

CONGRESS AND THE ARAB HEAVYWEIGHTS: QUESTIONING THE SAUDI AND EGYPTIAN ALLIANCES

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"When it comes to our allies in the Middle East, America too often turns a blind eye to their failings of leadership. We rightfully denounce countries with repressive regimes like those in Iran and Syria, but others such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia receive a pass." — Representative Rahm Emmanuel (D-IL)¹

Since the breakdown of the peace process in late 2000, the advent of the Bush administration and 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, there have been many questions asked on Capitol Hill about America's policy in the Arab world. The collapse of the peace process — so carefully managed by both the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations — and the initial hands-off approach of the George W. Bush administration led the unequivocally pro-Israeli Congress to harden its feelings toward the Arab states. This included the two Arab heavyweights, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, both of which faced questions about their commitment to peace and led to increased scrutiny of their political decision-making, both internal and external.

The 9/11 attacks were a dramatic shock to the American psyche and led to much soul-searching, making questions about America's most important Arab allies

all the more relevant. As the Bush administration tried to manage the war on terrorism and promote regional democracy, Congress embarked on a fundamental reevaluation of its position on the Arab world. It remains to be seen where this process will lead over the long run, but to date it has effectively cooled relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and complicated the Bush administration's dual policy of fostering regional stability and promoting reform, while also managing with increasing difficulty the complex problems in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, and the Holy Land.

SAUDI ARABIA

In the wake of 9/11, stupefied Americans turned sharply critical toward Saudi Arabia, a country with which the United States has had a strong and enduring relationship since the historic 1945 meeting of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz. The simple, oft-repeated

fact that 15 of the 19 terrorists on 9/11 were from Saudi Arabia, — not deep-seated hostility — recast public opinion. Following the public's lead, Congress began to seriously question not only the kingdom's reliability as a friend and ally, but whether it tacitly encouraged extremist Islamic militants. Observed Senator Joe Biden (D-DE), "What did people expect of us, and what did our President do, when a group of mostly Saudi citizens killed thousands of Americans on the 11th?"²

Officially, the U.S. and Saudi Arabian governments have maintained cooperative post-9/11 relations, coordinating extensively on countering terrorism, including monitoring terrorist financing. While the kingdom did not politically support the United States during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, it did quietly assist U.S. forces during the campaign. Led by de facto ruler Crown Prince Abdullah, who became king last August, Saudi Arabia has fully supported the road map peace plan and offered its own proposal for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And while the kingdom has questioned the wisdom of American initiatives for regional democratization, it has undertaken internal political reforms that culminated in nationwide municipal council elections in 2005. With global oil prices soaring, it has worked with OPEC and utilized its excess capacity to limit petroleum costs. Lastly, King Abdullah and President Bush announced a Strategic Dialogue initiative in April 2005, which hopes to strengthen bilateral ties in the long term by establishing a framework for addressing security, financial, economic, cultural, and other matters.

Despite the close cooperation in these important areas, anti-Saudi fervor has not abated in Washington. In his most recent

State of the Union address, President Bush proposed to wean the United States of its dependency on the Middle East for 75 percent of its oil by 2025. While the proposal was met with skepticism about the viability of alternative fuels, the nature of the global oil market and U.S. demand, Bush's plan attempted to placate an anxious American public weary of \$50 per barrel of oil — a figure which has since risen to a record \$75.

The House of Representatives, on the other hand, passed two pieces of legislation critical of the kingdom in 2005. The first measure, an amendment to House Resolution 3057 (H.R. 3057), prohibited the United States from providing aid to Saudi Arabia. While the kingdom has not received any significant U.S. assistance since 1975, \$22,000 was allocated annually to support the training of Saudi military officers. The second act, House Concurrent Resolution 275 (H.Con.Res. 275), which was passed in December, demanded the kingdom reform its educational system. The House of Representatives found that Saudi education "promotes and encourages extremism... fosters intolerance, ignorance, and anti-Semitic, anti-American, and anti-Western views."³ While neither measure was passed by the Senate, both provide an accurate assessment of hostile congressional attitudes toward the kingdom and White House management of U.S.-Saudi bilateral relations.

