

# Al Qaida strikes in Riyadh, 30 killed, 100 hurt

By Dominic Evans

**Riyadh:** Suspected Al Qaida suicide bombers posing as Saudi police blew up their explosives-laden car in a Riyadh compound housing mostly Arab foreigners on Sunday, tearing it apart and killing between 20 and 30 people.

The powerful blast ripped an avenue of destruction between 200 villas in the compound in the capital just days after western nations issued fresh terror alerts and Washington shut its missions in the kingdom.

"The attackers got into the compound by disguising themselves as Saudi security. They wore security uniforms and drove into the compound

in a vehicle similar to that used by police," a Saudi security source said. A diplomat confirmed the report. The security source said there were at least two attackers.

The bombers shot their way into the guarded Muhaya complex and detonated at least one car packed with explosives. Most residents were families of middle-class professionals from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian territories.

One American was injured and another was reported missing, a US diplomat said,

but it was unknown if they were of dual nationality. In Washington, a State Department spokeswoman said: "It appears that no US diplomats live at the compounds."

On Friday, the US had issued its second security warning on Saudi Arabia in recent days, saying "terrorists" were planning attacks in the kingdom. US missions were shut on Saturday for a security review.

After the attack, the US embassy and the French advised personnel and dependants to be vigilant and not to leave their compounds.

Saudi authorities are still to give an official toll but senior western diplomats said the blast killed between 20 and 30 people and injured up to

100. As rescuers searched amid rubble and raging fires, a senior western diplomat said: "Our best guess is that between 20 and 30 were killed."

In May, a triple suicide bombing at Riyadh housing compounds killed 35 people, including nine Americans, and was blamed on the Al Qaida. Bin Laden's supporters have threatened to attack Saudi rulers and westerners in the kingdom. Bin Laden last month vowed to strike American targets inside and outside the US. Reuters



Rescue workers rummage through the rubble left by Sunday's blast in Riyadh.

RIYADH BLASTS / U.S. OFFERS HELP TO FIGHT TERROR

# Al-Qaeda aims to topple Saudi Govt.: Armitage

By Atul Aneja

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**MANAMA, NOV. 10.** A day after the deadly bombing of a Riyadh residential compound by suspected Al-Qaeda extremists, there has been wide speculation in the region on the purpose of the attack, in which 17 persons were killed and scores injured.

Many in Saudi Arabia believe that the attack was meant to destabilise the kingdom, the largest producer of oil in the world. A Saudi analyst, Dawood al-Shirian, said the attacks were an expression of "a war on the regime, a war to turn the country into a new Afghanistan rule by a Saudi-style Taliban." In comments quoted in the Lebanese English daily, *The Daily Star*, Mr. Al-Shirian said that the attackers "do not want to kill Westerners. What they really want is to subvert the ruling establishment here and attain power."

The visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, expressed similar sentiments. "It is quite clear to

me that Al-Qaeda wants to take down the royal family and the Government of Saudi Arabia," Mr. Armitage told *Al Arabiya* television, excerpts of which were broadcast on Monday. At a press conference, Mr. Armitage pledged that the U.S. was ready to fully participate in countering the extremist menace, "if that is the desire of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In the past, senior functionaries of the Bush administration have been quoted as saying that Saudi cooperation in countering international terrorism has been deficient.

While acknowledging that the attackers wished to carry out a political agenda, some analysts said the extremist activity in Saudi Arabia was a response to the political situation in the kingdom. Abdullah al-Hamed, an Islamist activist was quoted in *The Daily Star* as saying that, "When people are not permitted to express their disagreement through peaceful means such as demonstrations, some are ready to rebel and resort to

violence." Many commentators in the region have said that one of the objectives of the extremists was to undermine the Saudi economy by scaring away skilled expatriate workers.

An editorial in *The Gulf Today*, an English daily from the United Arab Emirates, said the attackers, "by targeting foreigners, hoped to undermine the economy of the country which is home to six million expatriate workers."

The ghastly midnight killings on Saturday have been met with widespread condemnation throughout West Asia. Saudi Arabia's *Okaz* daily said, "What happened in the residential compound... can only be described as aggression against religion, ethics and humanity." Qatar's *Al-Rayah* newspaper said, "The targeting of a residential area, which shelters families of Arab and Saudi nationals, has nothing in common with the *jihad* slogan under which radical fundamentalist groups, which carry out such terrorist acts, operate."

# Saudi monarchy to hold first-ever polls

Riyadh, Oct. 13 (Reuters): Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, announced today it would hold its first elections to vote for municipal councils, seen as the first concrete political reform in the Gulf Arab state.

The announcement by the cabinet followed growing demands by reformists on de facto ruler Crown Prince Abdullah to allow wider political participation, elections and freedom of expression in the conservative Muslim kingdom.

In taking this action, Saudi Arabia has joined a growing trend towards experiments in democracy in other Gulf Arab countries. The decision also coincided with the opening of the first human rights conference in Riyadh. "The council of ministers decided to widen participation of citizens in running local affairs through elections by activating municipal councils, with half the members of each council being elected," the state news agency SPA said.

It did not give further details but seemed to imply that other members would be appointed by the government. It said preparations for the polls should not take more than one year.

"Our happiness will be complete when there are 100 per cent elections," said 38-year-old Saudi citizen Sultan Abdul-Aziz.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks on US cities — in which

15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis — Riyadh has come under intense pressure by key ally Washington to implement social and political reform in the kingdom which is the cradle of Islam and the world's largest oil exporter.

Mohammed al-Harfy, a columnist in *al-Watan* daily, said he hoped the decision was not a one off move to appease reform calls. "I think this is a positive step because many people in our society have been calling for comprehensive elections, in-

## Kuwait women get more rights

Kuwait, Oct. 13 (Reuters): Kuwait's cabinet has approved allowing women to stand for office and vote in municipal council elections, a move observers hail as a first step towards granting women greater political rights.

Kuwaiti newspapers said the bill was discussed yesterday, but it still needs approval from the all-male Gulf Arab state's powerful parliament, which in the past has blocked government proposals to grant women suffrage.

"I expect the draft law to be sent to parliament in the coming week," Islamist lawmaker Walid Tabtabai said.

cluding municipal," he said.

"But this is not enough. We hope these elections are a beginning and would lead to elections in the Shura Council, in universities and the right to form syndicates," he added.

The cabinet statement said the decision "comes to implement King Fahd's speech about widening popular participation and confirming the country's progress towards political and administrative reform... and accountability". The king pledged in a speech in May to expand reforms following suicide bombings on Western compounds in Riyadh. He said the government would "expand public participation and open up wider horizons for women's employment".

The cabinet statement did not make clear whether women will be allowed to vote. Until now women are forbidden to drive and were only issued with identity cards in 2001.

Riyadh has already responded to international disquiet about its restrictive political, social and religious culture by radically reforming what it teaches at its schools by scrapping offensive teachings that promote hatred of Christians and Jews.

The kingdom, under the dynastic rule of the house of Saud since its foundation in the 1930s, has an appointed advisory council but has never had elections for public office.

## Cheering crowds greet new Liberian leader

MONROVIA, OCT. 14. Businessman Gyude Bryant came home on Monday to lead a post-war, post-Charles Taylor Liberia, welcomed by a new, U.N.-protected peace and cheering crowds packing streets filled just months ago with panicked refugees, shrapnel and corpses.

Mr. Bryant, a long-time civilian campaigner against Liberia's warlords, takes the oath of office later on Tuesday as chairman of a two-year interim administration — meant to shepherd Liberia out of 14 years of bloodletting and into 2005 elections. The 54-year-old takes over a nation in ruins, with

thousands of fighter-thugs still in arms — and Mr. Taylor and other rival warlords-in-waiting watching to gauge Mr. Bryant's success.

The guns are stilled by what is only the latest of a dozen peace deals since Mr. Taylor launched Liberia into conflict — though this deal, crucially, comes with Mr. Taylor gone.

"We're gonna have peace. We already have it!" shrieked Susan Kulue, a 40-year-old among 500 hankie-waving women in white headscarfs and white dress flocking to greet the new leader.

Referring to Liberians, the U.N. envoy, Jacques Klein of

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America, said, "It's now a question of them — do they want to put this behind them, and move ahead?"

A Ghana air force plane brought Mr. Bryant to Liberia from Accra, Ghana's capital, scene of months of peace talks that engineered the transition Government.

He stepped off the Ghana air force base in a business suit, accompanied by the Vice-Chairman, Wesley Johnson. A heavy-equipment dealer and leader of a small political party, Mr. Bryant led a 1997 effort to unite political parties behind a civilian candidate in Liberia's

first elections after a ruinous 1989-96 civil war.

The six-party alliance's effort failed, and the Libyan-trained guerilla fighter who had launched the war — Mr. Taylor — won the presidency.

Thousands filled the streets of Monrovia, singing and dancing to drums.

Crowds streamed toward a church that Bryant was to make one of his first stops — joining a prayer service for the bloodied nation. Mr. Bryant was picked to lead Liberia with approval of rebels and the Government, both of which agreed to yield the top positions in the interim administration.

Mr. Bryant is to replace Moses Blah, Mr. Taylor's chosen successor and former

The Vice-President, Mr. Blah took office Aug. 11 as Mr. Taylor jetted into exile in Nigeria, his rule ended by African, U.N., American and European leaders and by rebels who had taken the majority of the country and driven deep into Mr. Taylor's capital. Sieges in the 2 1/2 months before Mr. Taylor's exit killed well over 1,000 civilians in the capital, capping nearly a decade and a half of conflict estimated to have killed more than 150,000.

