers and facsimile transmissions to send newsletters back to Saudi Arabia. This led to confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Britain in April 1996. The Saudi Ambassador to the United Kingdom stated that his government would withdraw from large contracts for British weapons unless the United Kingdom expelled al-Mas'ari. However, no Saudi Government retribution actually took place against the British government.

Al-Mas'ari ultimately proved to be the loser. He was successful in avoiding deportation, but he could not afford the legal fees involved. As a result, he found himself some 10,000 pounds in debt. A London high court declared him bankrupt on January 8, 1997, and the resulting judgment meant that any donations to al-Mas'ari would go to his creditors rather than the CDLR.[23]

According to the US State Department report on human rights for 1998, the CDLR suffered from internal problems that resulted in a major split. In March 1996 internal divisions within the CDLR led to a creation of a rival Islamic Reform Movement (IRM) or Movement for Islamic Reform in Saudi Arabia (MIRA), headed by Sa'ad Al-Faqih. Faqih was able to persuade most of the CDLR's major backers to support MIRA, and the CDLR lost much of its funding. By the end of 1996, the CDLR's seemingly endless faxes attacking the Kingdom and Royal family and other activities had come to a virtual halt. The IRM has, however, continued in its path and it too has implicitly condoned the two terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia, arguing that they were a natural outgrowth of a political system that does not tolerate peaceful dissent.[24]

Violent Islamic Extremists: The Saudi National Guard Bombing

Islamic extremism has taken on violent forms. On November 13, 1995, a 150-225 pound bomb placed in a pickup truck exploded outside the building housing the headquarters of the US Army Materiel Command's Office of the Program Manager (OPM) for the Saudi National Guard. OPM is a program that provides training support to the National Guard. The bombing was the first such attack on Western military forces in Saudi Arabia since 1991, when two Americans were wounded in an attack on a shuttle bus in Jeddah, and it clearly stunned both American and Saudi officials.[25]

The blast killed seven people, including five Americans and two Indians, and wounded 60 others, of which 37 were American. The timing of the bomb indicated that it might have been

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directed primarily at Americans. It was detonated at 11:30 a.m. when most Saudis would be at prayer and off the streets and none of the 67 casualties were Saudi citizens.[26]

It is still unclear who was responsible. An extremist group called Movement for Islamic Change in the Arabian Peninsula-Jihad Wing claimed responsibility, as did two previously unknown groups calling themselves the Tigers of the Gulf and the Combatant Partisans of God. All demanded the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Saudi Arabia. The Combatant Partisans of God also demanded the release of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman and Mousa Abu Marzouk from US custody. The CDLR, which indicated it had never heard of these groups, officially condemned the attack, but al-Mas'ari's equivocation in commenting on the bombing prompted the British government to order his expulsion.[27]

While Western and Saudi sources had no information these groups, the third group, the Movement for Islamic Change, had sent two previous warnings to the US Embassy in Riyadh in April and June, 1995, via fax. The statements demanded a withdrawal of all US forces from the Kingdom by July 1995. Receipt of the faxes was admitted after the bombing by US Ambassador Raymond E. Mabus, who indicated that they were not taken seriously enough because, "of all the places in the world, [Saudi Arabia] was deemed one of the safest."[28] A review of the faxes also revealed phrases that suggested that the group adhered to mainstream Sunni beliefs and was likely to be indigenous to Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi government was initially unwilling to publicly acknowledge the possible involvement of indigenous opposition groups. In a letter-to-the-editor in 1995, the Saudi ambassador to the US, Bandar Bin Sultan Bin Abd al-Aziz, declared, "dissidents did not cause the car bombing."[29] These public denials were partly the result of a Saudi belief that acts this violent had to be the acts of foreign groups and partly the result of an effort to discourage indigenous groups from copy cat incidents. They also were affected by US intelligence reports of increased surveillance of US installations by Iranian agents prior to the attack.[30]

Nevertheless, the investigation by the Ministry of the Interior focused on both foreign and indigenous opponents of the regime and Saudis inside and outside the country. The Saudi authorities sorted through the files of some 15,000 known Saudi "Afghanis" and Islamic extremists. Shortly after the blast, the Saudis released a sketch of one suspect and the Saudi and US governments offered a $3 million reward for information regarding those responsible. The US assisted by providing technical expertise, and dispatched 19 FBI investigators and two State Department security officials to the site of the bombing within days after it occurred.

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The first arrests indicated that Saudis outside Saudi Arabia might be involved. On February 1, 1995, Pakistan extradited an individual believed to match the sketch, a Saudi national named Hassan Sarai, at the request of the Saudi government. Sarai was known to have fought with Islamic groups in Afghanistan in the early 1990's and to have supported Islamic militants in India's Kashmir region.

However, Sarai was not charged with the attack. Instead, the Saudi government arrested four Saudis living in Saudi Arabia, and broadcast their confessions on April 22, 1996. The four men were Abdulaziz Fah Nasser, Riyadh Harji, Muslih Shamrani, and Khalid Ahmed Said. The Interior Ministry announced that three of the four men were Saudi Islamic extremists that had joined the Mujahideen forces fighting in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, and the fourth had fought in Bosnia. They had smuggled in the explosives from Yemen, and had at least some ties to the Islamic Group in Egypt. Shamrani was an ex-solider who had fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and was the son of an army officer. However, all four were part of the large class of Saudi young men with no real career prospects, family wealth, or connections.[31]

The four men had planned a much more extensive series of kidnappings and assassinations, but had given up their plans because they feared they would be caught as a result of the massive step up in security measures following the bombing. The Interior Ministry did not indicate the men were part of any of the three groups that had originally claimed responsibility for the attack and issued press releases that vaguely linked the four men to a foreign power or foreign group. According to Saudi sources, they seem to have been an independent cell that was influenced by clerical extremists linked to the Islamic radical Hizb al-Tahrir or Liberation Party, which draws much of its thinking from clerics based in Jordan. They may, however, have been influenced in part by Mas'ari and Osama ibn Laden, and the Saudi government may have suppressed the details of their involvement with other groups. All four were beheaded on May 31, 1996.[32]

Violence and Extremism: The Al-Khobar Tragedy

These arrests did not halt further violence. The success of the bombing demonstrated the vulnerability of targets within the Kingdom to terrorist acts and there were some 30,000 Americans living in Saudi Arabia, many of whom are easy targets for terrorists. The end result was a series of new indicators that further bombings and a major new attack on US facilities in Saudi Arabia were likely.

In December, 1995, the US Embassy released a statement in which it said it had "unconfirmed information that additional bombings may be planned against Western interests in

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Saudi Arabia, including facilities and commercial centers occupied and/or frequented by Americans."[33] A similar statement was released by the State Department on January 31, 1995- a week prior to a scheduled visit by Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Saudi Arabia. The visit was subsequently canceled, ostensibly due to scheduling conflicts, but possibly because of the terrorist threats.[34]

On March 29, 1996, Saudi border guards intercepted a new shipment of explosives at the Jordanian border. The possibility of additional attacks had also prompted concern by corporate contractors in Saudi Arabia as to the safety of their employees and dependents.[35] New anonymous threats were made against Americans in May 1996 and the US Embassy asked Americans living in Saudi Arabia to keep a "low profile."[36]

On June 25, 1996, these threats turned into a major tragedy. A truck bomb exploded outside a US military housing complex called the Khobar Towers at Al-Khobar, near the Saudi air base at Dhahran, where the US had a significant combat presence. While the US base commander had planned his defenses for bombs of several hundred pounds, the bomb weighed closer to five thousand and some estimates put it in the 10,000-25,000 pound category. It was placed in a large fuel tanker parked about 35 yards from the perimeter of the base, and was so large that it could be felt in Bahrain. It toppled one of the apartment towers at the complex and the crater was some 85 feet across and 35 feet deep. The attack killed 19 U.S. servicemen and injured 373 others. It was the worst disaster since 241 Marines and sailors were killed in the bombing of a US barracks in Beirut on October 23, 1993. [37]

The incident was so serious that the US relocated most of the several thousand USAF personnel that were stationed in Saudi Arabia to the Saudi air base at Al-Kharj, some 60 miles southeast of Riyadh, at a total cost to the US and Saudi Arabia of several hundred million dollars. Unlike Al-Khobar, the Al-Kharj area was virtually unoccupied, and could be made almost completely secure -- even including US operation of the sewage trucks on the base. The US restricted temporary duty in Saudi Arabia to Al-Kharj and other sealed, secured areas, and rushed in extensive new perimeter defense equipment, including advanced thermal imaging equipment for vehicles and fixed surveillance, and strengthened Force Protection Groups from the USAF. [38]

The Initial Course of the Al Khobar Investigation

The investigation initially did little to reveal the identity of the bombers. Large-scale arrests produced few results -- in part because Saudi Arabia rushed to arrest the "usual suspects" without much initial investigation. Similarly, Saudi and US investigations of Mas'ari and Bin

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Ladin gave little indication they had direct responsibility. Although both the US and Saudi Arabia offered massive rewards, no solid informer came forward such as the Yemeni truck driver that had informed on those involved in the National Guard bombing. [39]

