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Intelligence Squared U.S.

The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness

For the Motion: Madawi Al-Rasheed, Mark P. Lagon
Against the Motion: F. Gregory Gause, James Jeffrey
Moderator: John Donvan

AUDIENCE RESULTS
Before the debate:  
28% FOR
26% AGAINST
46% UNDECIDED

After the debate:  
31% FOR
58% AGAINST
11% UNDECIDED

Start Time: (00:00:00)

John Donvan:
We always begin these debates by having a short conversation about our thinking on bringing the topic of the night to stage. And we do that by inviting to the stage the gentleman who launched Intelligence Squared U.S. That's Bob Rosenkranz. So let's welcome Bob to the stage right now.

[Applause]

Hi, Bob. And there's a mic for you. Sorry.

Robert Rosenkranz:
Hi, John. Very briefly, tonight's motion is a little bit more verbose than normally. We have a lot -- we have nine words in it. The U.S. special -- the U.S. -- the special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness, a little bit longer. Why not just go with, "The Saudis are not our friends"?

[laughter]

You know, that was the first language we considered. And then, as we talked about it, we realized that nations don't have friends; they have interests.

John Donvan:
Where does that come from?

Robert Rosenkranz:
Well, I was curious so I looked it up today, and there are three people who claim credit for it: Charles de Gaulle, Lord Palmerston, and Henry Kissinger.

John Donvan:
And now you, so that makes four. So what are the stakes of what we're debating here?

0:01:20

Robert Rosenkranz:
Well, I am reminded of a -- I had visited the CIA back when George Tenet was director, which was -- he served under Clinton and then under George W. Bush. And I asked him a question. I said, "What is the biggest economic challenge to the global economy?" And he said, really quickly, he said, "It's the danger of a takeover of Saudi oil reserves by radicals." And I think if you ask that same question today, the answer could well be the same answer. And I understood why he was saying that, because clearly whenever you think of Saudi Arabia, they kind of have some interests in common with the United States. Most of their financial assets have -- are exposed to the success of the Western world.

0:02:20

Places I go, New York, London, and so forth, a lot of the Saudi elite seems to enjoy being in those places. And in contrast to the radicals who really wish us ill, we have some substantial interests in common with the Saudis.

John Donvan:
So the question, of course, and I think it's what we're going to be debating tonight is where you draw the line.

Robert Rosenkranz:
Exactly so.

John Donvan:
When is a relationship worth preserving or downgrading?

Robert Rosenkranz:
Exactly so. And I think it's very -- it's a very important topic. I saw the list of press attendees tonight. There were 32 members of the press coming to this event, which is more than we typically get, so it's a topic that I think has a lot of interest.
That's the honest media that's coming tonight.

[laughter]

Robert Rosenkranz:
It's just the media. I can't --vouch for them.

John Donvan:
Okay. All right. Thank you, very much, Bob. And let's begin by welcoming our debaters to the stage.

0:03:16

Robert Rosenkranz:
Good. Sounds good.

[applause]

John Donvan:
Just as there is no such thing as the perfect spouse, almost no such thing, there is almost no such thing as the perfect ally. Other nations that we call our partners -- interesting word, and there are lots of them -- they have their own problems and pursuits which sometimes grate up against American purposes and ideals. That is true of Israel, it's true of France, it is oh, so true of Canada. I'm kidding on Canada. Canada might actually be almost the perfect ally.

0:03:52

[laughter]

But the one we are going to look at tonight is Saudi Arabia, steadfast, stable, swimming in all the oil we like, but also an embarrassment on the human rights front, the place that most of the 9/11 hijackers came from, a monarchy whose talent for attracting enemies might suggest that U.S. coziness with Saudi Arabia represents a liability. Well, all of that is debatable. So let's do it. Yes or no to this statement: The special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness, an Intelligence Squared debate. I am John Donvan. That is our motion. I stand between two teams of two, experts in this topic. Once again, the motion being the special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. As always, our debate will go in three rounds, and then our live audience here at the Kaufman Music Center here in New York will vote to choose the winner. And as always, if all goes well, civil discourse will also win.

0:04:48
Let's have a vote from you to get -- to see what your view is on this motion as you come in off the street. If you go to that keypad, pay attentions to the first three keys, one, two, and three, and take a look again at the motion on the board. If you agree with this motion right now, push number one; and if you disagree, push number two; and if you're undecided, push number three. Let's meet our debaters. Again, the motion is: The Special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. One team arguing for the motion. First, let's welcome Madawi Al-Rasheed. Hi, Madawi.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Hello, John.

[applause]

John Donvan:
So Madawi, you are a visiting professor from the London School of Economics. You've written a lot of books on history and religion and politics in Saudi Arabia. Now, your name gives us a clue to your history. You are a member of the Rasheed family, and that is a dynasty that fought a lot of wars with the House of Saud in the early 19th century.

So what I want to ask is you, is there any separating your family's personal story from the debate that we're going to have here tonight?

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Thank you, John. It's true that my family had fought battles with the Saud, but I can't claim that I personally participated in this battle. Yes, this is precisely the kind of answer or question that I get from Saudi apologists who don't have actually a legitimate response to what I have to say or write.

John Donvan:
Oh, okay. Not to mention even talking about a battle of wits. All right, thank you very much. Let's welcome again Madawi Al-Rasheed.

[applause]

And, Madawi, please tell us who your partner is here tonight.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yes. My partner in the debate, Mark --

John Donvan:
Mark --
Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Ambassador Mark Lagon.

John Donvan:
Ladies and gentlemen, Mark Lagon.

[applause]

0:06:39

John Donvan:
And, Mark, Madawi just gave it away. In addition to right now being at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, you have head a lot of positions in government, including service as an ambassador. You were deputy assistant secretary in the Department of State. You're also a former president of Freedom House. And Freedom House publishes a report that assesses political and civil liberties around the world. So what does it take to get a passing grade? And how does Saudi Arabia usually do?

Mark Lagon:
So Freedom House rates every country in the world on political freedom and on civil liberties from one being best to seven being worst. And just last week, the annual scores came out, and Saudi Arabia was a seven on both in the worst, meaning repressing dissent or repressing women, repressing minority face --

John Donvan:
And meaning evidence here -- evidence for your side tonight.

Mark Lagon:
Indeed.

John Donvan:
And the side, again, arguing for the motion, let's welcome them, ladies and gentlemen.

0:07:39
[applause]

John Donvan:
And this is a debate. That means there's another side to this motion, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Outliving Its Usefulness. The team arguing against the motion. Please first welcome Gregory Gause.

[applause]
Hi, Greg. Greg, you are professor and head of international affairs department at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M. You have been focusing for quite awhile on the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and you recently wrote an article looking at U.S.-Saudi relations in which you quoted President Obama and President Obama’s statement on the situation was quote unquote, "It's complicated."

[laughter]

Is it going to look any less complicated after tonight's debate?

Gregory Gause:
John, I think it won’t be any less complicated. We don’t have that kind of power up here, but I think that folks will understand the complications a little bit better and I think they’ll understand why the relationship with Saudi Arabia continues to be in America’s best interest.

0:08:41
John Donvan:
Okay. Thank you very much, and tell us who your partner is, please.

Gregory Gause:
My partner is the very experienced and very talented Ambassador James Jeffrey.