U.S.-SAUDI RELATIONS: BACKGROUND

For decades, U.S.-Saudi relations have been premised on security cooperation and oil. The kingdom has long been criticized for its position vis-à-vis Israel, human rights, and other issues. But the alliance

has not been consistently questioned or seriously challenged because Saudi Arabian oil has been so vital to the American economy. Prior to 2001, no single issue stuck to the kingdom and threatened its standing in Washington.

Successive U.S. administrations have worked with Saudi Arabia to address mutual threats, many rooted in the Cold War. Challenges from Nasserism, communism, Iranian militancy, and more recently Saddam Hussein demonstrated the importance of cooperation, as the Americans and Saudis worked hand-in-hand to resist threats to regional stability that endangered the flow of oil to the West. More than just the executive branch stood behind strong U.S.-Saudi ties. Congress repeatedly approved selling arms to the kingdom despite opposition from one of Capitol Hill's strongest lobbying organizations, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT), an Orthodox Jew, has bucked AIPAC in the past in favor of allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

Economically, Saudi Arabia is a key trading partner — the largest in the region in 2004. That year, the United States exported \$4.7 billion in goods to the kingdom and imported \$20.4 billion — almost entirely in petroleum products.⁴ Prior to 9/11, overseas Saudi private capital was estimated at \$700 billion, much of it invested in the United States. Traditionally, on economic matters, Saudi Arabia and the United States shared the goal of maintaining a stable, affordable, reliable supply of oil to the world. It clearly served the interests of the United States — the largest consumer of oil — and Saudi Arabia — the largest supplier of oil — to maintain strong relations. "The economic and security

partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia is vital to both nations. Strong business ties are a key element of this partnership. Saudi Arabia is America's leading supplier of oil, while American technology is important to the efficient development of Saudi oil reserves," stated Lieberman in a 1996 speech.⁵

CONGRESS AND SAUDI ARABIA: Historical-Political Context

Congressional policy toward the Middle East has long centered on Israel. The Israeli lobby — of which AIPAC is the most formidable entity — has generally frowned on efforts to bolster U.S.-Saudi ties. From the Israeli perspective, shared by many of its allies in Congress, any gain for the Saudis is a loss for Israel. In this zero-sum game, Israel opposes any moves which could ultimately result in Saudi Arabia replacing it as America's most important regional ally. The importance of oil alone, not to mention other geopolitical issues (particularly after the Cold War reduced Israel's importance as an American proxy), puts Tel Aviv on the defensive. America could remain secure without Israel, but would suffer greatly should Arab oil cease to flow.

Like his predecessor Jimmy Carter, President Ronald Reagan ran into problems with AIPAC over arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The decision to sell additional F-15 fighter jets and AWACS command-and-control aircraft to Riyadh made sense from a strategic standpoint, as both the United States and Saudi Arabia feared a spillover from the Islamic revolution in Iran. Arms sales have been a lucrative business for Americans. From 1950-1997, U.S.-Saudi arms transactions totaled \$93.8 billion.⁶ However, Reagan burned up considerable

political capital in supporting the sale — ultimately needing one of the congressional chambers to approve the deal. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin personally lobbied against the sale during a visit to Capitol Hill. The House of Representatives voted decisively against the package, but the Senate narrowly passed it after the White House applied heavy pressure on wavering senators. But Reagan had little success with Congress in future arms deals for Arab states in the region. Much to the chagrin of King Hussein, Congress blocked a 1985 arms deal with Jordan; it also forced Reagan to withdraw another Saudi arms package the same year. A year later, yet another Saudi arms deal was overwhelmingly rejected by the Senate, 77-22.⁷

In the wake of Reagan's successful push for the Saudi F-15/AWACS arms package, AIPAC and other supportive organizations demonstrated that while they could offer congressional candidates carrots, they would not hesitate to use the stick to punish vulnerable incumbents opposing their agenda. For example, Senator Charles Percy (R-IL) was targeted in 1984 for his alleged pro-Arab positions. His opponent in the general election, Paul Simon, received \$3 million in Jewish contributions, allowing AIPAC director Tom Dine to publicly take credit for his defeat. The same year, Tom Harkin was heavily backed by pro-Israeli political action committees in the Iowa Senate race over incumbent Roger Jepsen, who famously switched his vote on the Saudi AWACS sale.⁸

In the 1980s, AIPAC began to aggressively broaden its coalition by building ties with evangelical Christian groups, shaping debate in the academic world, and prominently injecting itself in political campaigns.