Mr. Bryant has identified demobilising Liberia's tens of thousands of fighters — most, undisciplined gunmen accustomed to treating raping and robbing as their gun-given right — as his priority.

Liberia, founded by freed American slaves in the 19th century, once was a leading U.S. African trade partner and sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous country. — AP

# Pak-Saudi secret pact on N-cooperation

Indo-Asian News Service

ISLAMABAD, Oct. 21. — Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have concluded a secret agreement on nuclear cooperation, UPI reported, quoting an "unimpeachable" source.

"It will be vehemently denied by both countries," added this ranking Pakistani source, described as "a knowledgeable insider" by Arnaud de Borchgrave, the editor-in-chief of UPI.

"But future events will confirm that Pakistan has agreed to provide Saudi Arabia with the wherewithal for a nuclear deterrent," he said.

In a lightning, hastily arranged, 26-hour "state visit" in Islamabad, Crown Prince Abdullah Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, flew across the Arabian Sea with an entourage of 200, including foreign minister Prince Saud and several Cabinet ministers.

The pro-American Saudi defence minister Prince Sultan, who is next in line to succeed to the throne after Abdullah, was not part of the delegation.

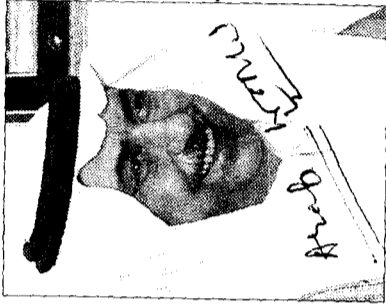
Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf met Abdullah at the airport and saw him off Sunday night with a 21-gun salute.

In Washington, Mohamed Sadiq, Pakistan's deputy chief of mission, said yesterday that the report about Pakistan and Saudi Arabia reaching agreement

on nuclear cooperation was "totally wrong".

"This is against our policy," Sadiq told UPI. "Pakistan would never proliferate its nuclear technology. It's a very clear policy. This was not even discussed in the talks we held with the Saudis. It was not even on the agenda. It is out of the question," Sadiq added.

The Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington did not immediately comment on the report.



NUCLEAR FAMILY? Saudi Arab. finance minister Mr. Ibrahim Al-Assaf (left) and his Pakistani counterpart Mr. Shaukat Aziz.

# Iraq council in big league

1.9 10/9

Cairo, Sept. 9 (Reuters): Iraq's US-appointed governing council took a step towards international legitimacy today when its delegate took up Iraq's vacant seat at an Arab League ministerial meeting.

A landmark decision by Arab foreign ministers to let the delegate join their talks, taken early today after hours of debate, was a diplomatic victory for the council that could help determine if it will be allowed to fill Iraq's seat in other bodies like the UN and oil cartel Opec.

In a highly symbolic move, Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd newly-appointed by the governing council, sat down in Iraq's chair at the ministerial meeting of the 22-member Cairo-based League.

Speaking to the assembly, Egyptian foreign minister

## US-appointed minister sits in vacant chair at Cairo meet

1.9 10/9

Ahmed Maher said the Iraqi people needed to receive greater powers and the UN had to gain a pivotal role in building Iraq's political structure.

"This is the meaning which we have confirmed today in our resolution and which we have confirmed in inviting... the representative of the transitional government to sit with us," Maher said.

Arab League chief Amr Moussa said it was "an occasion to welcome the Iraqi delegation in the context of moving towards restoring Iraqi sovereignty and ending the occupation".

The consensus agreement was a victory for more moderate

Arab states over hardliners in the league. Analysts had said some states would try to deny Zebari access, and perhaps only grant him observer status, to avoid legitimising the US-led occupation of Iraq and the unelected council.

But analysts said more moderate states, including a number of US allies, wanted to have the council represented in the league to ensure that Iraq was embedded in the Arab fold and that Arabs could influence Iraq's future.

Zebari told the meeting: "The governing council has no intention to abandon the Arab nation and we will cooperate with you

in all fields." The decision to let the council delegate take up Iraq's seat is only valid until the formation of an elected Iraqi government, and will be reviewed accordingly at each Arab ministerial meeting.

Arab states have previously called the council a step in the right direction, but have been loath to endorse the body fully for fear they would seem to be backing the occupation of Iraq.

Some analysts say Arab states are splitting hairs, and the council's participation at the League will be seen as de facto recognition, whatever political spin Arab governments put on it.

"This is really a very strong recognition of the governing council," said Egyptian political analyst Mohamed al Sayid Said. "This step is not very popular in the Arab world," he said.

# SAUDI PARADOX-II

51-8 1/7 Wahhabism Under Pressure Within And Without

By SWAGATO GANGULY

It would be a mistake to think that opposition to the Saudi regime is confined to radical Islamists of the ilk of Osama bin Laden. Of late, liberal voices are being heard in its media, testing the limits of permissible expression by broaching openly the question why the country is beholden of extremist values.

These voices have been spurred by the terror attacks in Saudi Arabia and subsequent international publicity, as well as by incidents such as the one that took place in Mecca on March 11 last year, when the *mutawa* stopped schoolgirls from leaving a blazing building because they were not turned out in the "correct" attire of *abayas*, leading to the deaths of 17 girls.

## Signs of dissent

The liberals are attacking the central institutions through which religious scholars exercise their stranglehold on Saudi civic life. These are the *sharia* law, control over education and media, and the extraordinary powers given to the *mutawa*. Education in Saudi Arabia, for example, is mostly religious; there is little room for technical, foreign languages or secular humanities subjects. A tenet of Saudi religious education is that not only non-Muslims, but also Shias are infidels. The liberals, on the other hand, are arguing that there is little point blaming foreigners for Saudi Arabia's or the Muslim world's current troubles, as the reasons are closer to home.

The point was made by a bold cartoon which appeared recently in the daily newspaper *Al Watan*, edited by Saudi journalist and political analyst Jamal A Khashoggi. It depicted a *jehadi* on a suicide bombing mission, except that the sticks of explosive he had tied around himself were labelled *fatwas*, or religious decrees. The implicit message was that the clergy are bent on making Saudi Arabia commit suicide. *Al Watan* criticised the ideas of Ibn Taimaya, a 14th century Muslim thinker who is to Saudi Wahhabism what Karl Marx was to the ideology of the USSR. It also issued an urgent petition on its website, urging those in charge to take action against extremist discourse.

Such freedom of expression is unprecedented in the Saudi press. Blowback came swiftly, especially as the interior ministry, under whose jurisdiction the press falls (itself an indication of the state of affairs in Saudi Arabia), is in the hands of the conservative Prince Nayef. A senior clergyman on the official Saudi *fatwa* council issued a *fatwa* against buying *Al Watan*, and the government ordered the

dismissal of Khashoggi from the paper's editorship.

But other signs of dissent are surfacing. At the first press conference held by interior minister Prince Nayef after the May 12 bombings, a Saudi journalist had

world where barriers are rapidly falling. Refusal of the liberal option will, in effect, strengthen the radical Islamist opposition inspired by the likes of Osama bin Laden. A leaked CIA memo that was circulated to the



the temerity to ask what would be done henceforth to reform the *mutawa*, at which the prince could only rage — "as a Saudi you should be ashamed to be asking such a question." Hamza Al-Muzini, a prominent linguistics professor, wrote in another newspaper that under the Saudi education system teachers taught extremist ideas to their charges, and that his son was learning the culture of death at school.

## Following the fashion

104 influential citizens have sent a petition to Crown Prince Abdullah, the de facto ruler of the kingdom, calling for parliamentary elections. The petition also demands equality for different regional groups, wresting power away from locals of the tribal Nejd area where the royal family has its roots. Third, it calls for giving women the right to vote.

The royal family itself is thought to be divided into liberal and conservative factions, with Prince Abdullah as the hope of the liberals, while Prince Nayef heads the conservative group. Liberal politics as of now consists of petitioning the rulers for reform, hoping that will strengthen the hands of the pro-liberal faction among them. However, half the current Saudi population is under 16, and should liberal impulses be thwarted, it is a moot point how long the new generation of burgeoning Saudi youth will stand by and watch their living standards halve every decade due to corruption and mismanagement by the royals, in a

National Security Council and State Department in Washington last year concluded that the house of Saud is an "anachronism" that is "inherently fragile," and noted that there were "serious concerns about long-term stability."

The export of Saudi Wahhabism on the strength of the petrodollar has had a destabilising effect on many Third World societies as well. Take Nigeria, where the northern province of Zamfara decided to follow the fashion and adopt *sharia* law in 2000. 12 other Muslim majority provinces followed suit, a controversial move that is not sanctioned by Nigeria's constitution.

Although the move by the provinces has provoked widespread riots, the federal government in Lagos has been weak-kneed and unable to assert its authority. Nigeria came in for harsh criticism in Human Rights Watch's 2002 report which reads — "civilian groups were used by the state authorities to enforce *sharia* in those states which had extended its application to criminal law. Some administered instant punishments to those caught violating *sharia* law .... in January, the governor of Zamfara state announced that he was giving powers of arrest and prosecution to local Islamic 'vigilante' groups as the police had failed in their duties."

2002 also saw communal riots between Muslims and Christians costing hundreds of lives in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna, over essentially trivial issues to do with the holding of

the Miss World beauty contest in Lagos. The army had to be called in to quell the riots, and the contest had to relocate to London. The latest is that Amina Lawal, a young single mother, has been sentenced to death by stoning by a provincial *sharia* court, on charges of having had sex out of wedlock. If the execution is actually carried out, it would amount to an act of secession against central authority, and one would have to see how Lagos responds.