By November 1996, however, there was growing evidence that the bombers might be Saudi Shi'ites affiliated with a movement known as the Saudi Hezbollah. This group had claimed responsibility for the bombing earlier, but its claims became more convincing as its ties emerged to the Hezbollah in Lebanon and to training facilities in Iran. It also became clear that the bombers might have a long history of ties to much lower level Shi'ite attacks on the oil facilities and other targets in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. The Saudis arrested Shi'ite religious figures like Abdul Karim Hubail and Sheik Jaffer Mubarak, and conducted other arrests that indicated that the Saudi Hezbollah might have as many as 1,000 members, with a core of up to 250. There were also indications that some members operated out of Syria or Lebanon. [40]

These reports led to the reports that Iran had been directly involved in the bombing touched upon earlier -- although Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati formally denied this as early as December 12, 1996. He stated that such bombings were an internal Saudi matter and that, "We deny any involvement directly or indirectly. We are against any kind of terrorist actions against any country...There are some opposition groups in Saudi that have admitted they are involved in different blastings there. We don't want to support this kind of activity."[41]

Unfortunately, at this point, the investigation was slowed by tensions between the Saudi and US investigators and a clash of cultures. The Saudis treated internal unrest as a virtual state secret, and had no desire for any American "help" that would directly interfere in their investigation or give the US access to Saudi Arabia's internal problems. The Saudi security forces also relied largely on domestic human intelligence, networks of local informers, large-scale arrests of possible suspects who were held for long periods, and direct, often forcible interrogation with limited regard to Western concepts of human rights. The Saudis were not used to working with foreigners, intelligence data on foreign countries, and technical data and intelligence, and had no real experience in conducting complex technical investigations.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation rushed in teams of Americans with limited Arabic and little regional political background, and which were trained largely in forensics and highly technical methods of investigation. The FBI investigators gave the impression they were trying to take over the Saudi investigation without knowing what they were doing. In a number of cases, they alienated US intelligence and State Department personnel as thoroughly as they alienated the Saudis. Things were made even worse on the US side by poor interagency coordination. While professional anti-terrorists worked together relatively well, there was a

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tendency to bring far too many officials together in Washington from different agencies that did little more than hold meetings, and generate new rumors and requests for data from the field.

Coordination was often poor. The Saudi investigators often seemed unable to open their mouths while the FBI investigators seemed unable to keep them shut -- or avoid posturing for the press and the Congress. Cooperation was minimal at best, with both sides trading countercharges and making little progress. Prince Naif, who was in charge of the Saudi side of the investigation in his role of Minister of the Interior, made it clear that he resented some of the actions of the FBI.

The possible Iranian role in Al Khobar made Saudi-US cooperation worse. Some US officials leaped far ahead of the evidence to condemn Iran, while the Saudis could not firmly decide if it was better to openly blame foreigners like the Iranian's for Saudi Arabia's internal problems with its Shi'ites, or to minimize any publicity about possible Iranian involvement to avoid a further crisis with Iran. It also became clear that the Saudi Hezbollah had ambiguous relations with Iran, and with the Hezbollah in Lebanon, that make it extremely difficult to separate Iran's role from encouraging such movements ideologically, and with training and funds, from a direct involvement or sponsorship of terrorism acts like the bombing.[42]

In March 1997, the investigation reached the point of tragicomedy. The media was already filled with rumors about Iran and possible US reprisals, when a Saudi named Hani Abdel Rahim Sayegh was arrested in Canada on charges that he had driven one of the vehicles involved in the Al-Khobar attack.[43] In the months that followed, Sayegh was reported to have identified an Iranian Brigadier General, Ahmad Sherifi, as having directly encouraged him to commit attacks on US personnel in Saudi Arabia.

It slowly became clear, however, that Sayegh was primarily concerned with avoiding possible deportation to Saudi Arabia. While he made an agreement to talk if he was deported to the US, this turned out to be little more than opportunism. Once Sayegh arrived in the US, he appealed his status in the US court system. He stated that his previous confessions were false and made under duress, without due process of law. He also reiterated his claim that he was in Syria during the actual bombing. He also discovered that the US press and courts made an excellent forum for publicizing the problems of Saudi Arabia's Shi'ites.[44] In September 1997 the Justice Department moved to drop the charges against Sayegh citing their inability to develop the requisite evidence. Sayegh went on to seek immigration relief under the Convention Against Torture, but his appeal was denied in September 1999. He was deported to Saudi Arabia a week later, where the Saudi government initiated legal proceedings against him.[45]

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Serious Progress is Made

Tensions eased in May 1997, when US officials that included the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs made it clear that they had no evidence of foreign involvement or sponsorship by Iran. There also were reports that a Saudi Sunni group had now claimed responsibility for the bombing. [46]

At the same time, it was still far from clear that Iran was innocent. Sayegh does seem to have tried to organize attacks against US citizens in Saudi Arabia during 1994 and 1995, and to have organized such attacks after visits to Qum in Iran and a Hezbollah camp in Lebanon. Another Saudi Shi'ite who might have been involved in the bombing -- Ahmed Ibrahim Ahmad Mughassil -- was reported to have fled to Syria after the attack. Mughassil was then to have crossed into Iran -- although Iran denied it had given Mughassil shelter. Mughassil was particularly important because Saudi Arabia listed him as a leader of the Saudi Hezbollah and as a key conspirator. [47]

Similarly, a Saudi Shi'ite named Jaafer Chueikhat was reported to have been involved in the bombing. Chueikhat had been trained by the Hezbollah in Lebanon before the bombing, and then committed "suicide" in prison in Syria under conditions that made it look like his death might have been politically convenient to both Syria and Iran. Three of the 12 suspects in the Al-Khobar bombing which the Saudis identified by August 1997, had clear ties to Iranian-connected organizations and several others were believed to be in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon.[48]

The public progress of the investigation slowed in 1998. In late March 1998, the Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Naif bin Abd al-Aziz, announced in Mecca that Saudi Arabia had finished the investigation and would announce the findings when the time is right "All the facts of the crime are with us and our intelligence exerted huge efforts to discover everything about the incident and we will leave the announcement for its time." In response State Department Spokesman James P, Rubin said, "As far as we're concerned the investigation is still wide open. We do not believe it's over. We are continuing to pursue it and believe that at the end of the day those responsible will need to pay a price"

Both sides appeared to have reached a compromise a few days later, but it did little to clarify the situation. Rubin issued a statement that Saudi Arabia was still investigating details of the unsolved bombing. "We are continuing to have exchanges with the Saudi government and have had repeated and very high-level assurances of cooperation from them," and that it was "it was not all that clear" that the minister meant the Saudis had closed the investigation,[49]

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> "On the contrary, (the Saudi minister) appeared to be saying that the big picture - there's nothing new and nothing new to find, but they're working on the details...Well, most investigations focus on the details, and from that, one can build out into understanding what might have happened...Let me say this. From the perspective of the United States, the Al-Khobar bombing investigation remains wide open. We are continuing to have exchanges with the Saudi government and have had repeated and very high-level assurances of cooperation from them.''

The Saudi and US investigation also continued to make significant quiet progress. Saudi and US cooperation steadily improved. The FBI and Saudi intelligence and security services still had very different cultural approaches to criminal and security investigations, and somewhat different political goals, but they learned to work together. The investigation also made enough progress so that reports appeared that the Saudi Arabia and the US had identified 13 suspects in the bombing, most of which are Saudi although they include at least one Lebanese.[50]

FBI experts indicated in November 1999, that they had growing evidence of some degree of at least indirect Iranian involvement from both Saudi and other sources. At the same time, the nature of the organization or organizations involve remained unclear, as did their strength inside Saudi Arabia. The issue of Iranian involvement also remained open, and had become steadily more political sensitive because Saudi Arabia had reached a political rapprochement with the Iranian government that steadily improved during President Khatami's term in office. Saudi Arabia did quietly ask Iran to provide background data on some aspects of the investigation in 1999. However, Saudi officials publicly denied that the Al Khobar issue was subject of formal discussions with Iran.[51]

Reports did continue to surface that Ahmad Sherrif, a senior official in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, was involved in the planning of Al Khobar.[52] A major London-based Saudi newspaper, al-Hayat, has claimed that the disappearance of two Saudis and one Lebanese believed to have planned the bombing were believed to have initially fled to Iran although investigation has since indicated they are not there.[53] The Saudi government never formally denied that Iran might be connected to the Al Khobar bombings, but Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal did state shortly after the New Yorker article appeared that it, "is not a good thing to launch accusations here and there, reporting a matter on which the investigation has not been completed."[54] The testimony of two Saudis arrested for the bombing – Hani al-Sayegh and Mohammed Qassab, also was not made public.[55]

The US Issues an Indictment

These issues took on new importance on June 21, 2001 when a federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, indicted 13 Saudi militants and a Lebanese chemist for the attack on Al Khobar Towers apartment complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. servicemen

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and injured 373 others. Attorney General John Ashcroft announced the indictment at an afternoon press conference, and stated that the 14 suspected terrorists were charged with murder, attempted murder of federal employees, conspiracy to commit murder, and conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction in the bombing. Ashcroft explained the timing of the indictment by stating that it was issued because many of the charges might have become impossible to file under the statute of limitations after the fifth anniversary of the attack, which was June 25, 2001.

The Role of the Saudi Hizbollah and Outside Groups

Ashcroft stated that the defendants included Abdel Karim Nasser, the leader of the Saudi Hezbollah terrorist organization; and Ahmed Mughassil, the head of the group's military wing, and members of terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia who planned and carried out the attack.[56] Hani al-Sayegh, was identified as the driver of the vehicle used to scout the bombing site.