John Donvan:
Ladies and gentlemen, James Jeffrey.

[applause]

And James, as you know, we drop titles on this stage, but I'm also going to -- can I go with Jim?

James Jeffrey:
Jim is fine.

John Donvan:
All right. Thank you. And so Jim, you were assistant to the president. You were deputy national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration. Also, a long-time diplomat. You were ambassador to Turkey. You were ambassador to Iraq. Not long ago you gave our new Secretary of State Rex Tillerson some job advice. You pointed out that what counts is and I'm quoting you, "Mastering the mind numbingly varied ambiguous and often contradictory expectations of the job." Are you feeling sorry for this guy?
James Jeffrey:
Not at all, John. He's got the best job in the world. I've had the privilege of working with him at times and he's going to do great.

John Donvan:
Okay. Thank you very much, Jim Jeffrey, and the team arguing against the motion.

0:09:41
[applause]

So reminding you once again, this is a debate. It's a competition of logic and ideas and fact and these two teams are trying to persuade you to vote for their side. You have voted already. You'll vote a second time. It's the difference between the first and the second votes that will determine our winner. We go in three rounds. Let's begin with round one. Round one are opening statements by each debater in turn. The motion is The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness, and here to argue for the motion, and you can make your way to the lectern now, Madawi Al-Rasheed. She is author of "Muted Modernists: The Struggle Over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia." Also, visiting professor at the London School of Economics Middle East Center. Ladies and gentlemen, Madawi Al-Rasheed.

[applause]

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. I'm very happy to be here and present the motion.

0:10:42
I will argue that the U.S.-Saudi relationship has indeed outlived its usefulness. In support of the motion I will cover the domestic and regional considerations, and my partner, Ambassador Mark Lagon, will cover the subsequently the international and global aspects of the bilateral relationship. Before I get started I'd like to make an important point. The domestic consideration that I will consider today cannot be discussed in isolation as some would have it, internal matters of for Saudi Arabia are not really for the country itself. We live in a global world and so many things are interconnected from terrorism to oil. We can't isolate the domestic from the international; however, we have a very good division of labor between the two of us and I will cover the first part of this debate and it deals with internal dynamics.

0:11:44
So, one thing to remember is that whatever happens inside Saudi Arabia does not stay within the borders of Saudi Arabia and has implication for the U.S. and also for that
matter the whole world. The U.S.-Saudi relationship was dubbed from the very beginning as a special relationship. From the moment American President Roosevelt met King ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia on the 14th of February 1945. At the core of this relationship were two issues. First, oil and second one is security. The special relationship meant that the U.S. offered Saudi Arabia uncritical, unequivocal, and unconditional support for more than seven decades.

0:12:40
We will argue that this is no longer in the U.S.'s best national interest. Let me just explain how this relationship developed. In the 1960s, Saudi Arabia was a very useful ally during the cold war. Its oil wealth, its strategic location -- and believe it or not, its conservative Islamic tradition -- all helped to defend against, and ultimately defeat, nationalism and communism, not only in the Arab world, but also in the Muslim world in general. This special relationship meant that Saudi Arabia became important for the U.S., and even more so, after 1979. So, why 1979?

0:13:39
Remember, in 1979, the main ally of the U.S., the Shah of Iran, was toppled. And we get to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. And at that moment, U.S.-Iranian relations became extremely difficult and hostile. And in fact, they have never been resolved until the present day. It is still a troubled relationship. So, the U.S. decided to put all its baskets in the -- all its eggs, sorry -- in the Saudi basket. And therefore, this relationship became even more special. And we leave that moment to come to Afghanistan in the 1980s. And here, the U.S.-Saudi alliance became extremely important. And also, Saudi Arabia used its conservative Islam in order to start what is regarded today as the menace -- and the menace is the global jihadi movement that brewed in the caves of Afghanistan.

0:14:48
But then it spread across the globe, and I do not need to remind you of the details. Today, this special relationship has become counterproductive. Unconditional U.S. support for this absolute monarchy is now against U.S. national interests. The absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia has become difficult to sustain. First, this regime oppresses its own people, marginalizes women, discriminates against religious minorities, spreads lethal conservative religious ideology, interferes in domestic affairs of its neighbors, and aspires to become a hawkish regional superpower.

0:15:41
This doesn't help U.S. interests, but actually harms them. Unconditional U.S. support legitimizes the regime and authoritarianism, and makes the U.S. vulnerable to accusations of double standards -- supporting dictatorship in one country while promoting human rights and democracy in other countries. More than that -- since 9/11, many Americans have asked legitimate questions. Given that 15 out of 19 hijackers were Saudis, Americans began to ask, "Are Saudis our friends or foe?"
was a legitimate question, given that Saudi Arabia spawned more than three-quarters of the terrorists who perpetrated the most horrific acts against America in modern history.

0:16:45
John Donvan:
Madawi Al-Rasheed, I'm sorry. Your time is up. Thank you very much.

[applause]

Our motion is, "The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness." And here making his opening statement against this motion, Gregory Gause. He is the professor and head of international affairs department at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M. Ladies and gentlemen, Gregory Gause.

[applause]

Gregory Gause:
Thanks, everybody, for coming out. We're going to divide up the defense of this motion, not according to domestic and international, because we actually think that the whole point of this motion is about the value of this relationship to the United States. And so, we're going to focus on the value that Saudi Arabia and the relationship with Saudi Arabia brings. I'm going to talk about probably the most telling point that Madawi brought up, the two most telling points: Values and the spread of this very conservative xenophobic, intolerant version of Islam that we short handedly call "Wahhabism."

0:17:54
And Jim is going to talk more about American interests in strategy and in oil and in other elements. So it seems to me that if the argument's about values, they win, we walk off the stage. Saudi Arabia does not share our values. We are very happy to stipulate that. But the question here is not for us about values, it's about interests. If we ran our Middle East policy based only on dealing with people who shared our values, we really wouldn't have many people to talk to in the Middle East. The Middle East is a very strategic area. It's in flames right now. And having a relationship with a stable country in the Middle East that has influence in Syria, in Yemen, in other parts -- in Iraq, in other parts of the Middle East that are in flames we think is actually very useful to the United States.

0:18:49
But I think Madawi, my friend Madawi -- and we've known each other for a long time. I think my friend Madawi's best argument here is the fact that Saudi Arabia has been the home of Wahhabism and that Wahhabism has become, in its various incarnations once it left the country, a threat to the United States. So there is a logic to this, undoubtedly. But I don't think that that logic holds through the entire argument. And let me tell you why. It's more complicated than that. It's nice to look for a single cause,
for any phenomenon, particularly a troubling phenomenon like the Salafi jihadist movement in that al-Qaeda and ISIS, they're Salafi jihadists. That's what specialists call them.

0:19:41
It's always nice to try to find the one silver bullet that's the cause for this, and then you can go against it. But I don't think that that's ever right, right? Salafi jihadism is the product of an enormous number of factors, and Madawi mentioned a very important one, the success of the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. That was supported by Saudi Arabia, also supported by the United States. You might remember President Reagan calling the leaders of this jihad, the mujahedeen. He compared them to the Founding Fathers of the United States, right? Lots of Saudis have joined ISIS, but lots of Tunisians have joined ISIS, Tunisia, the one success story of the Arab Spring, the most democratic of the Arab countries emerging from the Arab Spring. Europeans have joined ISIS, even some Americans. It's hard to say that Wahhabism was the thing that drove them to join ISIS. I think that the fact of the matter is the Saudis lost control of global Salafism, they lost control of Wahhabism once it left their borders.