## Puritan revolution

Nigerian instability, not to mention other Third World hotspots such as Afghanistan and Kashmir, have been the products of a puritan revolution across the Muslim world, a principal player in which has been the petrodollar boom of the 1970s, coupled with the proselytizing zeal of Saudi Wahhabism. French scholar Gilles Kepel, who has written an important new book *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam*, notes that "for the first time in fourteen centuries, the same books (as well as cassettes) could be found from one end of the *umma* to the other; all from the same Saudi distribution circuits, as part of an identical corpus. Its very limited number of titles hewed to the same doctrinal line and excluded other currents of thought that had formerly been part of a more pluralistic Islam."

The Wahhabi revolution, however, is ebbing because the petrodollar boom is fading, and societies that live by the *sharia* cannot acquire the tools of modern power. Moreover, the revolution has adversely affected not just ineffectual Third World governments and the crumbling Soviet bloc but also powerful Western nations, who had played along with it before but are now beginning to turn against it. That, however, will be a longer-term process — as the revolution implodes, many can still be hurt by its fallout. For India the principal cause of worry is the Deobandi *madrasas* in Pakistan, controlled by the Jamiat-e Ulema-i Islam and funded by Saudi money. These *madrasas* breed the human material for continuation of the *jehad* in Kashmir. General Musharraf has promised that foreign funding of Pakistani *madrasas* will stop, but one doesn't know the extent to which he is either able or inclined to keep the promise.

Whether the Saudi regime is able to reform, and a more liberal dispensation comes about in Riyadh, will have repercussions not just for Saudi society but distant parts of the world as well.

(Concluded)

CONFIDENTIAL

5 MAY 2003

# U.S. pull-out: Riyadh may see reforms

By Atul Aneja

**MAMAMA, MAY 4.** In withdrawing its forces from Saudi Arabia after accomplishing "regime change" in Iraq, the United States has set in motion a parallel process that could further re-define the West Asian political order.

The pullout of the U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia, Washington's key ally for over 60 years, has two major implications. First, it strengthens the hand of the "reformists" within the monarchy in Riyadh vis-à-vis extremist groups who also have an influence within the House of Saud.

Analysts say the U.S. action will help the Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, who has made his realisation for political change in Saudi Arabia public, to take on the Wahabis — believers in a Saudi State based on the foundations of radical Islam.

People like Osama bin Laden have been the practitioners of Wahabi extremist ideology on

an international scale. In over-seeing the back of U.S. troops, the Saudi Crown Prince has stolen the thunder of practitioners of radical Islam who have been clamouring for the exit of foreign troops from Saudi Arabian soil.

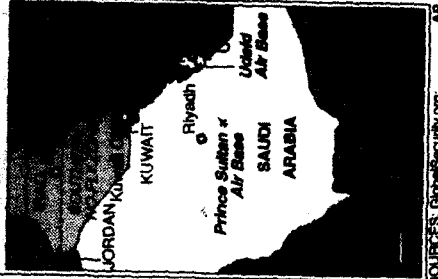
By negotiating the pull-out, the Crown Prince is likely to gain huge support among the Saudi people who, by and large, have been opposed to the U.S. military presence on their territory.

## A tight rope-walk

Aware of the unpopularity of the U.S. troops' presence, but keen to retain its linkages with the U.S., the Saudi regime walked the tight rope during the Iraq war. It disallowed combat missions by the U.S. fighter jets from its soil, but allowed the U.S. command centre at the sprawling Prince Sultan air base to function. It also did its best to curb information about the use of locations along the Saudi Arabia-Iraq border from where the U.S. forces launched some

## Change of air command

In the first major reorganisation of military forces in the Persian Gulf region, the United States moved its Air Operation Center from Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base — home to 4,500 Air Force personnel and 100 U.S. planes — to Uthmaniyah Air Base in Qatar.



SOURCE: GlobalSecurity.org. Associated Press

forces from Saudi Arabia, but by positioning them in neighbouring countries such as Iraq and Qatar, the U.S. has also signalled to the reformists in Saudi Arabia that political changes inspired from the top must be carried out urgently. Otherwise, U.S. commentators have hinted that Washington might be considering alternative plans to bring about a fundamental transformation in the Saudi Kingdom.

One such option, which has been talked about recently, has been the revival of the Woolsey plan, authored by the former CIA Director, James Woolsey. According to this plan, Saudi Arabian Kingdom could be trifurcated.

The oil rich area of Ihsa in the east could be separated from Hejaz and Najd, which would also emerge as separate nations.

If political reforms in Saudi Arabia succeed, they could not only weaken the influence of the extremists, but also have a larger impact on the region.

of its special operations inside Iraq. Second, by pulling out



# Bush trade sop for Arab nations

Columbia (South Carolina),  
May 10

AHEAD OF a new round of West Asia talks, President George W. Bush bluntly called on Israel to "take tangible steps now" to ease the plight of Palestinians and promised to reward Arab allies by creating a US-West Asia free-trade area within a decade.

Vowing to advance West Asia peace, Bush said he was sending Secretary of State Colin Powell to the region this weekend with "my personal commitment: America will work without tiring to achieve two states — Israel and Palestine, living side by side in security and prosperi-

ty and in peace". Bush on Friday also called for democratic reforms across West Asia, including Iran, where he said the "desire for freedom is stirring" and promised reformers that Washington "strongly supports their aspirations".

The White House hoped the new trade initiative, announced by Bush in a commencement address at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, will foster goodwill in a region deeply suspicious of Bush's goals in post-war Iraq and beyond.

But some analysts doubted it would add much to the peace process as Powell promotes a United States-backed plan that

sets out steps toward the goal of creating a Palestinian state by 2005.

Bush called on the Palestinians to take "concrete steps" to crack down on terrorism and said Israel "must take tangible steps now to ease the suffering of Palestinians and to show respect for their dignity".

Bush also stepped up pressure on Arab leaders, calling on them to renounce terrorism and "recognise and state the obvious once and for all — Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state at peace with its neighbours".

Analysts said Bush, despite pressure from religious conservatives and other pro-Israel

groups, was sending a tough love message to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

"It sounds like he was trying to send a message both to Sharon and to Arab leaders that if this is going to work, everyone is going to have to do their share and not just complain to Washington," said David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said late on Friday that Bush and Sharon would meet at the White House on May 20 to discuss "efforts to move ahead toward a peace settlement".

Reuters

# 90 killed in Riyadh blasts

91-1 14/5  
 ● Suspected Al Qaida suicide strikes claim 10 Americans, 9 Indians injured

**Dubai\Washington:** In the first big attack on US targets since the Iraq war, suspected Al Qaida activists carried out suicide blasts on three complexes housing Westerners in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, killing at least 90 people, ten to 12 of them Americans.

The attacks, which came hours before the arrival of US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Riyadh on Tuesday, left nearly 200 injured, nine of them Indians. Eight of the Indians were discharged after first aid. "We have counted more than 90 dead," a US State Department official said in Washington, warning that the final figure could rise as the day went on.

A second official said the current death toll from the triple blasts stood at 91 and was expected to rise. At least 30—and possibly as many as 44—US citizens were wounded, he said. Another US official in Riyadh said the overall casualty figures appeared to be in the hundreds. He added that several members of the Saudi National Guard were also killed.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, gave figures significantly higher than those released earlier by the Saudi interior ministry, which said at least 29 people had been killed, including nine bombers and seven Americans, and 194 injured in the blasts.



US Secretary of State Colin Powell stands in front of wrecked buildings after a series of suicide attacks in Riyadh on Tuesday.

## Bomb threat forces Cherie to skip event

**London:** British PM Tony Blair's wife Cherie pulled out of a charity event at a central London hotel on Monday following a call from an "Arab-sounding" man threatening a bomb blast, guests said on Tuesday. Christopher Meyer, Britain's former ambassador to the US, explained Ms Blair's absence to the 220 VIP assembled guests. He said that anyone who felt nervous following the threat, should also leave. AFP

The Saudi government said the 35-year-old son of Riyadh's deputy governor Abdullah al-Blaihed was among those killed.

The nine suicide bombers had shot their way into the three housing compounds after firing at security guards before setting off car bombs late Monday night. The

attacks were followed by a smaller bombing at a Saudi-US company on Tuesday morning, in which there was no casualty.

The Saudi government said ten people were killed in the first explosion overnight at Al-Hamra compound, two at the Al-Jadawel compound and eight at the Vinnel building. As many as five floors of some buildings were blown and their outer walls almost sheared off. Many balconies were blown off, leaving steel girders jutting out. Heaps of rubble and blocks of up-ended concrete surrounded spikes of twisted steel. Burned-out cars were still in their parking spots.

Mr Powell said that the coordinated attacks had "the earmarks of Al Qaida". "It is just part of Al Qaida and other terrorist organisations' willingness to kill innocent people in order to push forward a criminal agenda, a terrorist agenda that very often has no purpose, has no meaning other than to strike out in rage," he said in Jordan shortly after the attacks.

President George W. Bush react-



ed with anger and resolve. "Today's attacks in Saudi Arabia, the ruthless murder of Americans and other citizens remind us that the war on terror continues," he said in an appearance in Indianapolis. He called the bombings "despicable acts committed by killers whose only faith is hate"

and vowed to find the killers, stating, "they will learn the meaning of American justice".

No outfit has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but Al Qaida has implied that it was behind the strikes. Its operative, Abu Mohamed al-Ablaj, said in an e-mail to a London-based weekly, 'Al-Majalah', that the group "had been planning major operations for a long time. The execution of this plan was not hampered by the recent announcement by Saudi authorities of the seizure of large quantities of arms and explosives in the kingdom and the hunt for 19 people".