The Saudi Hezbollah is a small extremist group that had previously denied it was involved in the bombing, and which faced a statement to the Associated Press making this claim in November 1996. It was founded by Saudi Shi'ites in the Eastern Province in the 1980s as a reaction to the harshness of Saudi treatment of what many Wahabis regarded as a suspect branch of Islam. It sought support from Iran, which trained many of the Saudi Shi'ite clerics, and provided money and military training in Iran. The name "Hezbollah" is used by a number of Shi'ite extremist groups, principally the Lebanese Hezbollah. It is taken from the Koran, and literally means "party of God." It refers to active defenders of Islam.[57]

The ties between various "Hezbollah" groups are uncertain, although many train or meet together, and have some ties to Iranian and Syrian intelligence, and Iranian and/or Syrian sponsored training centers in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. The Lebanese Hezbollah, for example, has repeatedly denied it had ties to the Saudi Hezbollah since Khobar bombing, but was named in the US indictment. All of the various Hezbollah groups are also linked with interpretations of Islam that make it legitimate to lie and conceal in the defense of the faith. While the Saudi Hizbollah has focused primarily on attacking the Saudi regime, it is also strongly anti-American. It attacked the Saudi government for allowing U.S. troops to remain in the Kingdom after the end of the Gulf War. Nevertheless, some reports indicate that Saudi government allowed some 200 Saudi Shi'ites to return to Saudi Arabia in 1993, some of who may have included members of the Saudi Hizbollah. [58]

The text of the indictment describes the Hizbollah, the role of the attackers in the Hezbollah, and the role of Iran and other outside organizations as follows: [59]

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Hizballah, or "Party of God," was the name used by a number of related terrorist organizations operating in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Bahrain, among other places. These Hizballah organizations were inspired, supported, and directed by elements of the Iranian government. Saudi Hizballah, also known as Hizballah Al-Hijaz, was a terrorist organization that operated primarily in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and that promoted, among other things, the use of violence against nationals and property of the United States located in Saudi Arabia. Because Saudi Hizballah was an outlaw organization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its members frequently met and trained in Lebanon, Syria, or Iran.

…A regular gathering place for members of Saudi Hizballah was the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus, Syria, which was an important religious site for adherents of the Shi'ite branch of Islam. Saudi Hizballah drew its members primarily from among young men of the Shi'ite faith who resided in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, near the Persian Gulf. Those young men would frequently have their first contact with Saudi Hizballah during religious pilgrimages to the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine. There, they would be approached by Saudi Hizballah members to gauge their loyalty to Iran and dislike for the government of Saudi Arabia. Young men who wished to join Saudi Hizballah then would be transported to Hizballah-controlled areas in Lebanon for military training and indoctrination.

… Saudi Hizballah organized itself into departments, or "wings," each headed by a Hizballah member and each reporting to the leader of Saudi Hizballah, ABDEL KARIM AL-NASSER. The "military wing" of Saudi Hizballah was headed at all relevant times by AHMED AL-MUGHASSIL, aka "Abu Omran," a native of Qatif, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. In his role as military commander, AL-MUGHASSIL was in charge of directing terrorist attacks against American interests in Saudi Arabia. AL-MUGHASSIL was actively involved in recruiting young Saudi Shi'ite men to join the ranks of Hizballah; arranging for those men to undergo military training at Hizballah camps in Lebanon and Iran; directing those men in surveillance of potential targets for attack by Hizballah; and planning and supervising terrorist attacks.

ALI AL-HOURI was a member of Saudi Hizballah who served as a major recruiter for the Hizballah party; scheduled party functions; and transported explosives for the party. He also acted as a liaison for the party with the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, which was an important source of logistics and support for Saudi Hizballah members traveling to and from Lebanon. AL-HOURI was a close associate of AL-MUGHASSIL and participated directly in surveillance, planning, and execution of terrorist attacks.

"HANI AL-SAYEGH was a prominent member of Saudi Hizballah. He was actively involved in recruiting young Saudi Shi'ite men to join the ranks of Hizballah; arranging for those men to undergo military training at Hizballah camps in Lebanon and Iran; assisting in the surveillance of potential targets for attack by Hizballah; and carrying out terrorist attacks. AL- SAYEGH also spoke fluent Farsi and enjoyed an unusually close association with certain military elements of the Iranian government.

"IBRAHIM AL-YACOUB was a prominent member of Saudi Hizballah, actively involved in recruiting young Saudi Shi'ite men to join Hizballah, and in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks. He also served as a liaison between Saudi Hizballah and the Lebanese and Iranian Hizballah organizations. MUSTAFA AL-QASSAB was a Shi'ite Muslim from Qatif, Saudi Arabia. He joined Saudi Hizballah in the late 1980s after traveling from Saudi Arabia to Iran and meeting AL-MUGHASSIL and others. Over time, AL-QASSAB came to play an important role in the military affairs of Saudi Hizballah.

"SA'ED AL-BAHAR was a Qatif native who first became associated with Hizballah in 1988, when AL-YACOUB arranged for him to travel to Iran for religious study. He also spent time with AL-YACOUB in Damascus. In Damascus, he met and became close friends with AL-SAYEGH, who introduced him both to Hizballah and to elements of the Iranian government. In Qom, Iran during 1989 or 1990, he also met AL-HOURI, who accompanied him to military training sponsored by the Iranian government in southern Iran.

"ABDALLAH AL-JARASH was recruited into Hizballah at the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus. At the time of his recruitment, AL-JARASH met AL MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, AL-YACOUB, and AL-SAYEGH, all of whom were important party members.

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"AL- JARASH learned that, as a member of Hizballah, he would need to be loyal to the party and to Iran; he also learned that the goal of the party was to target foreign interests, American in particular, in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In about 1989, AL-JARASH was sent to Lebanon in a Mercedes supplied by the Iranian embassy in Damascus for military training provided by Lebanese Hizballah members. After being trained, he was assigned to recruit others who felt a strong connection to Iran.

"HUSSEIN AL-MUGHIS was a native of Qatif, Saudi Arabia who came into contact with Hizballah in about 1990, when he traveled to the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus and met AL-MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, and AL-SAYEGH, among others. With AL-MUGHASSIL's support, AL-MUGHIS underwent religious training in Qom, Iran, where he met AL-YACOUB. Then, in about 1992, AL-MUGHASSIL arranged for AL-MUGHIS to spend two weeks in Lebanon receiving weapons and explosives training. At that time, he filled out a Hizballah membership form provided by AL-MUGHASSIL and learned that Hizballah Hijaz and Lebanese Hizballah were both part of Iranian Hizballah. After this training, AL-MUGHASSIL directed AL-MUGHIS to secretly recruit others for Hizballah.

"ALI AL-MARHOUN was another Shi'ite Muslim from the town of Qatif in Eastern Saudi Arabia. His first contact with the organization came in about 1991, when he met AL-YACOUB at the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus. After AL-MARHOUN discovered that both he and AL-YACOUB wished to be martyrs for Islam, AL-YACOUB introduced AL-MARHOUN to AL-MUGHASSIL, who arranged for AL-MARHOUN to travel to Lebanon for Hizballah training and indoctrination.

"SALEH RAMADAN and MUSTAFA MU'ALEM were recruited into Saudi Hizballah in approximately 1992 by AL-MARHOUN, whom they knew from their common hometown of Qatif, Saudi Arabia. RAMADAN was chosen because he was very religious and a great admirer of Ayatollah Khomeini, the former Supreme Leader of Iran. Both RAMADAN and AL-MU'ALEM agreed to join Hizballah and form a "cell" under AL-MARHOUN. After being recruited by AL-MARHOUN, RAMADAN and AL-MU'ALEM traveled to Lebanon for military training, where they met AL-MUGHASSIL, who had them fill out written applications for Hizballah membership. FADEL AL-ALAWE was a Qatif native who joined Hizballah in about 1992 at the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus. He was recruited by AL-QASSAB, who introduced him to AL-MUGHASSIL. Shortly thereafter, AL-MUGHASSIL arranged for AL-ALAWE to undergo military training in Lebanon.

"JOHN DOE was a member of Lebanese Hizballah who assisted Saudi Hizballah with the construction of the tanker truck bomb used to attack the American military residences at Khobar Towers. He is described as a Lebanese male, approximately 175 cm tall, with fair skin, fair hair, and green eyes."

The Detailed History of the Attack

The indictment did provide a additional details on the attack. It stated that the terrorist activities leading to the 1996 Khobar blast began as early as 1993. At this point, Ahmed al-Mughassil, who was identified as the Hezbollah leader in charge of attacks against Americans in Saudi Arabia, is said to have ordered three of the other defendants to look for possible targets in Saudi Arabia. and that members of Saudi Hezbollah began extensive surveillance to find American targets in Saudi Arabia. The indictment says that these reports were sent to Mr. Mughassil and Iranian officials, and described possible targets like the American Embassy in Riyadh, a nearby fish market and locations in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, including the site of the Khobar Towers apartment complex.