AIPAC established strong relations with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other evangelical luminaries. The Zionist-Christian rightwing alliance was to increase in importance in the coming years, especially while the time President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were in office. This allowed Republicans to compete with Democrats for Jewish votes and campaign contributions. For its part, the Christian right has grown significantly over the past three decades, particularly as the Republican party solidified its control over the Bible Belt by appealing to social and religious conservatism in the American South.

Critics of the pro-Israel lobby attribute President George H. W. Bush's political tailspin to his insistence on brokering a Middle East peace deal that Israel opposed. Faced with Israeli inflexibility, Bush threatened to freeze a lucrative \$10 billion loan guarantee that Israel intended to use to construct housing — much of it in occupied Arab lands — for Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. His position on the loan made him the target of considerable criticism from Israel's congressional allies. The president received a letter drafted by AIPAC and signed by 240 members of the House and 77 Senators, opposing his decision to withhold the loan guarantee. One estimate suggests that Bush's Jewish support dropped from 38 percent in 1988 to between 8-13 percent in 1992.⁹

In Congress, Saudi Arabia was under significant criticism prior to 9/11, in part due to the Palestinian intifada. The Israeli lobby worked quietly, but continuously, to weaken the congressional standing of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They opted to do so out of a longstanding fear that the two

Arab heavyweights could — using Saudi Arabia's economic muscle and Egypt's political clout — convince the United States that it needed to coerce Israel into negotiations and an unfavorable agreement. This helps explain why, from 2000-2001, both Cairo and Riyadh faced new and recycled allegations over their shoddy human-rights records, questions about the necessity of obtaining modern American military hardware, and charges of incitement of antisemitism and anti-Americanism. While not germane, these issues collectively served as distractions and irritants which put both nations on the continual defensive.

Most congressional criticism of Saudi Arabia actually occurred after the Abdullah peace plan was unveiled in early 2002. The peace plan, which was adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut, called for full Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, boundaries. Prior to its formal presentation in Beirut, many Washington-based supporters of Israel, particularly neoconservatives, condemned it. "In 35 years of studying the Middle East, I have rarely seen anything to rival the Saudi 'peace plan' for cynicism (of those pushing the plan) and gullibility (of those buying it)... the plan is an obvious Saudi ploy to blunt American anger at the shockingly deep Saudi role in Sept. 11 by posing as peace-makers," wrote *The Washington Post's* Charles Krauthammer.¹⁰ Rep. Ben Gilman (R-NY) distributed Krauthammer's piece to the House of Representatives in a "Dear Colleague" letter.¹¹

2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Saudi Arabia was an issue in the 2004 presidential campaigns due to the 9/11 backlash and a spike in petroleum prices. In

the Democratic primaries, Senator Robert Graham (D-FL) and former Vermont governor Howard Dean repeatedly blasted the Bush administration's handling of relations with Saudi Arabia. Democratic nominee John Kerry attacked the kingdom for its support of Islamic militants and stressed the need for America to gain energy independence from Saudi Arabia. In a May 2004 speech he noted, "If we are serious about energy independence, then we can finally be serious about confronting the role of Saudi Arabia in financing and providing ideological support of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups." Two months later he said, "I want an America that relies on its own ingenuity and innovation - not the Saudi royal family."¹²

President Bush used a more diplomatic tack when speaking about Saudi Arabia, but he did not ignore the rampant anti-Saudi sentiment when he commented in July 2004, "Three years ago, terrorists were well-established in Saudi Arabia. Inside that country, fundraisers and other facilitators gave al-Qaeda financial and logistical help, with little scrutiny or opposition. Today, after the attacks in Riyadh and elsewhere, the Saudi government knows that al-Qaeda is its enemy."¹³

U.S.-SAUDI COOPERATION

While Saudi bashing proved useful to presidential and congressional candidates alike, it did not change the fact that Washington and Riyadh have continued to cooperate on a variety of issues since 2001. After al-Qaeda attacks against residential compounds in Riyadh in May 2003, Saudi Arabia became an active participant and victim in the war on terror. Even before that, however, the kingdom allied itself with the United States in the

fight. Saudi Arabia supported U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373, and working with the U.S. Department of Treasury and the G-7, formed a Financial Action Task Force to examine terrorist financing. Intelligence cooperation, close prior to 9/11, was strengthened even more.

