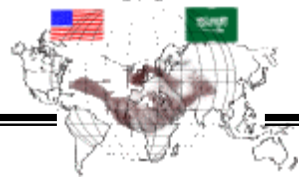


# Saudi-American Forum

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SAF Item of Interest

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## Saudis Out to Help the U.S., Not Push for Bush Re-election

By Frank Richter

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### Saudis Out to Help the U.S., Not Push for Bush Re-election

By Frank Richter

Bob Woodward's book "Plan of Attack" gave critics of President George W. Bush a chance to launch an attack of their own. Their target was Bush's cozy relationship with the Saudis, something that could become an election issue. In his book, Woodward reports that just before the Iraq war, Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar promised the president that the Saudis hoped to fine-tune oil prices over 10 months to prime the economy for 2004.

The president's opponents have tried to characterize this Saudi statement as some sort of "secret deal" designed to unfairly help Bush win re-election in 2004 by priming the U.S. economy with cheap oil.

Woodward also said that Bandar got a peek at the U.S.-Iraqi war plan, 2 months prior to the invasion, and before Secretary of State Colin Powell was briefed.

The Saudi ambassador and Bush have both denied any secret deal to lower oil prices for political purposes. And both Bush and Powell recently said that the secretary of State had been informed of the president's war plans far earlier.

Did the Saudis get a heads-up on the U.S. war plan for Iraq?

The Associated Press recently revealed that Saudi Arabia was a staging area for U.S. special operations forces used in the Iraqi invasion. Saudi assistance allowed the U.S. military to help our Kurdish allies take over western Iraq, in the first days of the war, preventing Saddam Hussein from launching Scud missiles against Israel.

After Turkey refused U.S. ground forces access into northern Iraq, Saudi help became essential to the war plan. The Saudis allowed the U.S. military to fly tankers, to refuel warplanes, to fly AWACs planes for reconnaissance and to maintain command and control of air operations from nearby Saudi bases. Gen. T. Michael Moseley, commander of U.S. air operations during the war, called the Saudis "wonderful partners."

If Vice President Dick Cheney showed the Saudi ambassador a war map depicting U.S. staging areas inside his own kingdom, so what? No news here, except for the news that the Saudis, as usual, came through in the clutch for America.

For decades, the Americans and Saudis have worked closely together to defeat the spread of Iranian fundamentalism in the Gulf and the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. The U.S.-Saudi alliance kicked Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991, and Saudi bases were used to command U.S. air operations against the Taliban after 9/11.

Iraq's enormous debt from the war with Iran, owed to the rich Arab Gulf states, motivated Hussein to invade and annex Kuwait for its oil wealth in 1990. The Gulf War that followed cost the coalition countries \$61 billion, much of it paid for by Saudi Arabia. The Gulf War's cost to the U.S. Treasury was \$7 billion, which amounted to a mere \$62 per taxpayer -- thanks to Saudi generosity.

The Saudi pledge to the United States to keep oil prices low has been a hallmark of the U.S.-Saudi alliance for decades. The Saudis pumped more oil to lower oil prices just before the Gulf War in 1991 and during the buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. When two of America's major sources of imported oil, Venezuela and Nigeria, experienced political crises in 2003, the Saudis increased exports to the United States.

Bandar's promise to keep oil prices stable to help the U.S. economy was part of a long standing Saudi pledge to America, not just to Bush. And this Saudi policy was not designed to help Bush's bid for re-election in November.

In February, OPEC -- led by the Saudis -- agreed to decrease, not increase, their oil production ceiling targets by 10 percent. That decision and insufficient U.S. refining capacity explain why gasoline prices in the United States today are near a 13-year high. U.S. elections are only 6 months away. Not much evidence there of a secret deal.

The Saudis recently proposed that OPEC increase oil production by 1.5 million barrels per day. That's because terrorists sabotaged an oil pipeline in Iraq heightening fears of an oil supply security problem.

Is the Saudi proposal part of a political deal or a response to economic needs? You judge.

Dragging the Saudis into American politics during an election year is a bad idea. The Saudis have been America's closest Arab ally in times of war and peace. The United States cannot afford to lose what few foreign friends it has in a world troubled by terrorism.

### **About the Author**

**Frank Richter** of Detroit lectures nationwide on terrorism and Middle East policy. He is a member of the World Affairs Council in Detroit.

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