0:20:43
And in fact, these people in ISIS and al-Qaeda, who share some beliefs with Saudi Arabia about what Islam means, now want to kill the Saudis. And they identify Saudi regime as one of their major opponents. In fact, counterterrorism is, I think, one of the major reasons why we need to sustain our relationship with Saudi Arabia. Intelligence sharing is an important part of that. The Saudis, we know -- right, we know that because of cooperation with the Saudis, there have been plots foiled. In 2010, a plot by al-Qaeda to ship explosives from Yemen to the United States in airplanes was foiled because of cooperation with Saudi Arabia. In 2015, because of cooperation with Saudi Arabia, the United States, and cooperating with Lebanese authorities, was able to arrest the mastermind behind the Khobar Towers bombing that killed Americans, Saudis, and others in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia back in 1996.

0:21:48
So intelligence cooperation is part of this. But also an extremely important part of this cooperation with Saudi Arabia and sustaining that relationship with Saudi Arabia is not simply the intelligence sharing, it's also that we need the Saudis on the ideological front against ISIS and al-Qaeda. We, the United States, have no standing in those arguments in the Muslim world, right? We can say, this is bad, this is wrong. No one in the Muslim world listens to us. We're not a Muslim country. What the Saudis do, right, as difficult as it is for us good liberal Americans, who really excoriate the Saudis on all sorts of grounds about women's rights and political freedoms for very good reasons. What we cannot do is make the argument against al-Qaeda and ISIS within their own intellectual framework, and the Saudis can do that.

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And that's another reason, besides the kind of very, very practical intelligence sharing that we do with them -- that's another reason the ideological fight against ISIS is best conducted from within the intellectual framework of Salafi Islam. And really, only the Saudis can conduct that fight. They are doing it. We have to press them to continue to do it, but I think that that makes them extremely important for the United States and argues for the sustaining of our relationship with Saudi Arabia.

John Donvan:
Thank you, Gregory Gause.

[applause]

John Donvan:
And a reminder of where we are. We are halfway through the opening round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donvan. We have four debaters, two teams of two, fighting it out over this motion: The special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. We heard the first two opening statements and now on to the third. To debate for the motion, here is Mark Lagon. He is Centennial fellow and distinguished senior scholar in the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, also a former U.S. anti-human -- a former U.S. anti-human trafficking ambassador.

0:23:55
Please welcome Mark Lagon.

[applause]

Mark Lagon:
Thanks, John. Thanks, Intelligence Squared, for asking a good question, and thank you for coming. Professor Al-Rasheed and I are here to ask you to support the same position that we're arguing for, that a special, unconditional relationship with Saudi Arabia has outlived its utility. She's focused on some domestic and regional factors. I'm going to look at some more global ones and aspects of the bilateral relationship itself. First, United States does not need Saudi Arabia as much as it once did for oil. The relationship the United States had with Saudi Arabia began with oil, and it was premised from the 1973 oil embargo for a good while on access to oil. But due to technical -- technological advances like fracking, the United States doesn't need Saudi oil as much.

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There was a decline of some 50 percent of Saudi oil exports to the United States from April to December of 2014 as a result. The Saudis know they need to change. The deputy crown prince has put forward an economic reform plan called Vision 2030 based on moving away from that dependence on oil. They depend on oil for 77 percent of their budget. That's compared to merely 33 percent for Iran. The Saudi government needs to simultaneously find a new source of economic growth and convince the United
States that the relationship is about something more than oil. Now, some say, including probably our debate partners, that the United States should care about this because the Europeans and the world economy depend on oil.

0:25:40
But for a number of reasons, the United States can remain an important military guarantor of stability and access to oil in the region without having an utterly unconditional relationship with Saudi Arabia. The likelihood of overthrow of the regime is not great. Our counterparts here in the debate will probably argue that it's a fairly stable regime. And there isn't reason to think that there's going to be major war between the regional powers or even a bad actor like Iran wanting to cut off the oil supply entirely. Second argument: Unconditional backing undercuts U.S. global credibility. This is a government, for instance, that stones, lashes, beheads people. It's executed over 150 people each of the last two years without due process. And internationally, the Saudis have engaged in harming civilians terribly in their escapades in Yemen, killing some 6,000 people in Yemen in the initial months of intervening to try and change the government to be more to its liking there.

0:26:51
There are now some 3 million people displaced in Yemen. At the same time as the United States is rightly criticizing Russia for harming civilians in Aleppo in Syria, it stands by Saudi Arabia and is selling massive weapons, 10 percent of U.S. arms sales go to Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabist world view that Greg Gause talked about has indeed been a pernicious factor. It has -- as Hillary Clinton said in a memo quoted in WikiLeaks indicated, that donors in Saudi Arabia comes through the most significant source of funding, the Sunni terrorist groups worldwide. We've seen this impact in Southeast Asia and in western Africa villages.

0:27:40
We've seen it in a $100 million going to extremist clerics in Pakistan from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with government support. We've seen it touching on Nigeria. We've seen it touching on Kosovo. Next argument. U.S. backing for Saudi Arabia leads to greater targeting of Americans. We help give birth to some of the worst extremists by working with Saudi Arabia to create jihadists to fight against the Soviets, perhaps in an elbow fight then, but they came to turn their eyes on the Saudi government and on the Americans from afar. It looks like even though there isn't a U.S. major deployment of troops anymore ever since Saddam Hussein was overthrown, that American presence is somewhat less in Saudi Arabia and still our association backing unconditionally that government of Saudi Arabia puts a bull’s-eye on the back of Americans because it’s easier for extremists to fight Americans as the patrons of Saudi Arabia than to succeed in trying to overthrow the Saudi government right there.

0:28:53
The Saudis engage in blackmail. If they really had the overlapping interests that our counterparts will argue that they had, they wouldn't regularly try to withhold intelligence sharing or threaten to stop buying our weapons or cooperating with us when, for instance, the Congress passes a law allowing American citizens with the families of 9/11 victims to sue the Saudi government. And that kind of leveraging happens with others. Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström had the temerity to note women's rights are horrific in Sweden and she was punished with being barred from talking at the Arab League with visas being withdrawn from Swedes. This is blackmail.

0:29:40
It's worth noting that also Saudi Arabia threatened the U.N. if it pointed a finger at it in its annual report on children in armed conflicts for the mayhem that it has been conducting against children in Yemen threatening to cut off aid, including for Palestinian refugees. Don't buy that this unconditional relationship has to stand as it is. Thank you.

John Donvan:
Thank you. Mark Lagon.

[applause]

And the motion is The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness, and here making his statement against the motion here is James Jeffrey, the Philip Solondz Distinguished Fellow at the Washington Institute and former ambassador to Iraq and Turkey. Here is James Jeffrey.

[applause]

James Jeffrey:
Thank you, John. Thank you all for coming. If there's one thing the recent presidential election showed is that it's a good thing to look at all of our assumptions and sunk cost ideas about foreign policy, domestic policy for that, and thus it's good to take a look at Saudi Arabia.