Economically, Saudi Arabia recently surpassed Israel as America's largest trading partner in the region. It continued to purchase arms from the United States, with sales to the kingdom totaling \$7.3 billion from 1996 - 2003. In 2004 alone, U.S.-Saudi arms agreements totaled \$1.6 billion.¹⁴ The United States was instrumental in Saudi accession to the World Trade Organization in 2005, a goal long sought by the kingdom.

Iraq, Israel, Syria, and Iran continued to be complicating factors for U.S.-Saudi ties, but even on these issues there has been cooperation. Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt, was helpful in allowing the nascent Iraqi government to re-enter the Arab League and other international organizations; it also worked to address the substantial debt owed by Baghdad so as not to cripple Iraq's recovery. The Middle East peace road map has been backed by Riyadh. Lastly, the success of any U.S. attempt to isolate, punish, or alter the behavior of Tehran and Damascus relies on the cooperation of Saudi Arabia.

In no way, however, have congressional attitudes toward the kingdom been altered by this bilateral cooperation. If anything, they may have hardened.

TODAY'S CONGRESS AND SAUDI ARABIA

It should be noted that three factors make Congress tick: (1) electoral needs, (2) ideology, and (3) partisanship. All three

factors overlap in congressional decision-making: reacting to events, appeasing special interest groups, and protecting parochial interests.

Foreign policy is no different from any other issue, except that the local link to international issues is tenuous. Members of Congress certainly want to do what is best, but not if voting a certain way risks their political fortunes. They don't simply try to appeal to country-specific or ethnic groups; they more often try to avoid offending them because offending special interest groups that are perceived as powerful hinders a member's ability to pursue legislative priorities. If the Middle East or Cuba — two areas heavily influenced by powerful domestic lobbying groups — are not important to either reelection or policy goals, most are unwilling to accept the consequences, real or imagined, of ruffling feathers by opposing a powerful lobbying organization such as AIPAC.

Today, there is little reward for acting conciliatory towards Saudi Arabia, but ample evidence suggests that attacking the kingdom is political gold. This explains why it is unlikely, in the near future, that Saudi Arabia will generate any substantial support on Capitol Hill. Consider the following remarks during the July 15, 2004, debate in the House of Representatives over the \$22,000 allocated to joint Pentagon-Saudi military training:

The Saudis have famously also failed to crack down on terror... Since September 11, not a single Saudi donor of funds to terrorist groups has been publicly punished. — Representative Anthony Weiner (D-NY)¹⁵

Time and again, the Saudis have shown that they are not our allies in the war on terror. In fact, they are soft on al-Qaeda terrorists operating in Saudi Arabia. — Representative Joseph Crowley (D-NY)¹⁶

And, more recently, in the December 19, 2005, debate over Saudi education reform:

The extremist Wahhabi religious education which is present in Saudi schools encourages and promotes extremism, viciously anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Semitic attitudes... It is no surprise that 15 of the 19 hijackers on September 11 were Saudi nationals. — Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA)¹⁷

It is unfortunate that some of the textbooks which are used in Saudi Arabian schools foster intolerance, ignorance and anti-Semitic, anti-American and anti-Western views. — Representative Ros-Lehtinen (R-IL)¹⁸

With opinions like these dominating Congress, particularly during an election year, it is easily apparent that advocates of the U.S.-Saudi relationship have much work to do before bilateral relations improve at the congressional level. In November, candidates will compete in elections for all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 34 seats in the Senate. Employing anti-Saudi or, more broadly, anti-Arab rhetoric is still likely to be of electoral benefit to candidates seeking to bolster their security credentials.

EGYPT

Historical-Congressional Context

The contemporary U.S.-Egyptian relationship was forged during the Carter

administration, which was able to build upon Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy and successfully negotiate a formal peace treaty between Israel and Egypt — the first treaty between Tel Aviv and an Arab state. The United States had provided assistance to Egypt since the end of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat began making peace overtures to Israel, broke from Soviet influence, and attempted to implement sweeping economic reforms. But after Camp David, Egypt was promised U.S. aid on a larger scale over an indefinite period. The aid package was intended to provide stability both domestically within Egypt and regionally within the Middle East.