The indictment stated that an Iranian military officer directed several of the other defendants to search for other potential terrorism sites along the coast of the Red Sea in 1995. It

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also says that Mughassil told another defendant that he maintained ties with Iranian officials and that they provided financial support for Hezbollah. It says that Mughassil decided in the fall of 1995 that Khobar Towers would be the site of the attack, which would serve Iran by driving Americans from the Persian Gulf region.

Mughassil then instructed another defendant to transport explosives by car from Beirut to hiding places in eastern Saudi Arabia in the vicinity of Khobar Towers in early 1996, which were obtained from an unidentified member of Lebanese Hezbollah. The conspirators then bought a tanker truck and converted it into the truck bomb used in the attack. The resulting bomb was larger than the one that destroyed the Oklahoma City federal building in 1995 and more than twice as powerful as the one used at the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983.

The indictment gives the following detailed history of the attack:[60]

> In about 1993, AL-MUGHASSIL instructed AL-QASSAB, AL-YACOUB, and AL-HOURI to begin surveillance of Americans in Saudi Arabia. As a result, AL-QASSAB and AL-YACOUB spent three months in Riyadh conducting surveillance of American targets. AL-SAYEGH joined them during this operation. They produced reports, which were passed to AL-MUGHASSIL, then on to Saudi Hizballah chief AL-NASSER, and to officials in Iran. At the end of their mission, AL-MUGHASSIL came in person to meet with them and review their work.
>
> Also in about 1993, AL-YACOUB assigned AL-JARASH to conduct surveillance of the United States Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and to determine where Americans went and where they lived. Also at AL-YACOUB's direction, AL-JARASH and AL-MARHOUN conducted surveillance of a fish market frequented by Americans, located near the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh. They reported the results of their surveillance to AL-YACOUB. In early 1994, AL-QASSAB began conducting surveillance, focusing on American and other foreign sites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, an area that includes Khobar. He prepared written reports, which were passed to AL-NASSER and Iranian officials.
>
> In about Fall 1994, AL-MARHOUN, RAMADAN, and AL-MU'ALEM began watching American sites in Eastern Saudi Arabia at AL-MUGHASSIL's direction. They passed their reports to AL-MUGHASSIL, who was then spending most of his time in Beirut, Lebanon. At about the same time, AL-BAHAR began conducting surveillance in Saudi Arabia at the direction of an Iranian military officer. Khobar Towers was a housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which the United States, among other countries, used to house military personnel assigned to Saudi Arabia. Building # 131 was an eight-story structure within the Khobar Towers complex that United States Air Force personnel, among others, used as their place of residence while serving in Saudi Arabia.
>
> In late 1994, after extensive surveillance in Eastern Saudi Arabia, AL-MARHOUN, RAMADAN, and AL-MU'ALEM recognized and confirmed Khobar Towers as an important American military location and communicated that fact to AL-MUGHASSIL. Shortly thereafter, AL-MUGHASSIL gave RAMADAN money to find a storage site in the Eastern Province for explosives. During the course of the cell's surveillance, AL-MUGHASSIL reported to AL-MARHOUN that he had received a phone call from a high Iranian government official inquiring about the progress of their surveillance activity.
>
> In 1995, AL-BAHAR and AL-SAYEGH conducted surveillance at the direction of an Iranian military officer of the area of Jizan, Saudi Arabia, located on the Red Sea near Yemen; they also surveilled American sites in the Eastern Province. Their goal was to gather information to support future attacks against Americans. AL-SAYEGH took their surveillance reports and passed them to the Iranian officer.

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In about April or May 1995, AL-MARHOUN attended four days of live-fire drills sponsored by Hizballah in Lebanon. While he was there, he met with AL-MUGHASSIL at his Beirut apartment. During that meeting, AL-MUGHASSIL explained to AL-MARHOUN that Hizballah's goal was to expel the Americans from Saudi Arabia. AL-MUGHASSIL also explained that he had close ties to Iranian officials, who supplied him with money and gave him directions for the party. AL-MUGHASSIL then gave AL-MARHOUN $2000 in $100 United States bills to support AL-MARHOUN's cell in their surveillance activity in Saudi Arabia. AL-MARHOUN used the money to finance a trip to Riyadh with RAMADAN to look for American sites.

In about June 1995, the Hizballah cell composed of AL-MARHOUN, RAMADAN, and AL-MU'ALEM began regular surveillance of Khobar Towers at AL-•MUGHASSIL's direction. Shortly thereafter, RAMADAN traveled to Beirut to brief AL-MUGHASSIL, who instructed the cell to continue surveillance.

At about the same time in 1995 that RAMADAN went to Beirut to update AL-MUGHASSIL on surveillance activities, AL-ALAWE was summoned to Beirut by AL-MUGHASSIL. Although AL-ALAWE did not see RAMADAN, he noticed surveillance reports from RAMADAN on AL-MUGHASSIL's desk. During their meeting, AL-MUGHASSIL explained to AL-ALAWE that explosives were going to be used against Americans in Saudi Arabia and he instructed AL-ALAWE to drive a vehicle he said contained explosives from Lebanon to Saudi Arabia. AL-ALAWE did so, only to discover that the car held no explosives; AL-MUGHASSIL explained that he had only been testing him.

In about October 1995, an unknown man visited AL-ALAWE at his home in Eastern Saudi Arabia and delivered a map of Khobar, saying AL-MUGHASSIL wanted AL-ALAWE to check its accuracy. A short time later, the same man retrieved the map and left a package weighing about one kilogram. AL-ALAWE kept the package until AL-MUGHASSIL called and told him to deliver it to another man unknown to him. AL-ALAWE did as instructed and did not look inside the package.

In the late fall of 1995, RAMADAN brought more surveillance reports to AL-MUGHASSIL in Beirut. It was then that RAMADAN, AL-MARHOUN, and AL-MU'ALEM learned from AL-MUGHASSIL that Hizballah would attack Khobar Towers, using a tanker truck loaded with a mixture of explosives and gasoline.

At the end of 1995 or the beginning of 1996, RAMADAN again returned to Beirut, where he and AL-MUGHASSIL again discussed the planned tanker truck attack on Khobar Towers and the fact that RAMADAN, AL-MARHOUN, and AL-MU'ALEM would each have a role in the attack. AL-MUGHASSIL said they would need enough explosives to destroy a row of buildings and that the attack was to serve Iran by driving the Americans out of the Gulf region. In January or February 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL traveled to Qatif, in the Eastern Province, and instructed AL-MARHOUN to find places to hide explosives. In about February, at AL-MUGHASSIL's direction, RAMADAN met AL-MUGHASSIL in Beirut and drove back to Saudi Arabia with a car loaded with hidden explosives. He delivered the car to a man in Qatif who wore a veil over his face.

In March 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL summoned AL-ALAWE to Beirut and again outfitted him with a car that was to contain explosives. AL-ALAWE drove the car from Lebanon, through Syria and Jordan, to the Al-Haditha border crossing in northern Saudi Arabia. There, on March 28, 1996, Saudi border guards discovered 38 kilograms of plastic explosives hidden in the car and arrested AL-ALAWE. Saudi investigators then arrested AL-MARHOUN, AL-MU'ALEM, and RAMADAN on April 6, 7, and 8, 1996, respectively.

After the arrests of AL-ALAWE and the AL-MARHOUN cell, AL-MUGHASSIL went back to Saudi Arabia in April or May 1996 to continue the planning for the Khobar attack. On or about May 1, 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL appeared unannounced at AL-JARASH's home in Qatif, explaining that he had come as part of a pilgrimage and was traveling on a false passport. AL-MUGHASSIL told AL-JARASH of the plot to bomb Khobar Towers, gave him a forged Iranian passport, and asked for his help. He told AL-JARASH that AL-ALAWE and AL-MARHOUN had been arrested. He also showed him a map of Khobar and described a plan in which AL-HOURI and AL-QASSAB would be involved; he told AL-JARASH to be ready for a call to action at any time.

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Three days later, on about May 4, 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL showed up unannounced at AL-MUGHIS's home in Qatif to tell him of a plan to attack an American housing complex. AL-MUGHASSIL explained that AL-JARASH, AL-HOURI, AL-SAYEGH and a Lebanese Hizballah member would help. AL-MUGHASSIL then gave AL-MUGHIS a timing device to hide at his home.•33. Also during the first half of 1996, AL-HOURI arrived at AL-MUGHIS's home on at least two occasions and enlisted AL-MUGHIS's help in hiding large amounts of explosives. They buried 50-kilo bags and paint cans filled with explosives at various sites around Qatif, near Khobar.

In early June 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL and the Lebanese Hizballah member, JOHN DOE, started staying at AL-MUGHIS's home in Qatif. Also in early June, a conspirator purchased a tanker truck from a car dealership in Saudi Arabia, using stolen identification. The conspirator paid about 75,000 Saudi riyals for the truck. Over the next two weeks, the conspirators worked at a farm in the Qatif area to convert the tanker truck into a large truck bomb.

Present at the farm were AL-MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, AL-SAYEGH, AL-QASSAB, and JOHN DOE. AL-MUGHIS assisted by returning the timing device and retrieving hidden explosives, while AL-JARASH supplied tools and wire to the group. During the bomb construction, AL-MUGHASSIL also discussed plans to bomb the United States Consulate in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Between June 7 and June 17, 1996, key members of the conspiracy attended a meeting at the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine in Damascus. Present were AL-NASSER, AL-MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, AL-YACOUB, AL-SAYEGH, AL-QASSAB, and other high-ranking Saudi Hizballah leaders. At that meeting, AL-NASSER, the head of Saudi Hizballah, discussed the bombing with, among others, AL-MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, AL-YACOUB, AL-SAYEGH, and AL-QASSAB; AL-NASSER also confirmed that AL-MUGHASSIL was in charge of the Khobar attack.