The Saudi ambassador to London blamed members of this group of 19, who have gone missing in Riyadh earlier this month, for the attack.

Just days ago, another Al Qaida spokesman had told an Arabic magazine of a new September 11-style attack against US interests. "The strike on America is definitely coming," he had said. Agencies

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## A BACKLASH IN THE DESERT

Armed forces

THE CAR-BOMB ATTACKS on expatriate housing complexes in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, carry all the hallmarks of Al-Qaeda's planning and coordination, and will send shock waves around the world. These reflect the first response to the month-long American occupation of Iraq and represent an ominous reminder both to the U.S. and the Saudi monarchy that their nemesis is far from beaten and vanquished. The strike comes within less than a week of the discovery of a major arms cache in the Saudi capital and an uncharacteristically open admission of the terror threat by local officials. An American target in the desert kingdom has for years been the goal of the Saudi mastermind, Osama bin Laden, and his terrorist group, and American and Saudi officials had been warning of a plot that could cause "tremendous damage". The U.S., which announced its decision to withdraw all its combat forces from Saudi soil by the end of August even as its campaign in Iraq was winding down, had issued a specific warning early this month that militants "may be in the final phases of planning attacks" on American interests in the kingdom. That neither the warnings nor the high alert of the security apparatus could prevent the massive bomb attacks in the capital speaks of the degree of local support that Osama and his network have built up in Saudi Arabia. This must come as a shock especially to the rest of the world, which had been lulled into complacency by the easy manner in which the Saddam Hussein regime disappeared into the sands of Iraq.

Aftershocks as a consequence of the American invasion of Iraq were not unanticipated and Washington had begun to plan repositioning of its forces for a post-Saddam Hussein Middle East. It was taken for granted that the first casualty of such reshuffling would be the unnatural relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, built up solely as an oil-for-security programme. In order not to give credence to talk that they

may be ready to leave Saudi Arabia and ask it to fend for itself now that they are in occupation of an equally oil-rich Iraq, American officials have claimed that their military withdrawal will help ease political pressure on the Saudi royal family. It may on the contrary allow the emergence of contradictory forces in the kingdom, so far suppressed and forced to work underground. Created by the British after World War I, the Saudi kingdom is a strange mixture of the modern and the medieval. The monarchy has resisted suggestions to introduce democratic reforms and has been practising and exporting its own orthodox version of Islam. The two stances have produced a totally divergent political opposition. On the one side is a section, Western educated and exposed to modernity, which seeks a gradual movement to democracy. On the other is a section that feels the monarchy is not orthodox enough in a land that holds Islam's two holy places. A powerful adherent to the second movement is Osama, the millionaire turned terror exponent.

Riyadh, the most apolitical capital around, is no stranger in recent times to bomb explosions and attacks on the interests of Americans who came into the country in a big way after the first Gulf War more than a decade ago. The planned American withdrawal, announced after the Iraqi action so that Osama and his Al-Qaeda do not claim credit for it, is a challenge that the Saudi regime must meet by reforming society so that bomb explosions do not convert into volcanic eruptions. Fundamentalist forces armed with the terrorist's tool must be ready to reap a harvest by exploiting popular unrest. The most effective answer to counter this trend is to open up society and give the people a vehicle to express their democratic urges. In a society ruled on feudal lines by an absolute monarch, democracy must be rarer than rain. But failure to plant its seeds can have disastrous consequences for the entire region.

## GRIM REMINDER

The recent terrorist attack in Riyadh is a grim reminder that the war against global terrorism is far from over. Indeed, the latest terrorist attack seems to indicate that the upsurge of anti-American sentiment, in the aftermath of the war against Iraq, may translate into increased violence in the days to come. The attack in the Saudi capital was the first significant terrorist incident since the military operations against Iraq, and coincided with the arrival in Riyadh of the United States of America secretary of state, Mr Colin Powell. It is believed that at least 29 persons were killed during the blast at a residential colony mainly inhabited by foreigners. The explosions were apparently caused by cars that were packed with explosives and were driven into the compound, housing the buildings. The incident demonstrates that terrorists groups, capable of mounting such daring incidents, continue to operate with impunity. The US secretary of state has claimed that the attacks had the stamp of the terrorist organization, al Qaida, on them.

In order to, however, understand the implications of the terrorist attack, attention needs to be paid to a complexity of factors. While anger and protests against the US-led operation in Iraq have been witnessed all across the globe, there is a grimmer reality that is finding support in the Muslim world. Increasingly, there are those who believe that since the US, given its technology and military might, cannot be defeated conventionally, it is perfectly legitimate to use asymmetric tactics, such as terrorism, against the only superpower. While this is a dangerous doctrine, it seems to have acquired a degree of popular legitimacy. It must also be realized that the attack in a country like Saudi Arabia reflects an uncomfortable reality. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is one of the strongest allies of the US in west Asia and there still exists a significant number of American soldiers and large number of American expatriates based in the country.

On the other hand, the Saudi ruling regime is known to appease fundamentalist groups on its soil and even encourage them to sponsor extremist causes abroad under the pretext of charity. The consequence of this attempt at performing a balancing act has been disastrous. The bulk of Saudi population is deeply alienated from the ruling family, which is seen as authoritarian and pro-Western. Not surprisingly, the main recruiting ground for al Qaida has been Saudi territory. Indeed, a large number of those who planned and carried out the attack of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington, were Saudi nationals, including the leader of al Qaida, Osama bin Laden. Indeed, Saudi-based self-styled charitable organizations have been a sponsor of terrorist groups in south Asia, some of which operate in Kashmir. In sum, if the US is seriously interested in winning the war against terrorism, it needs to first radically review its relationship with Saudi Arabia and the politics within the country.

15 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Chided Saudi owns up to security lapse

Riyadh, May 15

SAUDI ARABIA insisted on Thursday that "foreign hands" were behind suspected al-Qaida suicide bombers who killed at least seven Americans, having admitted security "shortcomings" following unprecedented US criticism.

FBI agents were due to join the investigation into Monday's triple car bombings that devastated Riyadh compounds housing mainly foreigners, killing at least 34 people including the Americans.

Saudi Arabia, birthplace of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, admitted to security lapses as the White House told the oil-rich Arab state that it must "deal with the fact that it has terrorists inside its own country".

The US ambassador to Riyadh had also criticised Saudi Arabia for not responding swiftly enough to earlier US demands for tighter security at the targeted complexes.

US wardens also said Ambassador Robert Jordan had urged dependants to leave the kingdom, saying: "This (Saudi Arabia) is a front in the war against terrorism. Women and children don't belong on the battlefield."

Some 40,000 Americans live in Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef vowed tougher security measures and said the fingerprints of al-Qaida could be seen all over the attacks, the first major strike at US targets since the United States waged war on Iraq.

"Foreign hands supported the attacks. This is clear from the identity of the terrorists who have received training in Afghanistan from al-Qaida," he told the Arab News newspaper.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal vowed to find those behind the bombings and said al-Qaida would regret it.

He also admitted Saudi securi-

ty measures could have been better but denied the kingdom had not acted on US warnings of an imminent terror attack against Westerners.

The United States also has strong suspicions that al-Qaida, which it blames for the September 11, 2001 attacks on American cities, was behind Monday's explosions. A team of FBI agents was on standby in Germany for Saudi approval to head to the kingdom.

In Washington, US officials said an envoy of President Bush had travelled to Riyadh shortly before the bombings to convey US fears about an imminent attack. The disclosure was made after rare US criticism of the kingdom, which had also come under fire after September 11 because 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis.

"Saudi Arabia must deal with the fact that it has terrorists inside its own country, and their presence is as much a threat to Saudi Arabia as it is to Americans and others who live and work in Saudi Arabia," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

The State Department said eight Americans had died and 17 were sent to hospital, one in critical condition. Official Saudi figures said seven Americans died.

Saudi officials said the prime suspects were 19 al-Qaida suspects who fled last week after a shootout with Riyadh police. Checkpoints were being set up across the vast desert kingdom.

Diplomats said one of these suspects had surrendered to Saudi authorities before the attack. Other officials, quoted in Saudi newspapers, indicated that the perpetrators had received their instructions directly from bin Laden.

The bombings were carried out hours before a visit by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was on a West Asia tour to explain US policy after Saddam's overthrow.

Reuters

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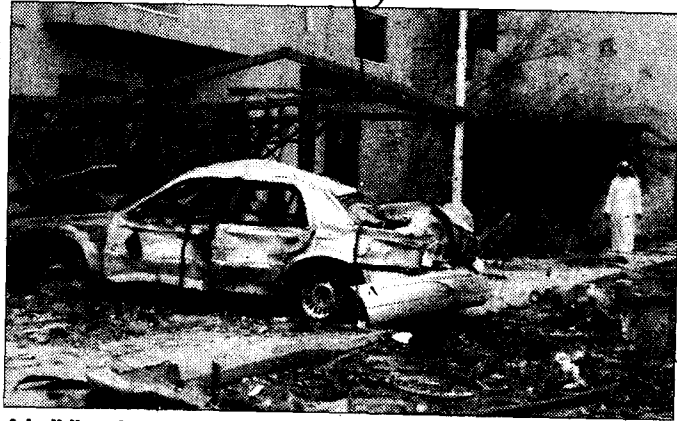
# Saudis ignored warning: US

GLENN KESSLER  
RIYADH, MAY 15

THE US urgently asked Saudi Arabia to bolster security at residential compounds frequented by Westerners throughout the kingdom just days before this week's terrorist attack in which eight Americans died, but the Saudi government failed to act, the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday.

