

Saudi Oil and U.S. Hypocrisy

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Few events expose the utter hypocrisy of U.S. politicians' grand words about democracy so starkly as their praise for the recently deceased King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. For decades U.S. imperialism and all the imperialist powers have given political, military and diplomatic support to the corrupt feudal family that rules Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of oil.

Heads of state abruptly changed plans and rushed to Riyadh to greet the 79-year-old new ruler King Salman. President Obama, British Prime Minister Cameron accompanied by Prince Charles, French President Hollande, Afghanistan President Ghani, Spain's King Felipe VI, Turkish President Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif were all anxious to be assured of the regime's continuation.

Saudi Arabia is an absolute and brutal dictatorship. The country is named after the royal Saud family that has expropriated the country's fabulous oil wealth, and treats it as a wholly owned family asset. Their control is maintained by massive state-organized repression. All forms of political dissent and social organization, from political parties to trade unions, are banned under pain of death.

Executions by decapitation in public squares are held on average once every four days. Capital crimes include adultery, homosexuality and political opposition to the regime. Public stonings are also a common form of execution. Other punishments include eye gouging, limb amputation, tooth extraction, surgical paralysis and public lashings.

Wealth and poverty

Government departments are treated as fiefdoms. Their enormous budgets are unaudited and at the family's personal disposal. Personal and state funds are completely commingled. All family members are guaranteed astronomical monthly allowances from birth, the amount depending on their proximity to the king's inner circle. The Saud family, with almost 4,000 members, extends privileges up to 30,000 others related by marriage.

The cabinet is made up of Saud family members. The key ministries — interior, foreign affairs, the military commands, National Guard and regional governorships — are held exclusively by family members.

The government does not gather data on poverty, literacy, unemployment or health coverage. However, the Saudi newspaper Okaz reported in July 2012 that 60 percent of the population lived below the poverty line

A third of the country's population of 27 million are immigrants with no rights, no status and

no social benefits, who make up 80 percent of the work force.

Saudi unemployment is estimated at 10 percent by the CIA World Factbook, but 28 percent among young men aged 15 to 24, who lack needed skills. Women are not considered part of the work force.

Women enslaved

Women in Saudi Arabia have the lowest literacy in the region. More than 1.5 million migrant women work in domestic slavery. A 2012 report from the International Trade Union Confederation on workers' rights in Saudi Arabia reported alarming levels of child labor, discrimination and forced labor.

All women, regardless of their class position, have no rights to employment, property or education. They cannot step one foot out of their homes unless covered head to toe in a long black abaya and accompanied by a male family member.

Women in powerful positions in the West ignore the reality of Saudi women. For example, Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, hailed King Abdullah as "a strong advocate for women." (Washington Post, Jan. 23) U.N. World Food Program Executive Director Ertharin Cousin praised King Abdullah: "He was a true humanitarian leader, always on the side of the world's hungry poor." (www.un.org, Jan 23)

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon joined in the imperialist outpouring of praise, expressing in the same statement his gratitude for the king's "generous humanitarian and developmental support" throughout the Middle East.

Because Wall Street, U.S. oil corporations, military industries and banks reap such enormous profits from this gang of thieves, they have done everything possible to arm, train and reinforce the Saudi military. The role of the corporate media is to provide a veneer of respectability to this family of looters.

This narrow ruling elite relies on five U.S. military bases, Western arms and military training for its protection and survival. The U.S. Fifth Fleet, based in nearby Bahrain, defends the status quo with aircraft carriers, 20 ships, nuclear submarines, 103 strike aircraft and 20,000 sailors and marines.

In return, the Saudi royal family pays protection money to U.S. military industries like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and Boeing. Billions also go to British, French and German military corporations. The Saudi military budget in 2013 was \$67 billion, the fourth largest in the world, after the U.S., China and Russia.

Saudi spending on weapons comes to 9.3 percent of its gross national product, the highest in the world. The economy is the least diversified of any oil-producing country, with more than 90 percent of its export earnings coming from oil. Virtually everything else must be imported.

Until the 1970s, four U.S. companies were the sole owners of Saudi oil — free and clear of taxes and duties. As revolutionary upheavals in the region led many countries to demand full control of their resources, Saudi oil was carefully nationalized into a conglomerate called Aramco. Exploration, drilling, pumping, transport and the building of pipelines, ports and

terminals were all structured to return maximum profits to U.S. corporations. While the Saud family can take immense wealth for themselves, the vast majority of these funds must be held in U.S. banks or be used to purchase U.S. materials.

Contras and terror militias

This opaque, unaudited economy makes Saudi Arabia a perfect conduit and funding source for U.S. wars, military adventures and secret agencies. At the same time, the U.S. State Department can claim that it knows nothing about who is funding terrorist militias — from the Nicaraguan contras in 1983 to ISIS in 2015.

When Congress denied funding for the reactionary contras in the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan covertly arranged for the Saudis to send them weapons to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Saudi money was a key component in the CIA's war against the progressive Afghan regime that began in 1979. Working with Washington, it has also funded reactionary militias in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon that have metastasized into a viciously sectarian and destabilizing force throughout the Middle East.

Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a former Saudi ambassador to Washington from 1983 to 2005, is considered a mastermind of the Saudi terror network. He is now director general of the Saudi Intelligence Agency.

Saudi wealth also keeps other military dictatorships in the region afloat. In Egypt, the Saudis provided \$1 billion to help General al-Sisi's coup against the elected Morsi government. After the coup they pledged an immediate \$8 billion to stabilize the military regime and have now committed more than \$20 billion to maintaining that dictatorship.

The continued rule of the House of Saud is based on a thin, corrupt layer of extreme privilege. Dependent on immigrant labor, foreign trainers and technical experts, it is hated by its own people. U.S. imperialism has staked its continued domination of the region on a detested and narrow grouping that lacks popular support or legitimacy.

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