**When the Eagle Turns the Cheek: US-Saudi Relations and the Oil Curse**

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The most controversial issue with American democracy today is the concern that money might have too much control over the working of government such that the government is no longer democratically legitimate. The foundation of the political process in the USA depends upon money in order to operate, and thus, absent regulations regarding the extent of campaign contributions, elections may be purchased by any billionaire without the consent of the American people. This is specifically detrimental not just to the rights of the people, but to the legitimacy of the United States government itself.

Concern for the American electoral process is well founded, but its fundamental thesis is one which is not commonly extrapolated to the actions of the government the aforementioned process hopes to create. Good government, one established to protect the rights of its constituents, cannot exist without the consent of the governed. This is generally accepted as a principle of democratic governments, but few attempt to hold all nations to the standard. It is one stance to argue that the foundation of a government is the people which it serves, but it seems only the next logical stance to make certain that a legitimate government only cooperates with other governments grounded in the backbone of democracy.

It is not entirely uncommon for democratic nations to denounce the existence of illegitimate governments - The European Union requires nations be wholly democratic before allowing them to enter – but the glaring exceptions to this phenomenon often have a shared characteristic which shows the lack of moral decision-making in American leaders. Oil has been blamed for sparking United States intervention in the Middle East, but the oil curse runs deeper than the actions of the United States Military.

When President Barack Obama visited India this January he made clear that the government of India had to increase its democratic participation and expand women’s rights[[1]](#footnote-1). His next stop was Saudi Arabia, and the leader of the free world did not make a single comment on democracy or the rights of women in one of the world’s last absolute monarchies where women are legally inferior to men[[2]](#footnote-2). Saudi Arabia is a key ally to the United States; they are the extractive foundation of the petrodollar oil industry, and they are the largest partner in the coalition to defeat the Islamic State, but this military alliance only emerged from the already solidified economic alliance between the United States and the autocracy[[3]](#footnote-3). Oil is only recently starting to falter from its position as the greatest international market for the United States, but the effects of it continue to alter the way the United States interacts with some Middle Eastern nations.

Fundamentally, a government cannot claim to conduct its policies with principles if those principles are not equally applied to every entity it interacts with. Connecting the theory that government draws its power from the governed, the principles it uses are, by definition, those of its citizens. Understanding that government must equally apply its principles and that commodities such as oil are able to create a misdistribution of justice by the United States government, it is clear that the alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia is one which violates the legitimacy of the United States as a nation.

It is clear that the United States must abandon all relations with the nation of Saudi Arabia, but it is also necessary to understand the nature of the United States and other nations. When a nation takes an exception to its morals in order to work with a productive ally, it abandons its ethical orientation towards the world and compromises its principles. Saudi Arabia is not the only nation which represents the compromised ethics of the United States in foreign policy, but it is one of the worst examples of unethical orientation.

The lack of principle held by the United States in foreign policy mirrors the control of elections domestically by corporate interests. The legitimization of the government by the people means nothing if the government itself acts against the principles prescribed to it by its constituents.

1. "Three Likely Outcomes of Obama's Visit to India." - Al Jazeera English. January 26, 2015. Accessed June 23, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Government." Government. Accessed June 23, 2015. https://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/government/. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Tough Choices Ahead for US-Saudi Relationship - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." Al-Monitor. February 2, 2015. Accessed June 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)