On the whole, Jimmy Carter had an acrimonious relationship with Congress, which impaired his ability to conduct both foreign and domestic policy. In the Middle East, Carter's commitment to the peace process — embracing Cairo and showing a willingness to consider Palestinian positions — gave heartburn to the pro-Israel lobby and its supporters on Capitol Hill. In 1977, in response to Sadat's goodwill overtures, Carter stated that the Egyptian president gave Egypt "a moral claim to US aid."¹⁹ Later that year, at a speech in Clinton, Massachusetts, Carter spoke of establishing a "Palestinian homeland," which at the time was a taboo among American politicians. In response, AIPAC-allied members of Congress sent Carter a detailed 21-point letter outlining their dismay at his Middle East policies.

But Carter persisted, doggedly engaging in personal diplomacy. In the court of public opinion, he was assisted by Sadat's charm offensive; the Egyptian president tirelessly used the U.S. media to transform

his image into that of a forward-looking visionary. Eventually, Carter was able to broker the Camp David accords, dramatically altering the U.S. regional position. Sadat's Egypt replaced the shah's Iran as the second pillar of America's Arab policy — along with Saudi Arabia. The accord committed the United States to providing a generous aid package to Egypt, much of it oriented toward bolstering the Egyptian armed forces. Congress questioned the necessity and unprecedented size of the Egyptian assistance program, but with the euphoria of Israel-Arab peace coupled with the Sadat factor, it overcame dissent and endorsed the plan.

Even eight years after his death, Sadat's enduring legacy as a peacemaker bound Congress to Cairo, as noted by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY):

Anwar Sadat was handed a society with profound economic problems and disturbing social tensions... he began a process aimed at curing Egypt's age-old ills. This vision and this energy carried Sadat beyond the borders of his own country. This man of humble roots escaped the ideological dogmatism of preceding generations and pursued an historic peace with Israel.²⁰

President Husni Mubarak continued Sadat's policies vis-à-vis Israel and repeatedly demonstrated Egypt's solid support for the United States, even though Egypt's policies had led to its exile from the Arab League. That the U.S.-Egyptian relationship was a force for regional stability throughout the 1980s and 1990s was not lost on Congress, which constantly showed its appreciation by continuing to provide the generous assistance levels established at Camp David. Since the late 1970s, Egypt

has been America's second largest recipient of foreign aid, to the tune of a staggering \$61.7 billion dollars.²¹

Congressional rhetoric throughout the 1990s, with the exception of a heated debate over Egyptian debt relief following the first Gulf War in 1991, illustrates this fact:

President Mubarak has continued in the tradition of Anwar Sadat... Times in the Middle East are changing... Egypt can and should continue its vital role as an actor in this process... The Egyptian model can indeed be the model for others in the Arab world to follow. — Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ)²²

The Republic of Egypt has been an outstanding leader in the Arab world in bringing an historic reconciliation between the state of Israel and its neighbors... Egyptian leaders, including President Sadat as well as the present leader, President Mubarak, have dedicated substantial energy toward such reconciliation. — Senator Robert Byrd (D-WVA)²³

The United States and Egypt share a unique friendship based on common interests and goals in global security, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. The continued stability and economic growth of Africa and the Middle East and its environs depends in significant part on the capacity of Egypt to maintain a stable government, which advocates modernity while being respectful of its own rich culture and heritage." — Representative Gary Condit (D-CA)²⁴

Never That Rosy

While relations always appeared placid, this belied the unpleasant fact that

congressional support for Egypt was not particularly deep. Over the past 25 years, U.S.-Egyptian relations have periodically been strained when Egypt's relations with Israel have cooled. And within two months of the start of the intifada in 2000, Egypt's critics in Congress began to speak up. On November 30, Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) sent a scathing letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, censuring Egypt and threatening to cut its assistance package for its alleged hostile actions in response to the breakdown of the peace process.²⁵ Egypt also endured congressional badgering over antisemitism in its state-subsidized press.