On the evening of June 25, 1996, AL-MUGHASSIL, AL-HOURI, AL-SAYEGH, AL-QASSAB, AL-JARASH, and AL-MUGHIS met at the farm in Qatif to review final preparations for the attack that evening. The group then executed the bombing plan.•37. Shortly before 10:00 p.m. on the evening of June 25, 1996, AL-SAYEGH drove a Datsun with AL-JARASH as his passenger. The Datsun entered the parking lot adjoining Khobar Towers building # 131 as a scout vehicle and parked in the far corner. Next to enter the parking lot was the getaway car, a white four-door Chevrolet Caprice that AL-MUGHIS had borrowed from an acquaintance. The Datsun containing AL-SAYEGH and AL-JARASH signaled that all was clear by blinking its lights. With that, the bomb truck, driven by AL-MUGHASSIL, with AL-HOURI as passenger, entered the lot and backed against a fence just in front of Khobar Towers building # 131. After parking the truck, AL-MUGHASSIL and AL-HOURI quickly exited and entered the back seat of the white Caprice, which drove away from the lot, followed by the Datsun from the corner. Within minutes, the truck bomb exploded, devastating the north side of building # 131, which was occupied by American military personnel. The explosion killed nineteen members of the United States Air Force and wounded 372 other Americans.

As planned, the attack leaders immediately left the Khobar area and Saudi Arabia using a variety of false passports. Only AL-JARASH and AL-MUGHIS remained behind in their hometown of Qatif. AL-SAYEGH reached Canada in August 1996, where he remained until his arrest by Canadian authorities in March 1997. In May 1997, AL-SAYEGH met with American investigators at his request. Among other things, AL-SAYEGH falsely denied knowledge of the Khobar Towers attack and falsely described a purported estrangement between Saudi Hizballah and elements of the Iranian government. After he was removed to the United States in June 1997 on his promise to assist American investigators, AL-SAYEGH reneged on that promise and unsuccessfully sought political asylum in the United States.

The Role of Iran and the Threat of An American Follow-Up

Ashcroft publicly linked the bombing to Iranian government officials: "The indictment explains that elements of the Iranian government inspired, supported and supervised members of Saudi Hezbollah. In particular, the indictment alleges that the charged defendants reported their

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surveillance activities to Iranian officials and were supported and directed in those activities by Iranian officials."[61] The indictment did not name any Iranians as criminal defendants, but Ashcroft noted that the case brought against the 14 defendants was limited to those dependents because "as with any criminal case, [this] is what we believe we can prove in a court of law." He also stated that the US would pursue further indictments.. The text of the indictment did not mention Osama bin Laden, who U.S. officials had suspected was involved in the attack, but did state that members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security "continued to be involved in the planning and execution of terrorist acts and continued to support a variety of groups that use terrorism to pursue their goals."

President Bush issued another a statement complementing the work of the Justice Department and the FBI, and thanking the Saudi government for its assistance in the case, "For the last five years, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have conducted an intensive investigation of this deplorable act of terrorism…I applaud the work of the Department of Justice and the FBI who have spent countless hours pursuing this case. And I want to thank the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their assistance in this investigation. The U.S. Attorney prosecuting the case also gave a press interview stating that he was looking forward "to working with our Saudi partners and law enforcement around the world to apprehend the fugitives and to bring all these defendants to justice."[62]

FBI Director Freeh gave a press conference and stated that the investigation remained open and the FBI would pursue it "to ensure that all those responsible are ultimately brought to justice." Freeh said some of the Saudis indicted today were in jail in Saudi Arabia. Freeh stated that the US did not have an extradition treaty with Saudi Arabia, but that efforts were being made to bring the defendants to the United States. When he was asked if the Saudis had agreed to extradite the suspects, he said only that. "I am very confident that they will be brought to justice, and hopefully in the United States, some of them, at some point." He refused to comment on why no charges were brought against Iranian officials, but said that "everyone who could be charged based on the sufficiency of the evidence has been charged. That does not mean, however, that our investigation is over or that this indictment can't be amended or superseded if we reach the threshold of evidence which would be required to address additional subjects."

Violent Saudi Extremists: Osama Bin Laden

Osama bin Laden is the best-known violent Islamic extremist with ties to Saudi Arabia, although he has long lived in exile and is now based in Afghanistan. His ambitions have also focused more on attacks on Russia and the West than political action in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden

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is the 17th son of Saudi construction magnate Muhammad Bin Ladin, who comes from Yemen. Bin Laden joined the Afghan resistance almost immediately after the Soviet invasion in December 1979. According to US experts, he played a significant role in financing, recruiting, transporting, and training Arab nationals who volunteered to fight in Afghanistan. During the war, Bin Ladin founded al-Qaida (the Base) to serve as an operational hub for like-minded extremists. The Saudi Government revoked his citizenship in 1994, and his family officially disowned him. He moved to Sudan in 1991, but international pressure on the Sudanese government forced him to move to Afghanistan in 1996.[63]

The US has not blamed Bin Laden for attacks in Saudi Arabia, although it strongly suspects he played a major role in the attack on the USS Cole in October, 2000. (Another Saudi man, Muhammed Omar al-Harazi, was one of those arrested for the attack.) He has now acknowledged that his organization did play a major role in the bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on August 7, 1998. He made a series of public threats to drive the United States and its allies out of Islamic countries before the attacks, and presented a" fatwa" on February 23, 1998 under the name "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders." that asserted it was a religious duty for all Muslims to wage war on US citizens, military and civilian, anywhere in the world. . In December 1998, Bin Ladin gave a series of interviews in which he denied involvement in the East Africa bombings but said he "instigated" them and called for attacks on US citizens worldwide in retaliation for the strikes against Iraq.

Al-Qaida is international, rather than Saudi, although it calls for the overthrow of the Saudi royal family and government as part of a broader effort to destroy what it terms corrupt, Western-oriented governments in predominantly Muslim countries The suspects identified after the Embassy bombings include -Egyptians, one Comoran, one Palestinian, one Saudi, and U.S. citizens.[64] He has established liaison with a wide range of other groups, and uses money he has inherited and obtained from business interests and contributions from sympathizers in various countries. He has support from allies like the Egyptian and South Asian groups that signed his fatwa, and funds, trains, and offers logistic help to extremists not directly affiliated with his organization. His organization has sent trainers throughout Afghanistan as well as to Tajikistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen and has trained fighters from numerous other countries, including the Philippines, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, and Eritrea.

Al Quaida seeks to set social and political goals for Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and the Islamic World based on four aims: to eliminate the US and Western presence from the region; to eradicate all forms of non-Islamic rule and apply the Islamic teachings to all aspects of life; to

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achieve true Islamic justice and eradicate all forms of injustice; to reform the political system and purify it from corruption and to "revive" a system to make it possible for citizens to bring charges against state officials. At the same time, the group states that all means for social change to bring about an Islamic state are legitimate as long as they conform to Islamic teachings. This essentially means that violence is legitimate whenever it is necessary.

Bin Laden's main grievances against the Saudi regime include "lack of commitment to the teachings of Sunni Islam, the state's inability to conduct a viable defense policy, the mismanagement of public funds and squandering of oil money, and the state's dependence on non-Muslims for protection." His power base has consisted of three groups inside and outside Saudi Arabia: those who are dedicated to him as a leader and will die for his cause; those who are not part of his organization but who see him as an inspirational force in Arabia; and the "Arab Afghans"- the Saudi youths who went to Afghanistan and have varying degrees of allegiance to bin Laden.

At the same time, Bin Laden has lacked many of the qualities that give him credibility and importance in Saudi society. He is a marginal figure in terms of tribal genealogy and place of birth. Although he was born in Riyadh, his family comes from the Hadhramaut region of Yemen. In spite of his family's wealth, he is still considered a non-Saudi and is thus looked down upon by many in the intensely tribal Najdi heartland. In addition, his criticism of royal corruption seems hypocritical because most of bin Laden's money has come from his family's connections to the royal family. When Bin Laden was declared an opposition figure, his family disowned him rather than let their relationship with the royal family suffer. He was stripped of Saudi citizenship in 1994, and was forced to flee to Jalalabad in Afghanistan, where he remains under the protection of the Taliban. Since the late 1990s, Bin Laden seems to have focused more on the US and regional Turgots than the Saudi regime.[65] Bin Laden has never seemed to have the religious and societal status to seriously undermine the stability of the Saudi regime. [66]

Some sources have reported that Bin Laden's movement is tied to Iran. Jane's Intelligence Review has suggested that an international network heavily supported by bin Laden and tightly controlled by Tehran sponsored the perpetrators of the Al-Khobar bombing. According to the article, bin Laden is part of a special three-man committee established directly under Mehdi Chamran, head of Iranian intelligence. This committee, which is part of an international terrorist organization called International Hezbollah, is tasked with the organization's co-ordination, planning and attacks against the West. US intelligence officials, however, do not support these conclusions.[67]

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Violent Saudi Extremists: Other Threats

At this point in time, it may be the violent extremists the West does know that pose a more serious threat to Saudi stability than Bin Laden. The Saudi government attempts to block reporting on internal security problems and deal with them publicly as criminal rather than political activity. When it does have to deal with internal security problems publicly, it usually focuses on foreign suspects and does not mention or downplays the role of Saudis. It also avoids reporting on internal violence that does not involve foreign targets.