0:30:51
Nonetheless, this motion as written is not only and I quote the moderator, John, "verbose." It's also not very clear. If I were here tonight debating either we should stop defending South Korea or we should continue, I could give you an idea of exactly what that meant and some idea of the risks racking and stacking them. This is different because we're talking about a special relationship which has no real definition. As a diplomat I know what it feels like because I've done it in countries like Germany, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Korea, and a few other places that reached that level, but nonetheless, it is hard to pin down. But let me try to explain a little bit what a special
relationship is and in particular what it isn't. Actually, I'll start with what it isn't. It isn't unconditional support.

0:31:43
I don't know of a Saudi, and I've talked with most of the leaders, who would claim that Barak Obama gave Saudi Arabia unconditional support, but I would like to see the other side defend -- the point that he did. Nonetheless, a special relationship continued. We managed to maintain a good relationship with Saudi Arabia despite major disputes over Yemen, major disputes over Iran, because that's what special relationships do. They don't mean you agree on everything and they certainly don't mean you like each other's domestic policies. What they mean is that they're important players in a construct internationally that you share. So, that takes us to the key question, and it's a very dramatic question right now with a new administration with very new ideas, what is our national interest. From then we can deduce whether Saudi Arabia fits into them. The Trump administration is going back and forth with a lot of rhetoric and lightning bolts between a somewhat more colorful version of what we've been doing since 1945, which is a global security -- collective security system and a global order.

0:32:53
On the other hand, some in the administration are pushing for a more muscular "America First" national interests approach, rather similar to what we saw -- and it didn't work well -- in the 19th century. But regardless of which way this administration goes, short of full isolationism, you're going to need friends and allies. We can't do whatever we want to do in the world alone. And that means we have to turn to countries that will help us. So, how does Saudi Arabia help us? Now, our colleagues gave us a wonderful example of how they helped us 20, 30 years ago. My first point is, they were certainly no more democratic or lovable then than they are now. In fact, on Mark's scale, they would have been an 8, probably, 30 years ago -- [laughs] -- if we'd had an 8.

0:33:48
But nonetheless, we managed to do a lot of very important things with them. We've got big business to do with them now. First, oil. Back when all this started, according to the other side, it was all about oil dependency, except back in the 1970s, we were in America only beginning to important major amounts of oil. The problem was not oil to America then, or for a while, and we did import a lot -- including from Saudi Arabia -- now, when we only import about 25 percent, and only a small part of that from Saudi Arabia. It's about oil to the world. And where does that come from? 25 percent of internationally traded oil comes from the region around Saudi Arabia, and it is the biggest swing producer. That means that Saudi decisions on oil have a huge impact on the international economy that we trade with and have a huge impact on the price of gasoline at your pump. We saw what happens when we get on the wrong side of Saudi Arabia on oil issues in 1974.
0:34:50
That's a good example that close friends don't always support each other. The next things is, the threats we're facing in the region. It isn't quite the Cold War, I grant you, but between ISIS and Iran, we have really terrible problems. Have the Saudis killed inadvertantly, to a large degree, 6,000 people in Yemen? I think that's a pretty accurate figure. The side they're struggling against, Iran and friends, have killed deliberately, as a policy, a hundred times that. Those are the kind of facts we have to deal with. It isn't a choice between who you'll take to the ball. You're not looking for a special partner, a special relationship -- someone -- a significant other for the rest of your life. This isn't a love affair. It's a question of transactional issues to accomplish common goals. Those common goals include fighting ISIS, fighting Al-Qaeda, and containing Iran in the area.

0:35:52
And there, we need the Saudis. My opponents are absolutely right about the blackmail. But I'm here to tell you, I don't know of a major ally of ours who hasn't done similar blackmailing. And had I six more minutes, I would start with Turkey. Actually, I would probably end with Turkey.

[laughter]

But I could throw in even the lovable Germans and some others that would surprise you. The Japanese and the Koreans, once. So -- and as far as us being more in danger because of Saudi -- as a guy who's had a bulls-eye on my back, literally, in the Middle East repeatedly, it's never been because of our relationship with Saudi Arabia. It's been from many other things. That's not the fault of the Saudis. Thank you very much. Vote against this bad, bad motion.

[laughter and applause]

John Donvan:
Thank you, James Jeffrey.

0:36:42
And that motion was, again, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. And that concludes Round 1. Now we move onto Round 2. And in Round 2, it's freer form. The debaters can address one another directly, and they take questions from me and from you in our live audience here in New York City. The motion is this: The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. Two debaters arguing for this motion -- Madawi Al-Rasheed and Mark Lagon. They have argued that the unconditional support that they say marked the core character of this relationship since World War II no longer makes sense, that this relationship is no longer in the U.S. interest. There was a usefulness, but it's -- that time has passed. And it is counterproductive now, that the regime itself cannot sustain, especially in light of its record of oppression of minorities, oppression of women, oppression of the free press,
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its aspirations to be a regional superpower. Bottom line, the thing that got us in the door the oil just doesn't matter as much to us anymore.

0:37:44
The team arguing against the motion, Gregory Gause and James Jeffrey, they concede that Saudi Arabia does not share our values, but they argue that that is irrelevant to the question of whether the relationship is in the interest of the United States. They point out that in many ways we have the same enemies, that they have been cooperative in helping to fight those enemies, particularly in the area of intelligence sharing where they say that plots have been foiled. They say that we are going to need friends and allies and that Saudi Arabia continues to be critical in the fight against shared threats. So we're going to mix it up a little bit and go through some of these points a little bit point by point. But first I want to take a question to Madawi Al-Rasheed and ask you, your partners -- your opponents, rather, are making the argument -- it's implicit, I think, that Saudi Arabia remains stolid. I won't say stable exactly, but stolid. It's been there, assuming that it's going to continue to be there.

0:38:43
At the heart of your argument about the -- its position in the world, the risks it's taking globally, and its human rights record, do those things add up to a threat to their stability, or are those irrelevant to Saudi Arabia's stability? Bottom line, is Saudi Arabia stable?

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Saudi Arabia is a pressure cooker. And the more there is of oppression and sabotaging people's rights, the pressure is going to rise. And one day, it's going to implode from within. I just want to remind you of what Woodrow Wilson said about repression actually is so connected to revolution. And the U.S., by giving Saudi Arabia unconditional support, is actually sowing the seeds of revolution. It is unconditional. To give you two examples, if oil is important, those of us who are old enough, remember what happened in 1973 when the oil prices quadrupled-- or most-- because of the embargo.

0:39:47
And with the U.S. support to Saudi Arabia it wasn't able to do anything, and it took six months for the oil prices to sort of stabilize, but at a very high price. The second point about this unconditional support is Yemen. We have --

John Donvan:
Actually, Madawi, can I stop you for a second because I want to -- I want to sort of stay point by point. I do want to come to the point that you're going to make about Yemen and conditional, unconditional support. But I want to stay on the theme first of whether or not Saudi Arabia is stable. Take your point to your partners. And that's how I sort of want to unfold the evening as much as possible, having these points go back and
forth. So -- and I will come back to the point that you’re moving on to. So let me take to your opponents, either to Greg or to Jim, your -- Madawi is just say -- Madawi is just saying that Saudi Arabia is a pressure cooker. It cannot sustain, quoting Woodrow Wilson, for example.