As anti-Palestinian sentiment spiked in late 2000 and early 2001, threats were again made — most vocally by Tom Lantos, the most senior Democrat on the House International Relations Committee — to cut Egypt's \$1.3 billion annual military assistance package despite Egypt's ongoing efforts to end the Palestinian-Israeli imbroglio. The threats were rebutted by Egypt's allies on and off the Hill, and further quieted in the fall of 2001 when Egypt hosted Bright Star, a massive military exercise in which 10 nations participated, including the United States. However, President Bush's decision that year to approve an arms deal with Egypt, involving Harpoon missile and patrol boats, was met with intense scrutiny on Capitol Hill. "A stable and prosperous Egypt is in our interest, while an arms race between Israel and Egypt is not," suggested Lantos,²⁶ who was parroted by his Senate equivalent, Senator Joe Biden, and supported by an editorial in *The Washington Post*.²⁷

Egypt: Democracy & Reform

Despite nagging complaints, the Egyptian aid package was not seriously challenged until 2004, when Lantos proposed legislation to alter the economic-military assistance formula. At the time, the United States provided \$1.85 billion to Egypt, with \$535 million to fund economic and civil programs and the remainder allocated for the Egyptian military. Lantos's amendment to the annual appropriations bill called for shifting \$570 million from military to economic aid. President Bush's policies, announced at the 2004 G-8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia, seemed to justify Lantos's position. Many in Congress had become increasingly convinced that the U.S. foreign assistance program was not achieving its desired goals of promoting democracy and stability. Egypt was used as an example of how U.S. largesse had succeeded only in perpetuating the status quo.

Despite ideological consistency, the Bush administration opposed Lantos. And after a fierce debate on the House floor, the amendment was defeated 131-287. Egypt demonstrated it still had considerable support on the Hill — particularly among senior members of the House such as Bill Young (R-FL), John Dingell (D-MI), and David Obey (D-WI), all of whom were in office during the Camp David era. But rather than reassure Cairo, the debate was a harbinger of tepid congressional support:

Egypt has embarked on a major military buildup of a sort one would expect from a nation under dire and imminent threat... The United States has a vital stake in Egypt's stability and prosperity, and the US can best serve that goal and the strengthening of the relationship with Egypt by

supporting educational and economic development. — Representative Eric Cantor (R-VA)²⁸

I share the concerns many of my colleagues have expressed about Egypt's record... Egypt has not acted the way we should expect one of the largest recipients of United States foreign aid to act. — Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY)²⁹

I have wondered why Egypt needs all of these advanced weapons from us. Who are they arming themselves against? Finland? What Egypt needs now is not a larger, more powerful military, but a stronger, more prosperous economy." — Representative Gary Ackerman (D-NY)³⁰

It is time for the United States to start redirecting aid to Egypt...it's now time this aid move toward helping Egyptian people, not the military. The real threat to Egypt comes from the poverty and lack of freedom that exists in the country today. — Representative Joseph Crowley (D-NY)³¹

The Lantos amendment debate established that while Egypt was still viewed as an important American ally, legislators were displeased with the direction of the Egyptian government and critical of the pace of economic and political reforms. Others were alarmed by the lack of Egyptian support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq and questioned its dedication to the war on terror, and its commitment to the peace process. Additionally, congressional champions of human rights continued to object to Hosni Mubarak's government, while others complained about the treatment of the Coptic Christian minority.

A year later, in June 2005, Representative Joe Pitts (R-PA) introduced an amendment that called for shifting \$750 million from Egypt's military account to USAID's infectious disease program. It too was defeated, this time by an overwhelming vote of 87-326. But the Pitts amendment was not as politically perilous as Lantos's, as most members who would have supported a second Lantos amendment did not support shifting money to another program. More gravely for Cairo, however, the final House Appropriations bill earmarked Egypt's economic account, specifying that \$50 million be spent on democracy and governance programs. This broke precedent and opened Egypt up to additional dictates in the future. It was noteworthy that the earmark was written by Obey, one of Egypt's longest and most consistent supporters in Congress.

Egypt's position on the Hill has since grown worse, particularly after Washington perceived the 2005 Egyptian presidential and parliamentary elections as grossly flawed. The House considered a resolution rebuking Egypt for its imprisonment of Al-Ghad party leader Ayman Nour and passed a resolution critical of the elections. The latter measure passed by lopsided 388-22 vote. Even stalwart Egypt supporters such as Young and Dingell supported it.

Core of the Egyptian Problem

Perhaps Egypt's biggest problem has been its failure to convince the United States — especially Congress — of its fundamental importance to America on the bilateral level. Despite a U.S. trade surplus, Egypt does not have Saudi Arabia's oil reserves, which makes its economic significance less vital to the United States. But as the most populace

Arab nation, it has latent economic power; in the 1990s, it considered itself an awakening "tiger on the Nile." Egypt's geostrategic importance as a link to Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Islamic world is well understood by area specialists, who also are cognizant of Egypt's military, political and cultural dominance in the Arab world.