It is clear, however, that attacks do occur. Five Americans and two others were killed in a bombing of the Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) on November 13, 1995. Four Saudis were ultimately executed for this crime, although the Saudi government never made the evidence clear regarding the nature of their organization and its affiliations. A total of 19 Americans were killed in the bomber of the US Air Force Barracks on June 25, 1996. There was a pattern of threats to Americans and some low level attacks in 1999. A Saudi was directly involved in the attack on the USS Cole.

The Saudi government also has arrested a Briton, Canadian, Belgian and other nationalities for what it claims were criminal attacks related to the smuggling of alcohol and drugs. These include bombing on November 17 and 22, 2000, that killed one British man and injured five other foreigners. Another bombing took place in December 2000. The Saudi government did not make any of the details of this conspiracy clear when it announced the arrests on February 4, 2001, and the confessions of the suspects seemed somewhat rehearsed.[68] A US doctor was injured by a letter bomb on May 2, 2001.[69]

Prince Nayef, the Minister of the Interior, has stated that none of these attacks are suspected to have political motives. US experts feel, however, that they may have such motives and that a larger number of Saudi attacks on Saudis and Saudi targets, both by Sunni extremists and Saudi Shi'ites, go unreported. The fact that most such attacks seem to be associated with the names of small splinter groups and do not follow any serious pattern indicates that they are no yet serious. At the same time, no clear numbers and details exist.

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Opposition, Extremism, Terrorism and the Future

No element of the Saudi opposition currently poses a serious threat to the government, but it cannot ignore the rise of Islamic extremism. As the next chapter shows, the government cannot respond by going along with the views of Islamists, and cannot deal with the broader social pressures in Saudi Arabia by seeking to totally repress them. Its answer must ultimately be reform, not an awkward combination of cooption and repression. Arrests, deportations, and censorship do as much to martyr existing critics and breed new ones as to help the government. Cooption and tolerance with carefully defined limits is often more effective.

Every state must take the steps necessary to preserve its internal security. Ultimately, however, the only way Saudi Arabia can deal with both Islamic and secular criticism is through successful governance: putting an end to corruption and the abuses of the royal family and officials, successfully managing and reforming the economy and the distribution of wealth, respecting the core values of Islam, and demonstrating that Saudi military efforts are cost-effective and that Saudi security ties to the US and the West truly serve the national interest. The bombings at Al-Khobar, of the US embassies, and the USS Cole seems to have taught the US and Saudi military a great deal about improving perimeter defenses, relocating US forces into less vulnerable areas, and taking improved anti-terrorist measures. However, it is far from clear that events have taught the Saudi government how to deal with the problem of Islamic extremism.

It is far from clear, however, that the Saudi Ministry of the Interior and Saudi intelligence services are adopting less intrusive internal security methods or easing the kind of interrogation and imprisonment methods that sometimes create martyrs rather than enhanced security. There is a real danger that the Saudi government may continue to keep arresting the usual suspects, regardless of whether they are really violent. It may also overreact in its treatment of legitimate critics who do not support the extremists, but who want a more participatory form of government with a greater emphasis on human rights. The pattern of arrests following Al-Khobar and more recent incidents is very similar to the kind of “rounding up the usual suspects” that the Saudi security services have used since the time of Nasser. It is similar in some ways to the arrests of religious figures, academics and staff members at King Saud University in the early and mid-1980s, and probably did just as much to alienate many of those involved.[70]

Similarly, it is far from clear the US has learned enough from its problems in dealing with the Al-Khobar bombings and whether the US and Saudi Arabia have learned enough from their mistakes in dealing with Al-Khobar to cooperate effectively in the future. There seems to be a real danger that the US will ignore the broader causes of terrorism and extremism in Saudi

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Arabia, and focus solely on counter-terrorism under conditions where Saudi cooperation will remain limited. It is unclear how effective either Saudi or US intelligence is in properly characterizing the role of outside states and movements in supporting terrorism and extremism.

What is clear is that there is sufficient unrest among Sunni Islamic extremists and Shi'ites to lead to the near-certainty of further violence. By and large, Saudi Arabia is a non-violent society and few Saudis can as yet be described as either opponents of the regime or extremists of any kind. Nevertheless, the internal tensions and problems in Saudi Arabia are not just statistics or trends, and the "youth explosion" discussed earlier can be a literal one. Unless Saudi Arabia addresses the causes of violence more effectively, it may find that no improvement in security procedures will be enough.

It is also clear that Americans and Westerners will continue to be natural targets. Attacking US citizens -- particularly the US military -- allows Saudi extremists to attack proxies that are non-Islamic, and to obtain foreign sanctuary, if not foreign support. Attacking non-Saudi targets defuses some of the resentment that follows attacks on Saudi citizens. It also furnishes a way in which extremists can indirectly attack the Saudi family by attacking its strongest ally: Such proxy attacks are scarcely safe, but they do not provoke the kind of extreme action that would follow an attack on a prince. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the US Embassy has issued a steady stream of alerts since Al-Khobar, and further attacks and bombings seem almost certain.[71]

Sunni versus Shi'ite

Saudi Arabia must also deal with internal ethnic, sectarian and regional frictions. The most serious such problem remains the religious tensions between Sunnis and Shi'ites in the Eastern Province. However, there is regional friction between traditionalists in the coastal cities and conservative traditionalist Wahhabis in the Najd, and between the Shafii and Shi'ite immigrants in the Hijaz. In addition, there are still some vestiges of a heritage of tension between the followers of Ibn Saud in the Najd and the north and the citizens of the Hijaz around Mecca and Medina, which date back to the time King Abd al-Aziz drove the Hashemites into exile.[72] There are many long-standing tribal resentments and feuds, some of which predate the rise of Abd al-Aziz.

The divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite affect both Saudi internal security and the region with most of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. The Shi'ites make up about 5-6% of Saudi Arabia's total native population, and something under 10% of its native population -- although those figures go as high as 15%. They probably number between 400,000 and 700,000, although one

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estimate goes as high as two million. They clearly make up a substantial part of the native population of the oil-rich Eastern Province -- possibly as much as 40%.[73]

Saudi Shi'ites have some current and historical ties to the Farsi-speaking Shi'ites of Iran, but they are traditional Arabs who have occupied the coastal area and towns like Qatif, and the inland oasis of Al-Hasa and its city of Hofuf, for centuries. They are the original town dwellers and farmers in the Eastern Province; it was the nomadic Bedouin who were Sunni.

The present level of tension between Saudi Shi'ite and Sunni owes its origins to the rise of the Saud family and Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab in the 18th Century. The Wahhabis actively rejected all veneration of a man, even the prophet. At one point they even attempted to destroy Mohammed's tomb in Medina. In contrast, the Shi'ites were "Twelvers," a branch of Shi'ite Islam that venerates the Prophet's son-in-law Ali, and believed that the leadership of Islam must pass through Ali's line. They venerate each of the past Imams, and make pilgrimages to their tombs. Their religious practices included self-flagellation and a high degree of mysticism. All of these practices were, and are, abhorrent to the Wahhabis.

As a result, the Shi'ites were largely excluded from any political role in Saudi-ruled areas, and became second class citizens. Intermarriage stopped, little contact took place between Shi'ite and Sunni, and Shi'ite economic opportunities were severely restricted. These pressures diminished during the Turkish interregnum from the 1870s to 1913, but Abd al-Aziz's reconquest of Arabia made them an issue from the 1920s onwards.

Ironically, this discrimination was a factor that led many Saudi Shi'ites to go to work for ARAMCO once oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia. They had few other major opportunities and were a more stable and better-educated work force than most Sunni Bedouin. They also showed more interest in secondary and technical education than most Bedouin. As a result, Shi'ites made up 30%-40% of the ARAMCO work force from roughly the 1950s to late 1970s, sometimes rising to relatively senior positions. Most of ARAMCO's security personnel were Shi'ite until the mid- to late 1970s. Many of the residents of the Dammam, Dhahran, and Ras Tanura areas were Shi'ite.

Saudi Shi'ites exhibited little separate political identity until after World War II, although the Shi'ite clergy was relatively well organized by Saudi standards and Shi'ite elders furnish a traditional political framework at the local level. The main points of political friction occurred between the Shi'ite community leaders and the leaders of the Jiluwi tribe, which provided the governors and senior officials of the Eastern Province from the 1920s to the late 1970s. The Jiluwis ruthlessly suppressed any dissent.

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Things began to change in the late 1940s, in part because exposure to ARAMCO and higher education exposed local workers to union labor, in part because of the wave of anti-colonial, “anti-imperial” rhetoric sweeping the developing world, and in part because of the impact of Pan-Arabism and Nasser. A short-lived Shi’ite uprising -- led by Muhammad ibn Hussein al-Harraj -- took place in Qatif in 1948, and it was followed by growing unrest in the region. Much of this labor unrest was more pro-Nasser and pro-labor than sectarian, but the Shi’ites did begin to organize more effectively at the community level.