**0:40:44**
Can you respond to that, Greg?

**Gregory Gause:**
Sure. Saudi Arabia is a pressure cooker, and it's been a pressure cooker for decades. Every generation of American, Western, and even Saudi expert on Saudi Arabia has forecast the demise of this regime, whether it was at the end of King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud’s life when people said this was a personalistic mission and it's going to fall apart, whether it was during the Arab nationalist phase of Gamal Abdel Nasser. And Egypt, people said -- including people in our U.S. State Department -- and you can look at it in the declassified documents -- said the Saudis are goners. After the Iranian revolution, people said, oh, the Islamist wave is going to sweep them over. During the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia was the least affected country, major Arab country during the Arab Spring in terms of numbers of demonstrators out on the street.

**John Donvan:**
So bottom line?

**Gregory Gause:**
Bottom line is that in the long run, every regime is in trouble.

**0:41:44**
But in the long run, we’re all dead. And so far --

[laughter]

And so far, Saudi Arabia has a pretty good track record of stability.

**John Donvan:**
Mark Lagon.

**Mark Lagon:**
Well, our colleagues here would suggest that they are the sophisticates, and we're sort of pulling at heartstrings. We have a subtle argument. The -- Saudi Arabia is stable. It's not about to blow up. And it's a relationship that can withstand the United States pushing them a little more as opposed to giving them a free ride. But my colleague is right, they are resilient. And if they do not open up to women being involved, other forms of Muslims than Sunnis having a voice, it is going to be a pressure cooker that in the long run cannot last.
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John Donvan:
But to Greg's point, why has it lasted for so many years already if this prediction has come again and again and again? Let me take it to Madawi.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Well, everybody thought Mubarak of Egypt was very resilient, and he lasted 35 years.

0:42:40
It doesn't mean that things don't just sort of implode one day. And our failure as social scientists is we can't really predict with accuracy when these implosions are going to take place. But this doesn't mean that we can say that Saudi Arabia is stable and so many people have forecasted its downfall. We're not talking about that. We're talking about the U.S.-Saudi relationship. And it is an unconditional relationship so far as we can see.

John Donvan:
All right, let me take it to -- and I will return to the -- I also took note in Jim's comments about his challenging your statement of unconditionality. And I will come back to that. But I want to say one last round on this point of whether, you know -- your opponents' arguing, if for no other reason, betting on Saudi Arabia is betting on the wrong place because they're predicting it's going to blow up.

James Jeffrey:
John, Mark and Madawi are right, and I think that Greg reinforced that. But I'll say it too. You can't tell who's going to blow up or who can't. But so far you can look at experience. In the Arab world since 2011, we've had three really big meltdowns with war; Yemen, Syria, and Libya.

0:43:50
Those aren't American allies. Those aren't people who were pushed to melt down because America either did too much or didn't do enough. The countries that have survived it include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, albeit with considerable turmoil, and Iraq. Those are countries that America has maintained, at times holding its nose, a close relationship. I'll rest my case.

John Donvan:
Okay. Let me take it now back to Madawi. The point that your opponent made earlier in his opening statement challenging your claim that the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia is basically unconditional. They point out examples of times when Saudi Arabia has been very unhappy with the positions the United States has taken, that they feel that they are checked and challenged and there's nothing unconditional about it. Would you like to take that, Mark Lagon? Or Madawi, whichever. Madawi, you've been wanting to over this so go ahead.
Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yeah. I think, you know, the example that comes to my mind is Yemen.

0:44:52
Saudi Arabia, for the last two years almost have launched air strikes on Yemen under different guises and argued that they are doing this in order to restore the Yemeni regime in Yemen. But what had happened was all this is happening with the approval of the U.S. So the U.S. is helping Saudi Arabia to fight a war with its rival in the Middle East, using American weapons that it purchased from the U.S., and destroy a country in its -- on its southern border. So I don't understand how we could describe this relationship in other terms apart from being unconditional. The U.S. is supporting Saudi Arabia in destroying an Arab country. It supported Saudi Arabia in moving its troop to Bahrain where a pro-democracy movement was actually gathering momentum.

0:45:53
And the interesting thing is that the U.S. -- the United States Navy is stationed in this small island. Saudi Arabia moved its troop to support a regime that oppresses its own people.

John Donvan:
Okay.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
You want me to talk about Syria. Let me talk about Syria!

John Donvan:
I --

Gregory Gause:
I was wondering if I could ask Madawi a question.

John Donvan:
Sure. Go ahead, Greg.

Gregory Gause:
Madawi, do you think that Saudi Arabia would not be involved in bombing Yemen if the United States had a more distant relationship from Saudi Arabia? Do you think that Saudi --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Well, directing -- directing the plane, giving them the ground intelligence to direct their plane and, unfortunately, the plane hit a mosque --
John Donvan:
Okay, but --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
-- and killed hundreds of people.

John Donvan:
But, Madawi, what about his question, though?

Gregory Gause:
Yeah.

John Donvan:
The question, would Saudi Arabia be doing this if it didn't have U.S. backing?

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Well, if it didn't have American weapons, it wouldn't have done it. It wouldn't have the capabilities.

0:46:46
Gregory Gause:
You don't think the Saudis would have bought weapons from other people? I mean, we're talking about --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
This is an argument I heard in Britain. Every time you tell the British, "Don't sell Saudi Arabia arms that kill people in Yemen," they say, "Well, if we don't, the French would." And now, Greg, you're telling me that, oh, if we didn't sell the Saudis the arms that they need to bomb Yemen, then maybe China or Russia would. But two wrongs don't make it right.

Gregory Gause:
But maybe it's because it's right.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Two wrongs don't make it right.

[applause]

Gregory Gause:
Maybe it's because that argument's right that you heard it in Britain.

John Donvan:
James Jeffrey:
Leaving aside why the Saudis are in Yemen and the level of our support, because I would say under the Obama administration -- I won't say I know -- it was cut back to an absolute minimum. But leaving that aside, can friends tell us how many significant countries, other than total pariahs, have had weapons cut off by the international community in the last 30, 40 years? I can't think of too many so I don't think that the argument that if the Americans didn't give them nobody would give them weapons.

0:47:48
John Donvan:
Mark Lagon.

Mark Lagon:
Well, we would say it is fair to call this an unconditional relationship. The United States regularly under law passed by Congress finds Saudi Arabia to be in the cellar in terms of religious persecution, human trafficking. It doesn't use the sanctions that the United States can because it waives it. It is a false dichotomy to say we have to have the relationship as it has been for decades or it's a divorce. It's -- the burden of proof is on us to say what a conditional relationship would be. I'll tell you. We should tie our arms sales to asking specific things of the Saudis. For instance, audit all those finances of your charities and your private organizations and individuals that have been funding education around the world that has been creating radical extremists. And secondly, if you say that you need to jack up your economy and not rely so much on oil, you need women in that economy. You need to change your male guardianship laws or else you're going to continue to have gender apartheid.

0:48:54
Ask for those things and tie arms sales to them. That is a conditional relationship.