But Egypt has been unable to make those key factors resonate in the minds of American policy makers. Failing to craft a potent bilateral message, Egypt has tended to fall back on its crutch — its importance vis-à-vis Israel and the peace process. Logically, it is the path of least resistance. This factor alone has justified its assistance package with Congress. "Only by maintaining a vibrant, democratic, and strong Egypt may we ensure that the Camp David accords remain viable and that the peace negotiations come to a fruitful conclusion," observed Senator John McCain (R-AZ) in 1992.³² "Former President Anwar Sadat and the current President, Hosni Mubarak have helped develop a vibrant and growing Egypt and secure an enduring stable peace with Israel," noted Senator Paul Simon (D-IL) in a 1996 speech.³³

Even in economic matters, Egypt has fallen back on its relationship with Tel Aviv. Egypt has long sought a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States. An FTA would likely have more immediate economic benefit for the United States, but Cairo believes it will induce reforms which will open its regulation-burdened market to foreign investment, and lead to significant gains over the long haul. However, stymied by American inattention on the FTA, Egypt agreed as a first step to enter into a Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) pact with the United States and Israel in 2004.

The QIZ allows Egypt to export duty-free textiles so long as they include Israeli content. Thus far, according to Egyptians, the QIZ has resulted in economic gains, including job creation.

Politically, however, the United States intended the QIZ — a similar one exists with Jordan — as a tool to promote economic integration between Israel and its neighbors. And while Egypt's participation is no doubt hailed by U.S. policy makers, it further underscores that even Egypt's economic relationship with the United States is tied to Tel Aviv. Or, as best stated in a July 2000 letter signed by 26 senators to President Clinton, "As you know, Egypt, one of America's most important allies in the Middle East, was the first Arab nation to reach a peace treaty with Israel, and continues to play a key role in the Middle East peace process."³⁴ Although the letter was in support of a free trade agreement, it was Egypt's ties to Israel that were highlighted in the opening paragraph.

Over time, the massive military assistance package has allowed Egypt to modernize its military, including acquiring the weapons and communications systems that enable Egyptian and American military units to be interoperable. It has also allowed Egypt to maintain its regional position in the Arab world and Africa. But, again, military aid has long been justified by Egypt's commitment to peace. And with memories of Sadat and Camp David fading, the notion that Egyptian weaponry is essential for maintaining peace is losing its resonance.

CONCLUSION

The legislative branch was designed as a reactive body, always cognizant of and responsive to public opinion. This has led

Congress to frequently focus on short-term answers to complex international problems, which often causes tension with the executive branch since it is responsible for handling both day-to-day and long-term foreign policy. Congressional scrutiny of Saudi Arabia and Egypt is unlikely to subside in the foreseeable future.

In light of the war on terrorism, the war in Iraq, and high gasoline prices, the Arab world as a whole is viewed with trepidation. With even the reliability of well-regarded, nonthreatening Arab allies questioned, it is clear there is a regional stigma that hurts all Arab nations in their dealings with the United States. The Dubai Ports World controversy illustrates this fact and also shows a congressional willingness, consciously or unconsciously, to employ anti-Arab scare tactics. Leading congressional opponents of the deal included both Republicans and Democrats; Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), a top contender for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, played a leading role. Congress chose to ignore the fact that the United Arab Emirates has been a staunch ally of the United States on terrorism and a model of progressive development, instead dwelling on the facts that one of the 9/11 bombers was a citizen of the Emirates, that 9/11 financing was funneled through UAE-based banks and that the UAE was one of three nations that recognized the Taliban.

The Dubai ports battle also underscored another political reality. President Bush promised to veto any legislation which would have blocked the ports deal, primarily because the White House realized the political implications for the United States in the Arab world. However, Congress loudly renounced Bush and

called for hearings to review the deal. Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC), quipped that Bush was politically "tone deaf." The impasse can be attributed to President Bush's rapidly depleting political capital. Some believe Bush has already assumed lame duck status due to the situation in Iraq and his failure to pass key domestic initiatives last year. Compromising Bush's political position further, neither the sitting president nor the vice president will compete in the next presidential election for the first time since 1952.