Saudi officials denied the charge. Speaking in US Morning Television interviews, Ambassador Robert Jordan asserted the Saudi government failed to respond quickly to the US request even after evidence accumulated that a major attack was imminent. "They did not, as of the time of this particular tragic event, provide the security that we had requested," Jordan said.

A US official said the request was made around May 1 and would



A building damaged in the suicide attack at Riyadh. Reuters

have covered more than 300 residential compounds around the country.

Jordan's remarks appear to reflect growing tension between the US and Saudi Arabia over whether the attack could have been prevented. A US official here said Jordan received a phone call from the State Department after midnight telling him to go on the television shows to put pressure on the

Saudis. "We're holding their feet to the fire," he said.

But White House and State Department officials were taken aback by Jordan's comments, a State Department official in Washington said, since the Bush administration had decided to emphasise that they felt Saudi Arabia was cooperating.

In an interview after his television appearances, Jordan appeared

to downplay his comments. "This was not casual indifference by the Saudis. It was a failure to connect the dots in a way that would have been helpful," Jordan said.

Jordan noted that the armed guards did little to prevent the attack at one site, the compound operated by Vinnell Arabia, a local subsidiary of Fairfax-based Vinnell Corp. "In each time the American embassy or any other embassy seeks the intensification of security measures, the government fulfills this request," Saud said.

John Burgess, spokesman for the US embassy, said Saudi Arabia briefly enhanced security on some compounds after the request, but then let the matter drop.

A ministry official said requests for cooperation are often made by both countries, but he suggested it would not have been possible to supply security people to all the compounds as requested by the US embassy.

—LATWP

16 MAY 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

# Fearing strikes, America shuts Saudi missions

Riyadh, May 20

FEAR OF new terror attacks prompted the United States on Tuesday to close its diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia after Riyadh's ambassador warned of a major strike in the kingdom or even on American soil.

Washington closed its embassy in the Saudi capital, as well as consulates general in two other cities, following devastating suicide bombings in Riyadh and in Morocco's biggest city Casablanca last week blamed on al-Qaida.

After the triple suicide bombings in the Saudi capital eight days ago that killed at least 34 people, including eight Americans, Riyadh's envoy to Washington said he believed a much

bigger operation was planned. "I think they were looking to do something more major than this," Prince Bandar bin Sultan told foreign journalists in the oil-rich Arab state on Monday night. "My gut feeling tells me that something big is going to happen here or in America," he said, adding that he believed there were around 50 hardcore militants in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam.

Since the September 11, 2001, suicide hijacker attacks on United States cities blamed on Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida, a wave of bombings around the world from Bali in Indonesia to Kenya has spared the United States mainland but hit American targets abroad.

Washington's closure of its

## Ankara blast kills 1, police explore suicide bombing angle

A RUSH-HOUR bombing of an Ankara cafe killed one person and injured another, Turkish officials said on Tuesday.

Police is now investigating whether the explosion at the Crocodile Cafe, which occupied two floors of a 10-storey building at a busy intersection in the commercial district of

Kizilay, was a suicide bombing. The blast shattered walls and windows in the building. Police recovered the body of a woman from the debris of the lavatory, where the bomb exploded. Reports suggested that the woman may have been a suicide bomber or may have died when the bomb she was

**Agencies, Ankara**

Dhahran. No one was hurt or directly threatened.

### Casablanca investigation

In Morocco, where 41 people died in Friday night's multiple sui-

cide bombings, authorities initially blamed al-Qaida, but then on Monday ruled it out. Tuesday though, Interior Minister Mustapha Sahel repeated that a link with international terrorism had been established.

"The arrest of the two terrorists still alive has led to considerable progress in terms of information," he said in a statement carried by the official MAP news agency. "This allows us today to confirm the link with international terrorism."

Sahel said 12 Casablanca attackers died by blowing themselves up, not 13 as initially reported, when they struck mainly Jewish and Spanish targets and a Kuwaiti-owned hotel.

After talks in London with Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohamed Benatissa, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said: "There have been other times in recent post-war history when there have been very serious terrorist outrages across the world. We fight them, and this

battle against terrorism is one which we are winning and we will win."

Promising vigilance against renewed terror attacks, US President George W. Bush said: "There's an al-Qaida group still actively plotting to kill."

Bush, who waged war on al-Qaida in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks, said over-throwing Saddam Hussein would help stabilise the entire West Asia and insisted his global campaign against terrorists was on track.

"I always said this was going to be a long war," he told a news conference. "We're slowly but surely dismantling the al-Qaida operational network. But we've got a lot of work to do."

**Reuters**

# U.K., Germany too shut missions

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MAY 21. Faced with the growing terror threat, the chief of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, visited Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, ahead of a decision by Washington to shut down its mission in Riyadh temporarily. Subsequently, the U.S. has raised its terror alert to "high", while Britain and Germany also closed down their embassies in Saudi Arabia for the time being.

France, meanwhile, is rushing a senior official from its interior ministry to visit Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia to make an on the spot assessment of the threat that the terrorists pose to French interests. Canada is also keeping up its vigil after it was discovered that some of the attackers of the residential compounds in Riyadh bore Canadian passports.

This has further alarmed the authorities in the U.S., because of its shared borders with Canada. Authorities in the United States did not rule out on Tuesday, the possibility of a terror attack on U.S. soil. The activism sown by several western nations to avert a terror incident has come amid reports that the terrorists are ready to launch a massive strike. In fact, there are apprehensions that the terrorist strikes in Riyadh and Casablanca could be diversionary and a

much bigger attack is yet to come.

The Saudi Arabians are worried that a high rise building in Jeddah could be possibly targeted by a hijacked airliner on the pattern of the attack on the World Trade Center. Security is also tight to defend major Saudi oil installations. The Abqaiq complex housing the world's largest oil refining facility has for long been visualised as vulnerable to a possible terrorist attack. Mr. Tenet's interest in Saudi Arabia is only natural as the Kingdom is being fast recognised as the epicentre of the Al-Qaeda activity which not only targets several governments across the globe but also the present Saudi leadership.

The mountains of the Asir province on the Saudi-Yemen borders are the hub of Al-Qaeda activities. Five of the hijackers involved in the in the suicide attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, belonged to the Ghamedi tribe, which controls a large part of this area. Recent reports suggest that Mohammad al-Ghamedi, cousin of

Ahmed and Hamza al-Ghamedi, who were part of the suicide squad that struck the World Trade Center, has taken over as the new head of the Al-Qaeda cell in Chechnya.

The Russians have reportedly shared this information with the visiting U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in Moscow recently. The presence of safe-havens in the Asir province are also widely suspected as some of the key figures in the Al-Qaeda hierarchy, operating abroad are known to be visiting this area. For instance, Mohammad Fazul, the head of the Al-Qaeda's east Africa cell and whose name has been dragged in the 1998 U.S. embassy attacks in Tanzania and Kenya as well as the attack on a Mombassa hotel frequented by Israelis has been reported to be visiting the Asir province. Saudi footprint in Al-Qaeda leadership chain is also visible as the heads of the Al-Qaeda's Persian Gulf cells are also suspected to be of Saudi origin. The Al-Qaeda's Persian Gulf cells are reportedly led by, Khaled al Jehani and Saif al Adil.



# Toppling of Saddam's statue shocks Arabs

*7-12 11/9 Arab world*

**Cairo:** The Arab world was in shock after Baghdad fell almost without a fight and jubilant Iraqis, aided by US Marines, toppled a towering statue of Saddam Hussein.

Images of crowds rejoicing at the fall of the authoritarian ruler and cheering US forces, broadcast live in many Arab countries on Wednesday, caused consternation and a sense of shame, tinged in some places with envy.

Palestinians watching the al-Jazeera and Abu Dhabi satellite stations were stunned at seeing the giant Saddam statue tumble in a Baghdad square after the rapid collapse of Iraq's military. "This is a tragedy and a bloody comedy. We cannot believe what we see. What happened? It seems that the Iraqis have given up Baghdad without a fight. Where is the Iraqi army? Have they evaporated?" said Walid Salem, a Ramallah shopkeeper.

Ali Jaddah, an engineer, said: "It's a day of shame. On this day Arabs have become slaves. The only man who dared to say 'no' to the Americans' face has vanished to

## Kuwaitis upbeat

**Kuwait City:** Kuwaitis trumpeted the joy of Iraqis after the fall of Baghdad and lauded the "huge sacrifices" made by the US-led coalition to liberate them.

"Joy fills our hearts as we see our Iraqi brothers... express their jubilation at victory," Sheik Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah, Kuwait's foreign minister, said on state-owned Kuwait television on Wednesday. AP

day. What is left is a bunch of bowing and scraping Arab leaders."

Many Arabs equate the Palestinians' plight under Israeli occupation with the Iraqis' new situation under US and British military invasion. Anti-war banners have often featured joined Iraqi and Palestinian flags.

Ahmed, 35, a Cairo taxi driver, shook his head in disbelief at the toppling of Saddam's statue. "There is no way ordinary Iraqi citizens would have done that. Impos-

sible! They are probably Kurds or Shias," he said.

But some people said Saddam's fall should be a warning to other Arab leaders.

Egyptian political commentator Salama Ahmed Salama told Reuters: "The gap between Arab governments and the people represents a source of anxiety for different Arab regimes. But whether they'll learn the lesson or not, I don't know."

The Iraqi example showed that the backing of a party, clique or tribe was not enough to sustain a legitimate government.

"The scene of the statue being brought down showed how Iraqis were dissatisfied with (Saddam's) regime. Maybe this is going to be a lesson and an example to other Arab leaders who consider themselves like gods," said Ali Hassan, a shopper in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Some Arab broadcasters made a point of telling viewers Saddam's demise was the end of a unique tyranny, not a precedent for other states ruled by unelected monarchs or autocrats. Reuters

# Arab nations want coalition forces to leave Iraq

By Atul Anuja

MANAMA, APRIL 19. After witnessing the removal of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, key Arab countries now want the U.S. and British forces to leave their backyard.

