

Saudi Arabia Delegation to Iraq (NICHOLS SCHOOL)

Introduction:

Iraq is evolving through a complex mix of political measures. Every move they make is being done under the close surveillance of a global microscope. If done right, Iraq has incredible economic potential. If done wrong or dispassionately, greater violence will surely destroy any sense of obedience and unity. Now is the time for swift action, do they have the confidence to do so?

Background of Saudi Arabia:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia borders Iraq. The territory of Saudi Arabia is vastly larger than that of Iraq. In fact, it is the largest Arab state in Western Asia. The capital city Riyadh is a bustling global economic center, its vast richness largely fueled by oil revenues. The Saudi people have largely avoided the violence and disruption of the Arab Spring uprisings. Maintaining diplomatic relations with the United States, the ruling Unitary Islamic monarchy is headed by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. Abdulaziz has remained one of President Obama's more reliable links to the Middle East throughout a tepid time in the region.

As mentioned earlier, the country's economy is almost solely fueled by its huge oil reserves. The desert nation has the world's second largest oil reserves. Throughout the last century there have been many foreign hands trying to get a piece of the Saudi oil industry. There has historically been great tension regarding the distribution of oil rights. The last decade has seen greater foreign interest from Asian petroleum companies. Large companies from South Korea and Japan are leading the Asian pack at this moment: Japan Petroleum Trading Company and Ssangyong Oil Refining Co. are major distributors. Unsurprisingly, major American holders Mobil, Shell, and Texaco have major involvement as well. The distribution of Saudi oil is closely regulated by OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Freedom of the press is not a chartered right in Saudi Arabia like in many Middle Eastern nations. While the majority of newspapers are privately owned and operated, stories that cover protests and public dissatisfaction are rare. This is largely due to an unspoken code among journalists. The term self-censorship is often thrown around regarding the work of many Saudi journalists. The ruling monarchy promotes national pride and they largely disprove of critical writings in the press. Of course, the rise of mass media and image sharing has caused the Saudi government to change a bit of their rhetoric, allowing some stories through to print that never would have risen up before the digital era.

The television and radio networks of Saudi Arabia are a different story. They are funded and run by branches of the government across the country. Termed the BSKSA, the Broadcasting Services of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regulates the airwaves. They have live-streaming video and radio channels online at all times. There is a great worldwide discussion on the role of state-run media in a modern world. Are they presenting true realities and representations of the world

or are they twisting and contorting the message to fit a political agenda? The issue is huge in a country like Saudi Arabia that presents itself as one of the most modern of the Arab countries. We can look in depth at their “coverage” of the Arab spring and see some discrepancies where they might not have presented certain events in full coverage.

Any analysis of Saudi Arabia’s stance on Iraq starts with an analysis of Saudi home life. How are the people living? In what condition are they living? One of the most telling facts is that there is great internet censorship in the country. Recent articles by today’s “it newspaper,” The Guardian, have suggested that Saudi Arabia is leading the Arab world in internet censorship. They prohibit access to thousands of pages. Not surprisingly, there are firewalls preventing access to countless pornography sites, but sites as simple as Wikipedia are also prohibited. Many opposition politics website as well are shutdown. Many foreign articles regarding Saudi policy and economic status are also prevented. The monarchy has formed a very strong argument supporting these measures. The Saudis have been quite successful in preventing radical Islamic messaging from entering their country. Terrorist message boards are almost totally inaccessible.

Clearly, Saudi Arabia will want to address the issue of radical Islamic action in this conference. These movements are of grave concern to many Saudis so it will be at the forefront of their concern regarding much of the reconstruction of a peaceful Iraq.

Saudi Arabia will largely avoid discussion of poverty and the social situation. This is in large part due to the paranoia of King Abdulaziz who has consistently been an advocate of silencing those messages in his country. His unwavering desire to create a pure social image knows no bounds. The ones who risked imprisonment to tell the story of the grievances of Saudi Arabia have become enemies of the religious and political leaders of the country. This tells you something about the balance of interests in this Arab nation.

Basic Facts:

- birthplace of Islam and home to its most sacred sites—Al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca and Al-Masjid al-Nabawi in Medina
- Capital: Riyadh
- GDP: \$31,300
- Population: 28,290,000
- Government: monarchy

Elections:

For the 2014 Elections, there are 5 main parties running: the State of Law Coalition, the Sadrist Movements, the Kurdistan Democratic Republic, the Iraqi national accord, the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and the White Iraqiya Bloc. Out of the 5 groups mentioned, 4 are Shia run and the Kurdish people run the other. Saudi Arabia’s population is mostly made up of Sunnis and Wahhabis so none of their religious beliefs influence any of these parties. Saudi Arabia has low tolerance for Shia Muslims so it would make sense for them to support the Kurdish minority that lives within Iraq. The Kurdish have always been oppressed in all the lands that they inhabit so it is sensible to assume that they would join forces with a political powerhouse like Saudi Arabia for this election. It is likely that their political party is funded by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia

would like influence in Iraq because of Iraq's relations with the United States and its oil resources.