Congress will continue to press Saudi Arabia on issues such as oil prices, terrorism, and the decision by Saudi Arabia to provide funding to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. There will also be questions about the level of Saudi cooperation on regional issues like Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and a possibility — given growing anti-Chinese sentiment — of concern about budding Saudi-Sino relations. What is certain is that U.S.-Saudi relations at the congressional level are likely to remain troubled. But, because of the American thirst for oil, it is equally clear that Congress has little leverage over the kingdom.

In contrast, Congress has significant leverage over Egypt in the form of the annual \$1.8 billion assistance package. Congress has increasingly adopted a patronizing stand towards Cairo, and as the 2005 Obey amendment proved, is willing to condition aid in order to address what it sees as Egypt's failings. Slow to adopt Bush's democratization and reform agenda, Congress — encouraged by *The Washington Post* and other American media entities — now sees Egypt as the most appropriate candidate for political and social liberalization. Egypt, in fact, is seen as the litmus test for whether the United States has the stomach to live up to

its word on regional democracy and reform. To the chagrin of Egypt, the Bush administration postponed discussions on a free trade agreement in the wake of last year's elections and the imprisonment of Ayman Nour. But Bush's move probably saved Cairo from an embarrassing debate in Congress.

Congress would be wise, however, to proceed with caution. There is no guarantee that the United States will have leverage

over Egypt indefinitely. There already are serious discussions taking place in Cairo about the necessity of U.S. assistance, and whether the mounting political costs of receiving it outweigh its material value. There are only so many strings Egypt will allow Congress to attach before it opts out, reducing American leverage with Cairo and quite possibly eroding Washington's regional standing.

¹ U.S. Congress. House, 2005. 109th Congress, 1st Session. *Congressional Record*, H4806 (21 June).

² U.S. Congress. Senate, 2005. 107th Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, S4202 (25 April).

³ U.S. Congress. House, 2005. 109th Congress, 1st Session, H.Con.Res. 275 5272. 19 December.

⁴ Prados, Alfred B. 2006. "Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Service Issue Brief." p.12.

⁵ United States Congress. Senate. 1996. 104th Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, S1790 (12 March).

⁶ Prados p.10.

⁷ Hedrick Smith: *The Power Game*. (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 225.

⁸ Edward Tivnan: *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*. (Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 193.

⁹ Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Claire, eds: *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*. (CounterPunch and AK Press, 2003), p. 104.

¹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, "Saudi Peace Sham," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 2002, p. A19.

¹¹ Ben Gilman. Dear Colleague from Benjamin Gilman. September 19, 2001.

¹² Council on Foreign Relations. 2004. www.cfr.org/.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Prados p.11.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress. House, 2004. 108th Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, H5886 (14 July).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress. House, 2005. 109th Congress, 1st Session. *Congressional Record*, H12187 (21 June).

¹⁸ Ibid. H12186.

¹⁹ Smith p. 216.

²⁰ U.S. Congress. Senate, 1989. 101st Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, S13028 (11 October).

²¹ Clyde R Mark "Egypt-United States Relations," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief. 15 June 2005, p. 16.

²² U.S. Congress. Senate, 1989. 101st Congress, 1st Session. *Congressional Record*, S9815 (11 October).

²³ U.S. Congress. Senate, 1997. 105th Congress, 1st Session. *Congressional Record*, S6020 (20 June).

²⁴ U.S. Congress. House. 1999. 106th Congress, 1st Session. *Congressional Record*, E1438 (29 June).

²⁵ Jesse Helms and Sam Brownback. Letter from Senator Jesse Helms and Senator Sam Brownback to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. 30 November 2000.

²⁶ John Lancaster, "U.S.-Egypt Arms Deal Questioned" *The Washington Post*. November 27, 2001.

²⁷ *The Washington Post*, "Words From Egypt," editorial, October 30, 2001.

²⁸ U.S. Congress. House, 2004. 108th Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, H5847 (29 June).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. H5851.

³² U.S. Congress. Senate. 1992. 102nd Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, S15897 (30 September).

³³ U.S. Congress. Senate. 1996. 104th Congress, 2nd Session. *Congressional Record*, S12017 (30 September).

³⁴ U.S. Congress. Senate. 2000. Senate letter to President Clinton. 28 July.