John Donvan:
Let me make a point as having moderated a number of these debates. The temptation to begin to parse the meaning of the language of the motions is often irresistible, and it's --

[laughter]

-- our fault for leaving an opening. That said, it can turn into a fairly sterile exercise to keep talking about what the language means and I actually think there is a dichotomy of views here in which your view is let's -- the status quo mostly isn't very good and we've got to move away and yours is the status quo is mostly acceptable and we shouldn't abandon it. So, and one other point that I want to make --

[talking simultaneously]
John Donvan:
-- so that we don't get stuck on this question of what a conditional --

Gregory Gause:
If I could make on other point on that. Mark accused the Saudis of exercising blackmail against the United States on a number of occasions and he just called for us to use arms sales as a lever to get them to change their domestic politics. I think people in Saudi Arabia would say that's blackmail.

0:50:00
Now, I would say blackmail, schmackmail, it's diplomacy.

[laughter]

Right? But the question is how receptive are not just governments but domestic public opinion to outsiders coming in and telling them how to rearrange their domestic social affairs, even with the best intentions and then saying and if you don't do that we're going to withhold X, Y, or Z?

John Donvan:
Okay.

Gregory Gause:
I actually think that's counter-productive.

John Donvan:
Let me take the substance of your argument as I heard it to the other side and your opponents are arguing that when you weigh up the utter distastefulness of Saudi social justice legal practices and weigh them against the benefits of having Saudi Arabia as an intelligence sharer, as a foiler of plots, you hold your nose and you keep the relationship mostly going the way it is because that's the better choice.

0:50:59
So what about -- what's wrong with that argument? Because I'm sure you disagree with it.

Mark Lagon:
If I may.

John Donvan:
Yeah. Mark Lagon.

Mark Lagon:
There’s an interest based case for the distasteful side of the Saudi policies at home. That's why the domestic matters. U.S. credibility in the world is harmed irreparably if we are standing with such a retrograde power, not only authoritarian, but positively medieval in the way it treats people who for small crimes with execution and lashing. The United States should ask for changes. It doesn't have to underwrite the power of this regime with its arms sales.

Gregory Gause:
Could I --

John Donvan:
Respond to that.

Mark Lagon:
Their argument is it's, you know, it's awful, but it's worth it for what we get out of it. You can't -- it's a relationship so sturdy that we can press them back and ask for things.

0:51:51
We don't have to stand back and accept the status quo about the relationship. We don't have to sue for divorce, but let's be tougher in the relationship.

John Donvan:
Okay. I want to hear from Jim Jeffrey and then Madawi.

James Jeffrey:
Yeah, I think Mark may be confusing the European Union or maybe the Scandinavians with the world. This idea of the world all 180 nations complaining about Saudi Arabia and its behavior most of the world is kind of down there probably in the categories four, five, six, and seven with Saudi Arabia. How many countries of the 180 are in those last four categories?

Mark Lagon:
Well, there are a lot that are in those last categories.

James Jeffrey:
Thank you.

Mark Lagon:
But it's not for --

[laughter]

If the United States doesn't stand up for these values --
James Jeffrey:
No, what I'm trying to say is --

Mark Lagon:
-- our credibility depends on it.

James Jeffrey:
You're trying to say that it's a liability to have such a, you know, stinking fish of an ally
and that this one's trouble. I've never heard that.

Mark Lagon:
If we criticize Russia for killing civilians in Syria, but we help Saudi Arabia kill them in
Yemen.

0:52:49
If we criticize Iran for its horrendous treatment of religious minorities or women, but we
don't do so as vociferously with Saudi Arabia, we look like hypocrites. That harms our
power. That harms our interests.

[applause]

John Donvan:
Madawi?

James Jeffrey:
That's a good point.

[laughter]

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yeah. Well –

John Donvan:
I will let Madawi answer.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Jim, I would like to ask you, how could you justify sending your American troops to
liberate the women in Afghanistan, while at the same time sending the same troops to
protect a regime, such as the Saudi regime, who oppresses its women? We're not
saying that the U.S. should interfere in the domestic affairs of countries. That's not
acceptable in international law. What we are saying is resolve the contradiction. You
cannot be liberating Afghan women and supporting the regime that oppresses me.
James Jeffrey:
You know, we’ve gotten a really big issue here. We’ve gone beyond the issue into one of the core things that probably deserves 10 Intelligence Squared debates. And that is the purposes of our foreign policy. We didn’t send our troops to Afghanistan to liberate women. I’m --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
That was part --

James Jeffrey:
-- happy --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
-- of the discourse at the time --

James Jeffrey:
Wait a second.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
I do remember.

James Jeffrey:
Wait a second. I am not going to be responsible for the idiocy that our government has put out publicly, including what I said. I'm just going to talk about --

[laughter]

-- I --

John Donvan:
You know, we do appreciate honesty and candor at Intelligence Squared, and I think we just scored a new high.

James Jeffrey:
I’m going to talk about why we went in there. We went in there because we lost 3,000 people one fine day in September 2001. That's why we went in there. And that's why we do a lot of other things in the world. This idea that our foreign policy is all about interfering in the internal affairs of very, very different societies that the best of us know very little about, for our purposes -- to make them look more like us -- is a mistake, as a guy who has been sent out there for decades to do it.

0:55:02
I'm a reformed nation builder.
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[laughter and applause]

John Donvan:
Mark Lagon, there is an argument in terms of the social injustices in Saudi Arabia, that things are slowly evolving. Women were allowed to vote last year for the first time. There's a new deputy crown prince who is trying to reform the economy, shift things away from everything being based on oil, to allowing for an entrepreneurial class to rise up. There are a lot of educated young Saudis who seem to be excited and embracing that. That evolution, is that relevant to this conversation? Does that soften your concerns in any way?

Mark Lagon:
I hope that change accelerates. But even after, you know, a puny opportunity for women to be able to take part in municipal elections -- in which 1 percent of those elected were women -- is pretty slow.

0:55:59
And if they still have to be accompanied by a male to go to a job, to go to the polling place. It isn't going very far. I'm glad that Saudi Arabia and the deputy crown prince think that they need to change the economy and move off oil and reform things. But the proof of the pudding is in the tasting. We'll see if any more change happens than previous reform plans we've heard of.

John Donvan:
And Madawi Al-Rasheed, do you want to --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
I think we tend to exaggerate the kind of reforms that we are witnessing in Saudi Arabia. Since the Arab uprising, hundreds of people went to jail -- bloggers, poets, historians, professors at universities. You can go to jail in Saudi Arabia if you write a poem about the king, criticizing his policies. You could go to jail if you Tweet 140 words.

0:56:51
You can go to jail if you write a short article saying that perhaps there is a rivalry between the princes. You go to jail. So, basically, the -- let me just consider the issue of women. Mark mentioned the elections. We -- don’t imagine that Saudis, men and women, are actually participants in elections. There are no elections in Saudi Arabia that bring an elected government. This is an absolute monarchy. What we have is a consultative council. Members -- the members are appointed by the king, and he appointed 30 women to this council. And its role is advisory. But appointing women to this council does not necessarily translate into empowering women. These are the king's women. They are not the women who represent the real women.
0:57:49
So basically the reforms that we are talking about here are very, very cosmetic, superficial. Even the Vision 2030, that is supposed to transform Saudi Arabia into this liberal market economy away from oil is very myopic.