Shi’ite resentment of the Jiluwi governors also increased steadily with time, as did resentment of the economic and educational discrimination practiced by the Saudi government and resentment of the occasional Wahhabi crack downs on Shi’ite religious ceremonies. The Jiluwis did little to develop Qatif and Hofuf, and a series of governors were harsh and repressive. Abdullah Jiluwi and his son Saud were particularly disliked, although Abd-al-Mushin Jiluwi attempted to ease things when he became governor in the 1970s.[74]

The Saudi government did appoint a Shi’ite Minister of Agriculture and a Shi’ite director-general of the Royal Commission at Jubail, but this tokenism did not help development and career opportunities in the Eastern Province. Today, for example, only one of the 60 members of the Majlis al-Shura is a Shi'a.

Shi’ites also began to be excluded or removed from jobs in ARAMCO, or denied promotion. Shi’ite were virtually excluded from student office at the University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran although they made up more than half of the student body. The Jiluwis arrested any Shi’ite threatening to organize other workers or strike, and increased their surveillance over Shi’ite religious leaders. This led to riots in Qatif in 1970 that were so serious that the town had to be sealed off for a month, and led further riots in 1978, that were followed by 50 arrests and several executions.

This situation exploded December 3-5, 1979 -- shortly after Khomeini rose to power in Iran. The excuse was the Ashura or 10th of Muharram, which is the anniversary of the martyrdom of Hussein, the prophet’s grandson. This is the holiest day in the Shi’ite calendar and the fall of the Shah meant that Iranian Shi’ites could openly celebrate the day with self-flagellation for the first time in decades. The Saudi Shi’ites reacted to Khomeini’s victory by organizing protests and demonstrations in Qatif and in Khafji calling for a more equitable sharing of the nation’s wealth and for the Saud family to support the Iranian revolution. The government sent in the National Guard, a key Guard commander panicked, and at least five demonstrators were killed and several hundred were arrested.

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The Saudi crackdown that followed was exceptionally severe for several reasons. The governor and National Guard greatly exaggerated the seriousness of the riots and the riots came shortly after the uprising at the Grand Mosque. In addition, Khomeini denounced the Saudi royal family and called for its overthrow and death and the government feared the loss of oil production and destruction of oil facilities.

As time went on, it became apparent that neglect, discrimination, and the Jiluwis were responsible for much of what had happened. As a result, the Saudi royal family shifted to a policy of conciliation. Development funds were poured into Qatif and Hofuf, and new schools, hospitals, and housing developments were announced and rushed into construction. Political prisoners were freed. Prince Ahmad, Prince Naif's younger brother and Deputy Minister of Interior, toured the area in early 1980 and promised reforms. This was followed by a series of "flying Majlises" in the Shi'ite towns and cities, and by a speech by Crown Prince Fahd that called for Islam without discrimination. The king made a ten-day visit in November 1980. The Jiluwi governors were bypassed and replaced by Muhammad bin Fahd, a son of the King, in 1983. The government of the Eastern Province was then modernized and fully integrated with that of the rest of Saudi Arabia.

These steps scarcely ended the problem. Although there were few public incidents, a number of Shi'ites remained in exile. In addition, several loosely organized Shi'ite groups and cells were set up to oppose the government -- some with Iranian support. A major new wave of arrests took place in 1981, and a long series of incidents of petty sabotage followed. Shi'ites were slowly excluded from ARAMCO's security forces, and from many sensitive jobs. There were few incidents involving real violence, but there were recurrent arrests of students and workers, and some arrests of Shi'ite religious figures. Saudi officials also indicate that there was some cooperation between Saudi Shi'ite extremists and Iranian pilgrims during some of the Iranian protests during the hajj.

Prior to 1990, the government continued to prohibit Shi'ite public processions during the Islamic month of Muharram and restricted other processions and congregations to designated areas in the major Shi'ite cities. Since 1990, the authorities have permitted marches on the Shi'a holiday of Ashura, provided the marchers do not display banners or engage in self-flagellation. Commemorations of the Ashura have gone on peacefully in the Eastern Province since that time. The government, however, still creates religious problems for the Shi'ites. For example, it seldom permits the private construction of Shi'ite mosques. Yet, the Shi'ites decline government offers to build state-supported mosques because Shi'ite motifs would be prohibited in them.

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These religious problems have interacted with the decline in Saudi Arabia's oil wealth during the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s. Shi'ite towns received less investment, and less money went to Shi'ite areas after 1990, and housing loans became harder to get. Shi'ites increasingly claimed of discrimination in admission to advanced education, job hiring, and even medical treatment.

This led to new political problems with the Shi'ites. Some Shi'ite groups began to attack the US presence in the Eastern Province as a mercenary force that was aiding the Saudi royal family occupy the area and control it on behalf of the Sunnis and which was supporting Zionism and preparing to attack Iran. New peaceful groups arose that attempted to reduce discrimination and the number of Shi'ite extremists training in Iran also increased

The Saudi government tried to deal with these problems by improving economic and educational opportunities, and by co-opting Shi'ite leaders rather than repressing them. It allowed a number of Shi'ite leaders to return from exile in 1993, and promised additional benefits and government projects. However, the government no longer had the money or job opportunities to buy its way out of its problem. It also could not compromise too much or too publicly with the Shi'ites without creating additional problems with its Sunni Islamic extremists.

The steady rise of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism since the Gulf War has convinced many Shi'ites that they can only be second-rate citizens in their own country. The fact that the government has increasingly restricted the jobs open to Shi'ites in an effort to reduce any Shi'ite threat to key petroleum and economic facilities has not helped.

The Saudi Hezbollah probably has less than 1,000 members of any kind and less than 250 hard core members. Most Saudi Shi'ites are not violent and even most Shi'ites in exile advocate peaceful change.[75] The Al Khoei Foundation and Shi'ite Reform Movement are examples of such Shi'ite groups. The Shi'ite population of Saudi Arabia is also too small to succeed in any kind of uprising or separatism. It is, however, large enough to present a significant source of social tension in the world's most important oil producing area. This has been demonstrated by the fact there have been recurrent, minor incidents of sabotage of oil facilities.

Regardless of what the Saudi security services have done in trying to suppress the Saudi Hezbollah, they have not done enough to end the problem and its unlikely that repression can ever be a workable solution. There are still cells of radical Shi'ites in the Eastern Province that have obtained some support from Iran, and the improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran do not mean that young Saudi Shi'ites do not continue to train in Iran and Lebanon. There

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continue to be occasional incidents between Shi'ite groups and the government, and it continues to arrest younger Shi'ite clerics like Abdul Karim Hubaillast and Sheik Jaffar Mubarak.[76]

Political Reform and Opposition

Like the problem of Sunni Islamic extremism, the only long-term answer to the Shi'ite problem is reform. It is clear that constant, targeted efforts will be required to improve the status of Shi'ites in the Eastern province if the Saudi government is to avoid more serious problems, and no action the government takes is likely to totally avoid further low-level violence.

It must be stressed, however, that Western critics need to understand that reform must evolve in a Saudi way and on Saudi terms. It is easy to say that Saudi Arabia should deal with all the problems in Saudi politics and society by copying the West. In practice, however, any effort at such reform would ignore the religious, cultural, tribal, and regional character of the Kingdom. It would be destabilizing and impractical, and any effort at rapid democratization would be more likely to result in political divisiveness, factionalism, and "service politics", and the politization of Islam rather than progressive social change. Saudi Arabia's complex mixture of ultra-conservative Islam, population and sectarian problems, regional divisions, and a centralized monarchy supported by a modern technocracy is anything but easy to change and peaceful change requires the evolution of a uniquely Saudi form of government.

The Saudi government is beginning a process of political and economic reform that should help deal with Saudi Arabia's present internal political problems as well as what potentially are far more serious social, demographic, and economic pressures. At the same time, its present approach to change is sometimes more regressive than evolutionary. The Saudi royal family sometimes seems to be in a state of denial when it deals with internal security problems, and can move so slowly that the growth of the problem outpaces the implementation of the chosen solution. To be specific, a proper approach to internal security requires the government and royal family to concentrate on many of the same reforms it must make to deal with the pressures of economic and demographic change:

- *The leadership of the royal family needs to set clear limits to the future benefits members of the royal family receive from the state and to phase out those special privileges and commissions which limit the competitiveness and efficiency of the Saudi economy and private sector*. It needs to transfer all revenues from oil and gas to the state budget, and to ensure that princes obey the rule of law and are not seen as "corrupt" or abusing the powers of the state. At some point, most members of the royal family will also have to earn their living on their own. It does not take much vision to see that the Saudi

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monarchy cannot give 15,000 princes the same money, rights, and privileges it once gave several thousand.

- *The Majlis al-Shura needs to be steadily expanded in power, and in regional and sectarian representation, to provide a more representative form of government*. The Majlis has made a good beginning, but it needs younger members, more members that are moderate critics of the royal family, and some Shi'ites that are permitted to speak for this ethnic group. It needs to play a more direct role in reviewing the Saudi budget, and its debates need to be more open and reported in the media. It may be some years before Saudi Arabia is ready for a fully elected Majlis or National Assembly, but it is time to begin open elections at lower levels. The Saudi government needs to be more open and some body other than the royal family needs to be seen as playing a major role in decision-making. The present closed, over-centralized process of government breeds extremist opposition.