Committee on Natural Resources:

As the second largest producer of crude oil, Saudi Arabia wants to see to it that their relationship with Iraq, one of the world's fastest growing markets, is sound. Saudi Arabia wants Kurdish control in Iraq so that a prosperous relationship can be established. If Shias take power, Saudi Arabia's hopes of gaining a foothold in the Iraqi markets and having a peaceful relationship will be in jeopardy. Saudi Arabia can offer much needed protection and support against foreign nations trying to take advantage of Iraq's new government and establish its grip on Iraq's oil resources, which are the seventh largest in the world. Still, without a Kurdish party in power, this security cannot be offered. Together with the two countries' oil resources, both Saudi Arabia and Iraq can prosper as economic powers, but if a Shiite party is voted into power, this simply will not be possible. Saudi Arabia has already invested millions of dollars into the Kurdish parties, and they have the means and the intention to increase their support in order to see their agenda realized.

Committee on Federalism and Autonomy

When it comes to the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, there has been much tension in the past 40 or so years. My country, Saudi Arabia, has tended to go against Iraq in the past because they believed the Iraqi government posed a threat to them. Considering the two countries are neighbors leads Saudi Arabia to be extra cautious when it comes to Iraq. For example, in 1991 Saudi Arabia was one of a few countries that went to war with Iraq after they invaded Kuwait. Leaders of Saudi Arabia believed they had to do this for the safety of their country. Iraq would be defeated but this only strained the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq more. After the war, my country supported Iraqi groups that wanted to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government. We believed this might bring stability to the region as well as allow for a better relationship between our two countries. Also, in the past 5 years Saudi Arabia and Iraq have both named the first ambassador since the Gulf War to the others country, marking a major step forward in the relationship between my country, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. In my opinion, the state of Iraq should not be divided into federalized regions because it will only cause chaos and turmoil between the divided regions, thereby causing the country of Iraq as a whole to be fractured and this is bad for Saudi Arabia because it means we have a neighboring country that is politically unstable. It would be better to just stabilize Iraq as a whole country rather than a group of federalized regions. Sectarianism plays a major role in the defining of the borders within Iraq. For example, a majority of the country is Arab but there are also the minority groups such as the Kurds and Turkmen. There are also many religious groups within Iraq that shape the country. In Iraq, religion defines whom people accept and whom they hate, so this is a central role in defining borders within Iraq. Religious majorities such as Sunnis and Shi'as (both of which are Muslim sectors) persecute and discriminate against the minorities in the country, this

in turn causes a lot of the violence and problems that are occurring in Iraq. These issues make resource sharing a harder goal. For example, Iraq has petroleum and natural gas, but because of the divisions within the country, it is harder for these natural resources to be distributed due to differences in ideology. When it comes to the division of land, it is harder for the minority groups to gain a significant amount of land. In Iraq, minorities such as the Kurds are often discriminated against and forced to live in small communities whereas the majorities, such as the Arabs, live in much larger cities such as Baghdad or Kirkuk. Minorities are often prosecuted in Iraq because they do not share the faith of the majority. The most important actors internally for the rights of the minorities are the minorities themselves, such as the Kurds. The Iraqi government does not do much to help the minorities and they make it hard for outsiders to help these minorities. Externally, organizations such as the Independent High Commission for Human Rights, as well as the UN work hard to try and provide some safety for the minorities in Iraq but it is a process that is a long way from being completed.

Committee on Security:

On October 16, 2013, Saudi Arabia rejected a seat on the United Nations Security Council. This decision demonstrates the depth of Saudi anger over what it sees as the West's inability to deal effectively with Syria and Iran, Saudi Arabia's main opponent in the region and home to a Shia majority.

The Saudi ambassador to the United Nations, Abdullah Y. al-Mouallimi expresses Saudi Arabia's stance toward the elections in Iraq: "We take this election very seriously as a responsibility to be able to contribute to this very important forum to peace and security of the world," he told reporters. "Our election today is a reflection of a longstanding policy in support of moderation and in support of resolving disputes by peaceful means."

Even though Saudi Arabia and Iraq are two of the biggest oil producers in the world, there are actually very few goods that cross the desert border between them. Saudi authorities have even built a fence to ensure that political instability in Iraq doesn't permeate its territory. In 2012, Iraq traded more with Thailand than it did with Saudi Arabia. The border between the countries is closed except during the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

Poor ties between the countries have come to the forefront as violence plagues Iraq, turning it into another arena where Saudi interests have begun to diverge from those of the U.S. Fighting has broken out in Anbar province, bordering Saudi Arabia, where Sunni fighters tied to al-Qaeda are rebelling against the Shiite-led government of Nouri al-Maliki, supported by Iran. Saudi Arabia and Iraq have had strained connections since the U.S. ousted Saddam Hussein in 2003, which led, three years later, to the election of Maliki and the institution of his government, the first Shiite regime in the nation's history.