John Donvan:
Okay, let's let Greg Gause come into this conversation.

Gregory Gause:
Look, I don't disagree at all with Mark and Madawi about the nature of, "political reform" in Saudi Arabia. There really isn't much. Women now have the right to vote for meaningless municipal councils the way men vote for meaningless municipal councils.

[laughter]

But our argument is not based upon the fact, oh, the Saudis are improving domestically. I think Madawi's absolutely right that since the Arab Spring what had been a very interesting if very brief and very limited opening in terms of political discourse and public space in Saudi Arabia that we saw in the 2000s, after the 9/11 attacks, has basically shut down. I think she's absolutely right about that.

0:58:48
So I don't premise my argument on the idea that there's political reform in Saudi Arabia. I do premise my argument on the premise that -- and I've doubled the premise. We'll just go for three here now. -- on the idea that if the United States makes domestic change in Saudi Arabia the very top of its agenda the way Mark has advocated, I actually think that that would push back the possibilities of whatever change there might be in Saudi Arabia because people don't like outsiders to tell them what to do.

John Donvan:
I want to go to audience questions now. Yes, sir, you. You were the most energetic hand waver, so if you can stand up and tell us your name.

0:59:57
Male Speaker:
Hi. My name's Kalin Togus [spelled phonetically]. This is for the against side. First of all, to Gregory Gause, my dear friend and your former student Joe Carly says he wants to see you at his wedding in September.

[laughter]

In terms of the actual debate, if we stop supporting Saudi Arabia, how does that embolden Iran? And what does that do internationally if Iran is emboldened?
John Donvan:
Why are you asking that side, because --

Male Speaker:
Or either side, but I just want to hear what they have to say.

John Donvan:
Well, they don't want to do that, so let's put the question -- and I'm not sure this side wants to do it, either, but let me take it to Mark Lagon or to Madawi Al-Rasheed. What would be the consequences of a distancing in the relationship?

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yeah, it's not a zero sum game. The U.S. can have good relations based on interests -- we're not talking about values -- with many countries in the Middle East at -- in the Persian Gulf, and it had actually started doing that. Stopping this unconditional support to Saudi Arabia doesn't mean that the U.S. shifts to Iran.

1:01:01
The U.S. had other choices, for example, recently it had worked with Oman, another country in the Persian Gulf, to reach an agreement on Iran's nuclear program. So there is diversification. But to put all your eggs in one basket and give Saudi Arabia this unconditional support is counterproductive. It's actually -- I'm not arguing that, you know, the U.S. should intervene in Saudi Arabia to change the situation in favor of Saudis. Saudis have asked for reform and have paid a high price. Change is not going to come from the U.S. And the U.S. specifically has a very bad record at instigating political change in countries in a successful way. We have examples. And --

John Donvan:
But before you go into the examples, I want to let the -- your opponents respond to the same question or to your response to that question. Jim Jeffrey.

1:01:54
James Jeffrey:
That was a great question. We got a great answer because we've now gotten into, what do we do if we do pull back from Saudi Arabia. We'll replace Saudi Arabia with Oman. That is, we won't want to put all of our eggs in one basket. In terms of where we put our eggs, Saudi Arabia is a barn. Oman is an outhouse and not a very big one. [Laughs] We need to do serious foreign policy work, folks, all around the world for your security and the security for a lot of people outside of the United States as well. You don't do that with Oman.

John Donvan:
I can let a short -- one more short -- one more short round.
Madawi Al-Rasheed:
I’m sorry, it’s not about size. More countries can have more impact when they don’t have regional ambitions like Saudi Arabia and Iran. The reason why the nuclear agreement worked with Oman is because Oman is small and doesn’t have regional ambitions like Iran and Saudi Arabia.

James Jeffrey:
I like Oman --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
So have equal distance -- equal distance.

Gregory Gause:
But it’s not that. I like Oman, too. And I actually like –

[laughter]

And I actually like the nuclear agreement.

1:02:54
I don’t think that this is an either/or choice as well. I think Madawi is absolutely right that it’s a mistake for the United States to say, we have to pick sides in the Middle East. I think we should try to have good, regular relationships with every major country in the Middle East, which is why I thought the nuclear agreement was a good idea. But that does not mean that Iran doesn’t have regional ambitions. And I think that if you’re looking at a Middle East that is in flames, where there are no really stable governments from the Iranian border to the Mediterranean, it would be a mistake for us to distance ourselves from Saudi Arabia at a time when Iran, frankly, is winning the regional balance of power game.

John Donvan:
Mark Lagon.

Mark Lagon:
It’s a false dichotomy that our subtle friends on the other side are not engaging in to say that we need to suddenly tilt towards Iran if we don’t have a special relationship with Saudi Arabia. Iran is, in large part with its current government, a pernicious actor in the region as well as a human rights abuser.

1:03:53
But to have a more subtle, demanding relationship with Saudi Arabia doesn’t mean cutting off our relationship with them.
Gregory Gause:
I think you guys are trying to have it both ways though--

John Donvan:
I want to move on to another question down in the front row -- or second row, rather. And a mic's coming down your left-hand side.

Female Speaker:
Thank you. I'm Minky Worden from Human Rights Watch. As we discussed tonight, Saudi Arabia is really an outlier in human rights in many respects, among other things. The male guardianship system treats women as legal children, 13 million women and girls as children. The point of a special relationship should be that you're able to get something done. So my question is for the against team. What specific human rights advances or advances on women's rights can you point to over the duration of this special relationship that we might not have had by using leverage and influence on human rights?

1:05:02
John Donvan:
Jim Jeffrey.

James Jeffrey:
As our opponents have noted, there have been some very minor steps on human rights for women. In terms of human rights for women, Saudi Arabia is at the bottom of the barrel. On other questions of human rights it ain't good. We have Mark's scale. But in a lot of areas, it probably crawls up to the number four and number five in certain areas of openness of speech, although that's also limited. I disagree with you, partially because I've looked at a lot of other countries where it's a lot worse. And the question is, is that the purpose of a special relationship, to make countries -- now, this is a question to the audience, and specifically to you. Is it your belief that we are out there with all of our guns and all of our military and all of our importance -- power in the world to make these people follow our norms? I don't think so.

1:05:54
John Donvan:
I'm going to let that be rhetorical to the audience. But I want to let the other side --

[laughter]

No, but I want to let -- see if the other side wants to bite on it. Mark Lagon.

Mark Lagon:
I want to respond to some of the things that Jim has been saying articulately, but occasionally wrong. It is not to, you know, suggest that we want every country
internally to copy the United States. We’re talking about universal values here. And I
would take the step forward that pluralism in a country, access to justice, freedom of
expression, religious freedom, protecting civilians from harm, these are the true path to
stability as opposed to cozy relationships with some of the darkest autocracies in the
world.

1:06:37
Male Speaker:
Hi. I’m Zachary Entrada. There’s been a lot of discussion on the heft that Saudi Arabia
has in the Islamic world. Has it ever tried to use that heft to dampen radical clerics in
Saudi Arabia or in the Islamic world?

John Donvan:
Can you rephrase that question in a way that helps us -- helps vote on which side you
want to be on? In other words, you’re saying, is there evidence that they are a force for
good and therefore softens -- so oftens the critique of this side?