- *At the same time, Saudi Arabia must come to grips with the need to modernize its religious practices and find a solution that looks towards the future rather than attempts to retreat into an idealized past*. The problem is scarcely Islam per se. Islam creates no intrinsic doctrinal or religious barriers to the kind of reform that Saudi Arabia needs, and Saudi religious practices have already made major progress in many areas. These include dealing with the sciences, modern media, education, investment and insurance, legal and social practices, and even difficult issues like reinterpreting pre-Islamic history and archeology.

  Saudi religious modernists have shown that that the Kingdom can move forward without losing any of its Islamic character, and Qatar is a further demonstration that a Wahhabi society can develop such flexibility. At the same time, the demographic pressures that are creating a population and youth "explosion" illustrate why the government cannot succeed in dealing with Islamic extremism by a combination of accommodating the most fundamental and regressive Wahhabi practices while forcibly repressing Islamic extremists who actively criticize the government. Such policies drag Saudi Arabia back towards a past that cannot be viable in the future and will make the problems young Saudis face in finding rewarding careers and a valid place in society even more difficult.

  The Saudi royal family, the government, and Saudi intellectuals need to face the problem of social alienation and religion much more directly, and push for more rapid reform. Reform must still be gradual and evolutionary, but all elements of Saudi society need to face the fact that the ultimate cost of such efforts at change will be much lower than

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delaying until the present level of reform and modernization creates massive economic and social problems..

- *There is an equal need to evolve interpretations of legal procedures and the required punishments that are as humane as possible and find ways to encourage peaceful opposition on Saudi terms and deal with opposition by responding with reform and effective governance.* It is unrealistic and impractical for Saudi Arabia to attempt to adopt Western standards of human rights. The West needs to be careful not to be trapped into supporting the efforts of Islamic extremists who claim to advocate human rights and democracy as a way of attacking the Saudi regime. It needs to be equally careful to understand that Saudi law is an expression of Islam and Sharia, rather than Western or more secular interpretations of law, and the calling every religious practice that differs from the West a human rights abuse means demanding that Saudi Arabia abandon its religion and culture.

- *Saudi Arabia must accept the need to give Saudi Shi'ites a special religious status and proper economic rights, emphasize the protections of the individual already granted under Saudi law, and sharply rein in the growing abuses of the religious police*. The government must reestablish public faith in the Saudi legal process and the rule of law.

Saudis often quite correctly criticize Western analysts for demanding that Saudi Arabia become a mirror image of the West. This particular form of "globalism" implies convergence on a kind of Western secularism that is the antithesis of multiculturalism, and which attempts to emphasize the strengths of the Western approach with little regard to its weaknesses. Saudi culture, and legal and political practices, have strengths of their own, as well as the weaknesses some Western critics focus upon. These include social cohesion, firm control of crime, tightly knitted and supportive extended families, and a patriarchical sense of the government's obligation to the people. These are not values that any practical observer can easily dismiss.

At the same time, it seems valid to criticize the Saudi royal family and government for being too slow to react to the seriousness of some of Saudi Arabia's problems and for ignoring the lessons of the past. The Saudi monarchy and Saudi society may not want to adopt Western democracy, and cultural and legal processes, but they should pay close attention to the mistakes that have helped cause the fall of monarchies and which have produced political, social, and economic instability in so many Arab states, regardless of the nature of their regimes. The Saudi government must also recognize that legitimate criticism can only be disarmed by recognizing its legitimacy and acting to make the necessary changes.

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Saudi Arabia must find a golden mean between preserving its conservative Islamic character and meeting the massive demographic pressures for change. It must deal with population growth, education, urbanization, and fundamental changes in its labor structure. It the same time, it must preserve its religious character. Improved job opportunities and economic management can help deal with these issues, but a peaceful debate over the evolution of Islam in Saudi Arabia is critical to peaceful social change. At the same time, the government, cannot tolerate violence or violent rhetoric, and must be careful to distinguish between the support of legitimate peaceful Islamic causes outside Saudi Arabia and the support of terrorism and violence.

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The CSIS "Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century Project"

The CSIS is undertaking a new project to examine the trends shaping the future of Saudi Arabia and its impact on the stability of the Gulf. This project is supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation and builds on the work done for the CSIS Strategic Energy Initiative, the CSIS Net Assessment of the Middle East, and the Gulf in Transition Project. It is being conducted in conjunction with a separate – but closely related -- study called the Middle East Energy and Security Project.

The project is being conducted by Anthony H. Cordesman, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, It uses a net assessment approach that looks at all of the major factors affecting Saudi Arabia's strategic, political, economic, and military position and future implications of current trends. It is examining the internal stability and security of Saudi Arabia, social and demographic trends, and the problem of Islamic extremism. It is also examining the changes taking place in the Saudi economy and petroleum industries, the problems of Saudisation, changes in export and trade patterns, and Saudi Arabia's new emphasis on foreign investment.

The assessment of Saudi Arabia's strategic position includes a full-scale analysis of Saudi military forces, defense expenditures, arms imports, military modernization, readiness, and war fighting capability. It also, however, looks beyond the military dimension and a narrowly definition of political stability, and examine the implications of the shifts in the pattern of Gulf, changes in Saudi external relations such changes in Saudi policy towards Iran and Iraq. It examines the cooperation and tensions between Saudi Arabia and the other Southern Gulf states. It examines the implications of the conventional military build-up and creeping proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Gulf, the resulting changes in Saudi Arabia's security position. It also examines the security and strategic implications of the steady expansion of Saudi Arabia's oil, gas, and petrochemical exports.

This project is examining the succession in the Royal Family, the immediate political probabilities, and the generational changes that are occurring in the royal family and Saudi Arabia's technocrats. At the same time, it examines the future political, economic, and social trends in Saudi Arabia, and possible strategic futures for Saudi Arabia through the year 2010.

This examination of the strategic future of Saudi Arabia includes Saudi Arabia's possible evolution in the face of different internal and external factors -- including changes in foreign and trade policies towards Saudi Arabia by the West, Japan, and the Gulf states. Key issues affecting Saudi Arabia's future, including its economic development, relations with other states in the region, energy production and policies, and security relations with other states will be examined as well.

A central focus of this project is to examine the implications of change within Saudi Arabia, their probable mid and long-term impacts, and the most likely changes in the nature or behavior of Saudi Arabia's current ruling elite, and to project the possible implications for both Gulf stability and the US position in the Gulf.

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Work on the project will focus on the steady development of working documents that will be revised steadily during the coming months on the basis on outside comment. As a result, all of the material provided in this section of the CSIS web page should be regarded as working material that will change according to the comments received from policymakers and outside experts. To comment, provide suggestions, or provide corrections, please contact Anthony H. Cordesman at the CSIS at the address shown on each report, or e-mail him at Acordesman@aol.com.

Related material can be found in the “Gulf and Transition” and “ Middle East Energy and Security” sections of the CSIS Web Page at CSIS.ORG.

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[59] UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA ALEXANDRIA DIVISION UNITED STATES OF AMERICA) CRIMINAL NO: 01-228-A, "Conspiracy toKill United States Nationals;" v-) (18 U.S.C. § 2332(b)), June 21, 2001.

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67 Reuters, April 17, 1998, 1635

[68] The Estimate, February 9, 2001, p. 9; The Times, May 3, 2001, p. 17; Washington Post, April 26, 2001, p. A-22; New York Times, May 6, 2001, 0652.

[69]The Times, May 3, 2001, p. 17.

70 The author has encountered many of these attitudes during his visits to Saudi Arabia. For typical US reporting see the Baltimore Sun, July 28, 1991, p. 11-A; Security Intelligence, February 10, 1992, p. 8; New York Times, January 30, 1992, p. 3 and March 1, 1992, p. 8; Amnesty International 1994, pp. 254-256; US State Department, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1994, Washington, GPO, February, 1995, pp. 1165-1173.

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72 The reader should be aware that this often leads to exaggerated reports of tension and corruption. Anyone who has lived in Saudi Arabia becomes aware that royal family rumors, and rumors of internal conflicts, are almost a national sport. The Hijazi are masters of this sport, although sometimes surpassed by whatever businessman who has just suffered in a deal with one of the princes. It is far harder for a Westerner to understand the pressures building up within the Islamic fundamentalists, but the movement does affect a significant number of Saudi youths, and often has intense support at the university level. Cassettes are circulated nationally, and many very well educated Saudis, as well as many traditionalists, support fundamentalism.

e73 These estimates are based on interviews with US and Saudi exports, work by Michael Dunn summarized in The Estimate, , and Anthony H. Cordesman, The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability, Boulder, Westview, 1984, pp. 228-243. Figures referring to 60%-70% Shi'ite do not seem to be correct. See US State Department, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1994, Washington, GPO, February, 1995, pp. 1165-1173, and the on-line edition for 1999.

74 See Anthony H. Cordesman, The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability, Boulder, Westview, 1984, pp. 228-243.

75 Washington Post, November 4, 1996, March 29, 1997, p. A-12.

76 Washington Times, September 11, 1996, p. A-13; Reuters, July 1, 1997, 2045; Chicago Tribune, July 11, 1997, p. I-5; Washington Post, November 4, 1996, February 26, 1997, p. A-7; Philadelphia Inquirer, November 3, 1996, p. A4; New York Times, July 10 1997, p. A-14.

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