Keen to draw a post-war Iraq in an Arab sphere of influence, Iraq's neighbours, along with Bahrain and Egypt have declared in their meeting in Riyadh on Friday that they did not wish the U.S. troops to occupy the political space vacated by the ouster of the regime of the former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein.

This view was most strongly espoused by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt.

"We call on the occupying power, which we hope will withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible, to quickly put in place an interim government with a view to setting up a constitutional government," said the Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al Faisal, on Friday.

All the three countries derive benefits from the downfall of Mr. Hussein's regime. Iran, which fought a bitter eight-year war with Iraq has reasons to feel satisfied to see the end of Mr. Hussein's regime. Saudi Arabia which was subjected to missile attacks by Mr. Hussein's Government would also be relieved

to see its back.

But the three countries, to varying degrees are, nevertheless, worried about the U.S. troops filling the political vacuum. The possibility that the U.S. troops would remain permanently positioned next door in Iraq has definitely alarmed Iran and may have triggered a fresh sense of insecurity in Saudi Arabia. Both these countries apprehend that, after Iraq, they could also be subjected to the U.S. "regime change" initiatives.

Apart from seeking the departure of the U.S. forces, Arab countries in their meeting in Riyadh also declared that they did not wish the Anglo-American forces to play a major political role in Iraq.

Not surprisingly, they have sought the U.N.'s lead role in Iraq's political and economic reconstruction.

The media in Saudi Arabia has also sounding that the Arab League should also be allowed to open an office in Baghdad to assist the U.N. in the reconstruction effort.

Iran, with the fall of the regime of Mr. Hussein is showing signs of seeking to draw post-war Baghdad in the Shia orbit that it steers from Qom. The Iranian English daily, *Tehran Times* described yesterday's Friday prayers as "the first crystallisation of reaction among the Muslim clergy to the three-week war and occupation by the U.S. forces."

The daily pointed to the congregation in Karbala of Shia worshippers which will culminate on Tuesday to "also provide an opportunity for the Shias to flex their new political muscle" in Iraq.

Saddam aide held: Page 12

## U.S. offer to Pak.

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 19. The U.S. has asked Pakistan to join a "stabilisation force" which Washington is setting up for peacekeeping duties in Iraq.

The peacekeeping force would have troops from several Muslim countries because U.S. authorities believe that their presence would help pacify the Iraqis without hurting their religious feelings, local daily *Dawn* quoted officials in Washington as saying.

The State Department said that it was setting up such a force but refused to disclose the names of the countries invited to join the force, the paper said. — PTI

20 APR 2003

THE HINDU

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20 APR 2003

THE HINDU

ARAB SUMMIT / WE'RE ALL TARGETED: ASSAD

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2/3

# Step down, UAE tells Saddam

**SHARM EL-SHEIK (EGYPT), MARCH 1.** The United Arab Emirates called for the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, to step down to spare the region war, the first Arab country to do so publicly.

Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the Gulf nation, submitted a letter on Saturday to an Arab League summit proposing that Mr. Hussein and the rest of his leadership to give up power in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

The call defied long-standing resistance among Arab leaders to meddling in each others' domestic affairs. In Washington on Friday, the White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, had said that the only way for Iraq to avoid war is "disarmament and regime change."

Sheik Zayed's proposal likely reflected a minority opinion shared mainly by Gulf countries that have long taken the hardest line against Mr. Hussein.

In contrast, the Syrian President, Bashar Assad, in a speech during the opening session of the summit, said it was a mistake to identify the Iraqi leadership as the source of the crisis. Mr. Assad accused the U.S. of being interested not in toppling a dictatorial regime, but in securing Iraq's "oil and redrawing the region's map and destroying Iraq's infrastructure."

"We are all targeted ... we are all in danger," Mr. Assad said.

Iraq has rejected any suggestion Mr. Hussein might step down. Iraqi officials had no immediate comment on Saturday, though observers emerging from the Arab leaders' closed discussions said without elaboration that Iraqi delegates reacted angrily to Sheik Zayed's proposal. Iraqi state television in an afternoon news bulletin did not mention Sheik Zayed's proposal, reporting only that Arab leaders convened to discuss the Iraq crisis.

The 22-member league, which includes Iraq, was expected to take a moderate approach when Saturday's summit ends with



**HEADING OFF CRISIS?:** The Bahrain King, Sheik Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (left), talks to Sheik Mohammed Bin bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Defence Minister and Crown Prince of Dubai (centre), and the United Arab Emirates Sheik Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Emirates Vice-President and ruler of Dubai, at the Arab summit at Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, on Saturday. — AP

a pan-Arab declaration on how the Iraq crisis should be addressed. A proposed final summit resolution drafted by Arab Foreign Ministers rejects any attack on Iraq that is not sanctioned by the United Nations and proposes a last-ditch peacemaking effort.

In his letter circulated among journalists at the summit and formally submitted to his fellow leaders, Sheik Zayed said Arabs should "play a major role in (persuading Mr. Hussein to step down), something which might amount to the miracle needed to overcome this looming danger" of war.

Sheik Zayed did not name Mr. Hussein, but said the entire "Iraqi leadership should step down and leave Iraq ... within two

weeks of adopting this Arab initiative."

"Regional and international binding legal guarantees should be given to the Iraq leadership so that it won't be subjected to any form of legal action," Sheik Zayed said. Iraqi dissidents have accused Mr. Hussein's regime of crimes against humanity linked to brutal crackdowns on Iraq minorities, including the use of chemical weapons on rebelling Iraqi Kurds.

Sheik Zayed proposed that after Mr. Hussein's departure, the Arab League and the United Nations should govern until Iraq could return to "its normal situation according to the will of the brotherly Iraqi people." — AP

2 MAR 2002

**IRAQ / EGYPT TO KEEP SUEZ CANAL OPEN FOR U.S. FORCES**

## Arab nations brace for backlash

**CAIRO, MARCH 19.** As the leaders of Egypt and Saudi Arabia addressed their citizens about an impending war in Iraq, leaders of Jordan, Iran and Pakistan were convening in last-ditch efforts on Wednesday to discuss the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the Iraqi crisis.

Speaking in a nationally televised address on Wednesday, Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, blamed Iraq for the impending war. "My hope is that the Iraqi Government will realise the seriousness of the situation in which it put itself in — and us in — and that the different international forces will realise the dangerous repercussions of any military action on the safety and stability of the Middle East region as well as on the safety and stability of the world as a whole".

Such sentiments have been heard increasingly as nations in West Asia resign themselves to the likelihood of war and the possible backlash, including internal strife, that may result from an attack on Iraq.

Mr. Mubarak said the Egyptian



**FEAR-STRICKEN: Kurds fleeing Iraqi Government-run cities cross into the Iraqi Kurdish enclave at Chamchamal on Wednesday. — AFP**

tian Government and people share the responsibility for "protecting our internal front.... We will work together to maintain our national security." Mr. Mubarak has pledged Egypt's Suez Canal would remain open to U.S. and allied warships headed to a possible war. The Jordanian Prime Min-

ister, Ali Abul-Ragheb, left for a last minute meeting on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia with Crown Prince Abdullah, Jordan's official Petra news agency said. The two are expected to talk about "developments in the region, especially those related to Iraq and the repercussions of an expected mil-

itary action against Iraq," the agency reported.

The former Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, met in Pakistan with the President, Pervez Musharraf, on Wednesday to discuss the situation in Iraq, said Sayed Hussein Tehrani, press consular of the Iranian embassy. Both countries have said they are in favour of a peaceful solution in Iraq. However, Pakistan has stopped short of an outright criticism of Washington, a key ally.

Mr. Valayati is also to meet Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Kursheed Kasuri, before returning to Iran on Thursday, Mr. Tehrani said. Prince Abdullah read a statement from King Fahd on Saudi television on Tuesday that said the country's armed forces will not, under any circumstances, enter Iraq.

"We reject outright any infringement on Iraq's unity, independence, resources and internal security as well as a military occupation, and we have informed the United States of America of our position," read the statement. — AP

20 MAR 2003

**THE HINDU**

# Arabs fear war will unsettle region

By Atul Aneja

**MUSCAT (Oman), FEB. 8.** As the possibility of the United States invading Iraq increases, the Arab world has begun to agitate over the fundamental political transformation that the region is likely to witness after this war.

Unlike the first Persian Gulf War, which was to restore the *status quo* in the region after Iraq had invaded Kuwait, the U.S. mission in Iraq this time, in case it materialises, is aimed to achieve exactly the opposite — to alter the *status quo*, a diplomatic source said.

The Arab intelligentsia, by and large, is convinced that the U.S. is invading Iraq not just for its oil or for ridding it of its mass destruction. Apart from getting hold of Iraqi oil, the U.S., after entrenched itself physically in Iraq, will begin to change the political landscape of the region that was defined after the World War I break-up of the Ottoman empire, and, in Iraq's case, anchored in the Anglo-French Sykes Picot pact and the San Remo treaty of 1920.

"Washington intends to transform Mesopotamia (former Iraq) into a bridgehead for redrawing all the contours of West Asia, be they political, economic, ideological or cultural", says a commentary in the UAE daily *Al Khaleej*. The daily adds that this latter objective is likely to be upgraded in importance "immediately after the mission is accomplished in Baghdad, due to a combination of logistical, security, strategic and political considerations".