While Maliki has expressed reticence in establishing diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia has expressed similar sentiments. "As much as the tribal leaders hate al-Qaeda, they don't trust Maliki either," said Crispin Hawes, managing director of the research firm Teneo Intelligence in London, "Maliki fundamentally doesn't

believe that the Sunni population is ever going to be on his side, and he doesn't want them to be."

Regional Affairs:

The government of Saudi Arabia supports the struggle of Syrian rebels against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. Saudi Arabia, as a nation, has made it its duty to seek to aid the Syrian opposition in its struggle for victory. Despite a shared stance against Assad's dictatorship, Saudi Arabia has tired of the U.S.'s lack of clarity in its approach to the Syrian Revolution. Saudi Arabia has concluded that the rebels supported by the United States and other Western nations have fallen short in the execution of their goals—with this conclusion in mind, Saudi Arabia holds that the time has come for a redirection of support to more effective factions. For this, the U.S. has expressed reservation, just as it has objected to arming the Syrian rebels with more effective weaponry. Washington has conveyed its fears that these weapons will fall into the hands of extremists and cause further chaos in the region.

Just as Saudi Arabia asserts that the U.S. has failed to do its job in Syria, Riyadh has a critical view of the U.S.'s dealings with Iran. Iran's desire to amass power and assert its dominance threatens the institution of peace in the Middle East and its meddling in Iraq has unleashed unspeakable hardship for the citizens of the embattled nation. The United States must adopt a more firm stance in its dealings with Iran, for ever since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran has made it its mission to dominate Iraq. The Saudi government will do its utmost to prevent this shift of power and it acknowledges a direct correlation between the political interests of Iran and its support for Nouri Al-Maliki's government in Iraq. The United States has also extended its aid to Maliki, an act which Saudi Arabia views as contrary to the maintenance of peace in the face of Iran's vie for supremacy.

Maliki has claimed that Saudi Arabia does not want peace with Iraq. However, Saudi Arabia cannot be persuaded to seek reconciliation with a nation which stands in opposition to its own interests. Saudi Arabia's borders will remain closed to Iraq until its government adopts a more positive stance toward Saudi Arabia and Sunni Muslims in general.

291,000 Palestinian refugees live in Saudi Arabia as well as 70,000 stateless Arabs.

Committee on Religion and Sectarianism:

Religion is a major part of everyday life in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic theocratic monarchy. Domestic Saudi politics are dominated by the Sunni, Shiite sectarian divide. Saudi Arabia's policies promote the growth of Sunni politics to the detriment of its minority Shiite population. Instead of forming policies that promote amicable relations between the Sunnis and Shiites, Saudi domestic policy encourages the sectarian divide. While this policy promotes short term stability, it fails to deal with the Sunni/Shiite divide and leaves the problem for future generations. Saudi Arabia's sectarian politics enhanced this divide by portraying its minority Shia population as being anti-Saudi. While this sectarian policy has been a hallmark of Saudi Arabia since at least the labor strikes of the 1950s, sectarianism has become

a dominant theme in domestic politics since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The Saudi response to the Arab Spring was to continue promoting Sunnis over Shias. The Saudis have historically feared the Shia population because the majority of Shias lives in the Eastern provinces and are employed in the oil fields.

Committee on Media:

Saudi Arabia does not have a large media presence in Iraq; however, the state-run media outlets often discuss events in Iraq. This could change in the future if Saudi Arabia establishes an embassy in Iraq. The Saudi media will likely form bureaus in Baghdad.

As previously mentioned in the background, freedom of the press is not a chartered right in Saudi Arabia like in many Middle Eastern nations. This is largely due to an unspoken code among journalists: self-censorship. The ruling monarchy promotes national pride and they largely disprove of critical writings in the press. Of course, the rise of mass media and image sharing has caused the Saudi government to change a bit of their rhetoric, allowing some stories through to print that never would have risen up before the digital era. Unfortunately, Saudi Arabia has a history of arresting journalists who question the ruling party. One look at the website of Reporters Without Borders highlights that there are numerous journalists arrested in Saudi Arabia each month. There is also a large percentage of press resources dedicated to religious happenings in Saudi Arabia in comparison to much of Western media. Saudi Arabia will definitely not interject if anyone raises concern over ethics regarding the treatment of journalists at the conference. While the media are rarely accused of spreading propaganda, there is definitely a lack of large-scale investigative journalism.

On a specific basis, The United Nations propped up an independent media organization in Iraq that has since taken off and is hugely powerful. The ethos and policies of Aswat al Iraq are opposite from those of the largest media organizations in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, coverage of the Iraqi elections will assuredly be biased along the Saudi monarchy's own views.

Five Issues in Need of Being Addressed:

- 1) Denying Saudi involvement in aiding Iraqi terrorist groups
- 2) Organizing oil distribution
- 3) National unity & defense
- 4) Consolidation of political parties
- 5) Distribution of non-oil natural resources