Not surprisingly, more than the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell's address to the United Nations Security Council where he made out a case against Iraq, his remarks that "success" in Iraq could "fundamentally reshape" the region "in a powerful, positive way that will enhance U.S. interests" has made big news in the Arab world. By "reshaping", writes the pan-Arab *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, Gen. Powell could mean many things, such as "drawing new geographical and demographic maps, partition along racial and ethnic lines, and nurturing the emergence of brand-

new entities, just as the Sykes-Picot and San Remo agreements did during World War I." Among the countries of the region, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon apprehend that they could be affected most soon after a U.S.-backed post-Saddam dispensation takes over in Baghdad. Saudi Arabia feels extremely vulnerable as it apprehends that the Bush administration will keep it in focus till the time it undergoes a fundamental political change, in a manner that would satisfy Washington that it no longer can become a breeding ground for hardened extremists.

Syria, according to analysts, fears that it will be surrounded by U.S. forces once they enter and position themselves in neighbouring Iraq. With the U.S. at its doorstep and Israel on the other, the pressure on it to wind up anti-Israel Hezbollah offices will escalate.

The U.S., analysts say, finds Iran "too complex" and is likely to deal with it differently. According to some Arab intellectuals, Saudi Arabia's ultimate nightmare scenario is to witness its

three-way partition in what has been described by commentators as the Woolsey Plan, named after the former CIA Director, James Woolsey. Under this plan, the Saudi Kingdom could be divided into three separate states: Hejaz, Najd and the oil-rich Shia eastern province of Ihsa.

Since Ihsa would have most of the oil, but would be too small to defend itself, it could become a virtual U.S. protectorate on the lines of Kuwait. There are two other lines of thinking related to Iraq. First, there are those who are of the view that Arab people have been let down by their Governments. Therefore, the U.S. moves in Iraq and the region can only be beneficial, as they will change the *status quo*.

Second, there is recognition that the U.S. intervention in Iraq will cause political convulsions in the region and encourage terrorism. But, U.S. dominance of the region would undermine Israel's importance and encourage the emergence of an independent Palestinian state.

10-14 9/2

# Saudi rethinks America ties

2 10/2 ✓  
PATRICK E. TYLER *Arabian* 7-9

Washington, Feb. 9: Saudi Arabia's leaders have made far-reaching decisions to prepare for an era of military disengagement from the US, to enact what Saudi officials call the first significant democratic reforms at home and rein in the conservative clergy that has shared power in the kingdom.

Senior members of the royal family say the decisions, reached in the past month, are the result of continuing debate over Saudi Arabia's future and have not yet been publicly announced.

But these princes say Crown Prince Abdullah will ask President George W. Bush to withdraw US armed forces from the kingdom as soon as the campaign to disarm Iraq ends. A spokesman for the royal family refused to comment.

Pentagon officials asked about the Saudi moves said they had not heard of any plan so specific as a request for a complete American withdrawal.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in which 15 of the 19 hijackers involved were Saudis, members of both parties in Congress have urged broad reform in the conservative kingdom.

Until Abdullah actually issues the decrees, it remains to be seen whether he will be the first son of Saudi Arabia's modern unifier, King Abdul Aziz, to undertake significant political change.

The presence of foreign — especially American — forces since the Persian Gulf War of 1991 has been a contentious issue in Saudi Arabia and has spurred the terrorism of Osama bin Laden, the disowned scion of one of the kingdom's wealthiest families.

Saudi officials said the departure of American soldiers would set the stage for an announcement that Saudis — but probably not women, at least initially — would begin electing representatives to provincial Assemblies and then to a national Assembly, Saudi officials said.

The goal would be the gradual expansion, over six years, of democratic writ until a fully democratic national Assembly emerged, a senior official said.

The debate over the need for reform is described by Saudi royal family members as part of the post-September 11 reckoning to head off foreign and domestic pressures that threaten the royal family and its dominion over the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula.

As the US prepares for what could be a long military occupation of Iraq, the Saudi royal family does not want to appear as if it is being pressured into reform, say Saudis familiar with the debate. To be seen as acting under the US sway might undermine the monarchy's credibility before a population that is increasingly young, unemployed, pious and anti-American.

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

# Rethinking India's Gulf strategy

By C. Raja Mohan

MUSCAT, FEB. 11. As the kingdoms of the Gulf region brace themselves for a war they do not like but cannot prevent, influential sections of the establishment here would like to know if India has a long-term strategy to expand its political and economic influence in the region.

The widespread receptivity in the region for a more active Indian role in the region, it is tinged with a frustration that India takes its friends for granted and that New Delhi's attention to the Arab kingdoms of the Gulf is either sporadic or limited to a narrow basket of issues.

As they prepare for the consequences of an inevitable American war against Iraq in the next few weeks, the Gulf States are aware that the old ways of doing political business in the region cannot be sustained for too long. There is an acute awareness here that the war against Iraq and the creation of a new State in Iraq will make the U.S. presence in the region deeper and more enduring.

Meanwhile, the region is moving towards economic integration and developing a strategy to deal with globalisation. Earlier this year, the six nations — Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain — that constitute the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have launched a customs union and are working towards a single currency and a free trade area.

India's assertion of its interests in Gulf, that include energy security, economic cooperation and political stability and its potential role in the region are not

matched by a sustained engagement.

As the Gulf heads towards a major political and economic transformation, correcting that gap must be a high priority for Indian diplomacy once the current crisis in Iraq is resolved.

While America's longstanding allies in Europe are drifting away on the approach to Iraq, its regional partners in the Arab Gulf are lining up behind Washington in its final showdown with Baghdad.

The American effort to mobilise the support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation from Turkey, the northern launch

## OMAN JOURNAL

pad for American attack on Iraq, have been stymied by France, Germany and Belgium. But here in the Gulf, the GCC leadership has agreed to send troops to Kuwait, from where the American military thrust into Iraq from the south will be initiated.

Although the Europeans might prevent a U.N. consensus behind the American war against Baghdad, the neighbours of Iraq, who matter a lot more in the present crisis, are ready to join the United States.

Unlike the Europeans, the Gulf Kingdoms have little time for abstract arguments on international law and the procedures of the United Nations Security Council. They are far more sensitive to considerations of power and the consequences of use of force.

Having never been political fans of Saddam Hussein, and recognising the determination in Washington to engineer regime change in Baghdad, the

Gulf states who depend on the U.S. for their security are carefully walking the tight rope. They have few options.

\*\*\* The complex position of the Gulf Arabs in the current crisis is put across in a sophisticated manner by the minister state for foreign affairs of Oman, Yusuf bin Alawi. The articulate Mr. Alawi told visiting Indian reporters that the decision to send troops to Kuwait "is part of our obligation" under the collective security arrangements among the GCC nations.

This does not mean the Gulf states want a war. Mr. Alawi makes it clear that "none of us want to see a war taking place". He also expresses the widespread apprehensions in the region that the war might create more problems than it solves. Mr. Alawi was also not hopeful that Saddam Hussein could be persuaded to go into exile.

Mr. Alawi said the GCC hopes the problem could yet be peacefully resolved under the U.N. auspices. Would the GCC support a unilateral American military action in Iraq? Mr. Alawi says the GCC "will never be part of it". Would that lead to withdrawing the military bases most Gulf States have at present offered the United States?

Not really. The Gulf states might continue to provide "military facilities" to the U.S. but will not politically associate themselves with the unilateral American action against Iraq.

The military facilities given to the United States are not just about the crisis in Iraq, "but are part of a broader strategic outlook" based on the security considerations of the Gulf states, Mr. Alawi says.

12 FEB 2003



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IRAQ / SETBACK TO EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY

# Arab nations rally behind U.S.

By Atul Aneja

**MANAMA, FEB. 13.** After briefly flirting with the idea of joining a Franco-German initiative to avert war in Iraq, key Arab countries, with the possible exception of Syria, appear to be falling in line behind the United States.

Analysts point out that three clear indications have emerged over the last week that show that the U.S. may have been successful in discouraging some of the main constituents of the Arab world to restrain themselves from moving too close to the European anti-war camp.

First, the clearest signal that some of the main Arab players may have decided to distance themselves from European diplomatic exertions came during the recent four-nation summit in the Egyptian resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh. The Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, after meeting the Libyan President, Moammar Gadhafi, the Syrian President, Bashar Al Assad, and the Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al Faisal, announced that Arabs could do nothing to prevent or push back a war on Iraq and it was up to the Iraqi President to do something about it.

In expressing the futility of Arab activism and disregarding the evolving European initiative, Mr. Mubarak, according to some Arab commentators, effectively conveyed to the rest of the world that Cairo did not see much merit now in engaging in any serious collective exercise, to avert a war in Iraq.

According to a commentary in the pan-Arab *Al Quds al-Arabi*, "With the world polarising

into two camps, one focused on war and the other demanding that arms inspections continue, we would have expected the Sharm el-Sheikh summit to produce an Arab position in support of the latter but, as usual, we were disappointed."

Second, in yet another indication that influential Arab countries may prefer to stay away from the mainstream diplomacy on Iraq, many in Iraq's neighbourhood appear to be having second thoughts on adopting a collective stance. Observers point out that it may not be accidental that after announcing that the date of the Arab summit — the natural forum where common Arab positions are stated — needs to be advanced and held in the traditional Arab capital Cairo, rather than Bahrain, very little has been heard about this proposal in the last week.

Third, analysts see the decision of the six Persian Gulf states that belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that they would send troops to defend Kuwait during a U.S.-led war in Iraq, as a political expression of support towards the U.S. and Kuwait, rather than of any major military significance.

Sections of the Arab media have pointed out that with 120,000 U.S. troops already in Kuwait, the GCC countries hardly need to make any military contributions.

According to agency reports, the six GCC Foreign Ministers on Saturday decided at a meeting in Saudi Arabia to deploy forces, known as the Peninsula Shield, in Kuwait.



Children raise slogans during an anti-war march in Madrid, Spain, on Thursday. — AP

14 FEB 2003

# U.S.-France rift sharpens Arab divide

HD-14 By Atul Aneja 17/2

**MANAMA, FEB. 16.** The growing rift between the United States and France over Iraq was echoed in the anti-war demonstrations on Saturday where the turnout was high in Arab countries close to France but significantly low in states allied to Washington.

The largest street protests against war took place in Baghdad, the target of a possible U.S.-led invasion or in countries that have been staunchly opposed to war. Thus, Syria and Lebanon — two countries that support moves by Paris, Berlin and Moscow to avert war by giving U.N. weapons inspectors more time to do their work, have witnessed the largest demonstrations. Known for its large Palestinian population that is opposed to a war, large number of demonstrators also took to the streets in Amman, Jordan. But in contrast, serious anti-war protests have not taken place in the six Persian Gulf states. In Egypt, the

2,000-strong police force that was deployed outnumbered the 600 demonstrators that took to the streets in Cairo on Saturday.

Most of U.S. launch pads for a military strike on Iraq are located in the Persian Gulf states, while Egypt is known to be a close ally of Washington. Syria opposes war as it fears that the emergence of a pro-U.S. dispensation in Baghdad after a war can be detrimental to its interests.

Sandwiched between Israel and a hostile Iraq, Damascus would find itself extremely vulnerable in a post-Saddam scenario. Not surprisingly, France has been in regular touch with the leaderships of Syria — the only Arab member in the present United Nations Security Council, and Lebanon, the current chair of the Arab League — in order to gather more support in the region for its cause.

Analysts point out that the divisions within the Arab ranks are likely to affect the on-going meeting of the Arab League For-

eign Ministers in Cairo. It is unlikely that the Arab League will formally endorse a recent joint statement of France, Germany and Russia that seeks more time for the U.N. weapons inspections.

As the fallout of the European efforts to avert a war spreads in the region, it has found a reflection in the pro-U.S. Kurdish parties that have begun to sharpen their attack of France and Germany.

An Iraqi Kurd leader, Jalal Talabani, said on Saturday that the French opposition to a war to oust Mr. Saddam Hussein ignored the wishes of the Iraqi people.

"Germany is afraid that after Saddam's collapse, documents will be discovered showing how they supported chemical weapons programmes and the Kurdish people will ask for compensation," he said.

The Kurds have been victims of an Iraqi chemical weapons attack in Halabja in northern Iraq. They would thus stand to gain if Mr. Hussein is unseated.

17 FEB 2003

THE HINDU

# Gulf War and Arab democracy

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 3. The assertions of the Bush administration that a regime change in Iraq enforced by the impending war in the Gulf will be followed by a democratic transformation in the Arab world have drawn sceptical reactions from India.

But American pressures since September 11 for a political change in the region are beginning to have an impact. In a significant move last month, the Government of Saudi Arabia leaked a draft charter for internal reform that it had circulated among Arab capitals.

Called the "the charter to reform the Arab condition", the document will be taken up for discussion and adoption at an Arab summit in Bahrain in March. That the initiative for change should come from the most conservative of the Arab regimes, Saudi Arabia, is as startling as its content.

The Saudi initiative is part of the new political stirring in the Arab world. Crown Prince Abdullah, who has been calling for change in Saudi Arabia for a while, is now pressing for region-wide reforms.

This is not the first time that he has taken the lead. Last year he had called for a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute through the creation of a Palestinian state and the Arab recognition of Israel.

During the Cold War, Washington had used the conservative forces in the region against regional radicals and the Soviet Union and turned a blind eye to the internal political decay within the Arab world.

Without a modernisation of the political conditions in Saudi Arabia and other parts

of the Arab world, the Bush Administration has argued since September 11 that it is impossible to root out the sources of global terrorism. With or without American pressure, many regimes in the region too have come to recognise the urgency of political reform at home.

The draft charter calls on the Arab leaders to "end the silence that has gone on for too long" about the "explosive situation in the area", in an apparent reference to the social and economic stagnation that has fuelled political discontent and religious extremism.

"The Arab heads of state decide that internal reform and enhanced political partic-

## NEWS ANALYSIS

ipation are essential steps towards building Arab capabilities and providing conditions for comprehensive Arab revival," the draft declares. The charter also calls for a customs union and free trade zone in the Arab world and the promotion of private sector development.

Analysts in the region have ascribed many motives for the reform agenda in the Arab world. These include the avoidance of cataclysmic change through incremental reform, marginalisation of extremists, and pre-emption of American pressures by setting one's own agenda of reform.

Whatever might be the motive, the political worm has begun to turn in the region after September 11. The impending war in the Gulf is reinforcing the momentum for change. Reforms can no longer be post-

poned in the Arab world. The regimes have begun to recognise that blaming outsiders for the current tragic condition in the region will no longer suffice.

The charter is about the emerging political sense that the Arab nation will have to pick itself up by the bootstraps and integrate with the global mainstream. It does not use the word "democracy" or explain what it means by "enhanced political participation". But that does not detract from its timing and political significance.

Democracy, as the rest of the world understands it, might be a long way off in the Arab world. But in the last few years, many countries in the region have begun to experiment with expanded consultative processes and electoral politics within a controlled framework. This in itself is a step forward towards the longer-term goal of democracy.

Many Indians believe Islam and democracy are incompatible. That is a reflection of a deeply-held prejudice than an assessment of the potential for political transformation in the Arab world. Change is now inevitable in the Islamic world.

India must welcome the Saudi Charter and offer every possible support to the modernisation of the Arab world. India's own long-term battle against terrorism and extremism cannot be won without political change in its western neighbourhood.

For, the security of the subcontinent and the Gulf are interlinked through ideological and financial networks. In lending support to the Arab transformation, India helps itself and the subcontinent to move towards political stability and economic advancement.

# In Kuwait, US losing grip on most trusted Gulf friend

**SUSAN B. GLASSER & PETER BAKER**  
KUWAIT, JANUARY 22

**H**AKEM Mutairi is on trial in the country often called the most pro-American in the Arab world, charged with "spreading rumours that caused harm to Kuwait."

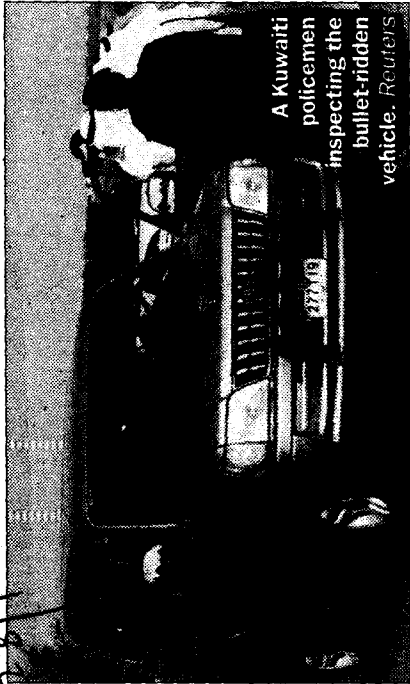
"We thought America was a friend for our country, but we think now it is a colonial power," Mutairi said last week, summing up the evolving views among conservatives here.

Mutairi is the face of anti-American sentiment in Kuwait — religious, politically influential and on the rise. Public statements such as his were seldom heard here before 9/11. But now, as the US threatens to use Kuwait as a launching pad for an invasion of neighbouring Iraq, even a crackdown by the Kuwaiti government

on such people as Mutairi cannot obscure the burgeoning resentment. It took two attacks last fall on US soldiers based here to awaken Americans and Kuwaitis to how much admiration for the US had waned in the years since a US-led coalition liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991.

Some of the resentments that have spread through the rest of the Arab world have reached even this pro-American enclave — bitterness about perceived US targeting of Muslims in the war on terrorism and anger at Washington's support for Israel in the conflict with Palestinians.

Islamic leaders here regularly complain about US pressure on Kuwait to adopt American values. They decry invasion plans, heard elsewhere in the Gulf. Despite lingering enmity toward Iraq they espouse the view of the US as a would-be "colonial" power.



A Kuwaiti policeman inspecting the bullet-riddled vehicle. Reuters

So worried were the country's rulers by the first attacks on US soldiers that they began rounding up men with suspected ties to radicals and this month issued a decree prohibiting Muslims from harming foreigners in Kuwait. That ruling did not prevent another attack.

Two civilian contractors with the US military here were shot, one fatally, as they drove down a highway near a camp used by US soldiers. The official view is that anti-American sentiment is a fringe movement, the attacks are "isolated incidents," as Mohammed Salem Sabah, minister of state for foreign affairs, puts it.

But on the streets and in the *dihwariyas* — traditional nighttime social and political gatherings where Kuwaiti men conduct

the country's business — many say the government has not yet come to terms with the shift in Kuwaitis' thinking. Kuwait's newly vocal complaints about the US are different and subtler than those elsewhere in the region. No US flag is burnt here, there are no anti-war rallies.

There are no independent opinion polls to measure how widespread the discontent is. But the fact that it exists at all — and is growing rapidly — marks a setback for the US.

Saud Nasir Sabah, a former ambassador to the US, oil minister and member of Kuwait's ruling family, blamed the government, arguing that even after 9/11 it has done little to rein in Islamic militants. "The US was there for us," he said, but since 9/11, "we haven't been there for them. You need a strong government to do this, we don't have one."

—LATWP