Male Speaker:
Yeah. Is there evidence that they have tried to put a -- maybe not with American
perspective --

John Donvan:
You know, I’m going to pass on the question because this side isn’t really -- this side's
whole argument is, in a sense, it doesn't matter, and this side we already know what
their feeling is and that the answer is no. So, no I'm doing it in a disrespectful way, but I
don't think it would move it forward.

Gregory Gause:
Can I just -- can I say one thing in response to that?

John Donvan:
Oh, there you go.

[laughter]

1:07:28
John Donvan:
Greg, let me move on and see if you can wrap it up.

Gregory Gause:
I bow to your experience.

John Donvan:
Thanks.
Male Speaker:
Hi. I'm Dillon Azaz [spelled phonetically]. I'm here on behalf of myself.

[laughter]

John Donvan:
Good.

Male Speaker:
Just a disclaimer on going back to some of the points you brought up on male guardianship and what not. I was fortunate enough to be raised in a house full of women, no man. I've been living in the states for five years.

John Donvan:
Do you have a question?

Male Speaker:
Yeah, yeah. Coming up. Follow up.

John Donvan:
Okay. I need you to get to it.

Male Speaker:
All the five women back in Saudi in my household do not need me back in Saudi to escort them to vote or what not.

My question is, following up on that, you seem to measure the progress of the Saudi-U.S. relationship in U.S. terms only as a one-way relationship and U.S. benefits, but you also seem to want to have U.S. to intervene for social political reform.

John Donvan:
Again, again, you -- I'm going to pass on this question because the debate is not about forward-going policy in terms of internal I don't think, so I want to -- unless you can rephrase it. Just like him you're saying --

Male Speaker:
How does reinforcing --

Male Speaker:
I think there's a question here.

Male Speaker:
How does reinforcing or vice versa the relationship of the U.S.-Saudi relationship --

Mark Lagon:
You've heard plenty from us on human rights and we've made the case it's an interest-based thing, but let's look at the other issues. If they really had the overlapping interests that the other side would suggest they do, why would they resist intelligence sharing when we annoy them with some demands.

1:09:10
If they really shared our interests, would they do more to make sure that funding from private charities and individuals did not go to extremist development of madrassa's that become a place for radicalization? If they really shared our values, our interests, then wouldn't they do those things?

Gregory Gause:
I think -- I think Mark in a Freudian slip way told us what he's really thinking. He said if they really share our values, which we've said all along they don't.

Mark Lagon:
Agreed.

Gregory Gause:
So the question is could they do more on private charities? Of course they could, but if you look at U.S. Treasury Department officials both in the Bush administration and in the Obama administration have said that they find Saudi cooperation on cracking down on money laundering, on private contributions to jihadist radical organizations to be vastly improved and very good. You can look at all sorts of statements by U.S. officials on that.

1:10:11
Is there still money coming from the Gulf states? Not just Saudi. The Gulf states to private sources? Yeah. The Syria conflict inflamed public opinion in many of these areas and yeah, the money did go. But I tell you -- I'll tell you what Saudis have told me, right? Back in the '90s, the -- especially in the '80s during the Afghan jihad and then the '90s, anybody could go into Saudi Arabia and raise money for any cause. Now that has ended. It is very, very tight as to who can go in and raise money. That does not help their human rights record, right? This is not about freedom. If you want them to crack down on people who are giving money to groups you don't like, you're going to have to give them some room on these human rights questions because that crackdown is part of restricting people's freedoms.

John Donvan:
I want to remind you that we are in the question and answer section of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donvan your moderator, and we have four debaters, two
teams of two debating this motion: The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness.

1:11:13
Did somebody come downstairs? Come on. Come on a little bit forward into the light. Thanks.

Male Speaker:
So, for the against team I have a question for you. How do you feel about the international community's opinion on the U.S. supporting a country that commits various human rights abuses and war crimes in other Middle Eastern countries at the same time criticizing Russia and Iran for committing these --

John Donvan:
Again, I'm going to pass on the question because I think that we've covered it and it breaks my heart to do that to you.

[laughter]

You know what might work?

[applause]

What might work is if you said do you think the U.S. practice of supporting a country responsible for such abuses is going to blow back in a negative way on the U.S. and therefore they should step back, would that be a good idea, you can try that.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Yeah. How do you feel about like the U.S. Would it, like, go back on the U.S. and -- like, yes.

[laughter]

John Donvan:
What's your name?

1:12:15
[applause]

What's your name?

Male Speaker:
My name is Ishan [spelled phonetically].

John Donvan:
Ishan? Well, you've got guts.

[laughter]

James Jeffrey:
Yeah. I --

John Donvan:
Yeah. Jim Jeffrey.

James Jeffrey:
It's a good question, particularly the way John reformulated it.

[laughter]

First of all, I may be violating John's rules. All in all, Mark has a point. If countries did look more like -- if not us, Denmark -- we would have a more stable world. The distance between us that has come into this is I don't know how to make that happen. And one reason for that is there is an international community that is up there in the U.N. It's in NGOs and such. And then there's the international community that I've dealt with for 35 years. That international community worries about the real security threats. Saudi Arabia, other than on the margins 20, 30 years ago with the Wahhabi outreach, was not on anybody's list.

1:13:15
But it's a long list. And the main 911 to deal with that list has been -- ever since the 1940s -- the United States. We may like it--we may not like it. But that's what we've been doing all of that time. And what countries are motivated by is whether we stand by our allies. I myself didn't know if we did the right thing, abandoning Mubarak, from the standpoint of he was a total loser by the time he left, and it was clear he was going down. But what happened around the world was we got a hell of a lot more reaction and blowback around the world for letting a good ally go who put two divisions into Saudi Arabia in 1990 to stand with us against Saddam -- than we have ever gotten for our human rights cozying up with somebody who is violating them. That's the way the world works --

John Donvan:
Mark Lagon --

[applause]
Mark Lagon:
The United --

John Donvan:
Mark Lagon.

Mark Lagon:
The United States won't be able to -- and maybe shouldn't try to change the internal affairs of other countries overnight.

1:14:15
But it would be a more stable and prosperous world if there was movement in that direction. I'll tell you one way we won't get there faster -- is to continue to have the relationship that we have now, which is largely unconditional. Barack Obama had misgivings. He said it was complicated, as you quoted it. But we sold $116 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia in the eight years that he was president. He had troubles with this regime, but the moment King Abdullah died, he made sure he went to that funeral and he gave the most unbelievable, over-the-top send-off for the dead king. We have an unconditional relationship. That's not going to get you more slowly in the direction of reform.

John Donvan:
Thank you, sir, for your question. Thanks very much. Right there. Yes. You just did that -- now, if you can stand up. The mic is going to come down left-hand side to you.

1:15:12
Female Speaker:
Hi. My name is Kylie McKenna [spelled phonetically], and I'm representing the Staten Island School of Civic Leadership.

John Donvan:
Welcome.

[laughter]

Female Speaker:
I know --

John Donvan:
I'm not familiar.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
Bit [spelled phonetically] of an omen.

[laugher and applause]

Female Speaker:  
I know that we spoke about this a lot, but I would like to make one -- to ask one more question about a point that hasn't been made yet about this. As evidence -- oh, and this is for the --

John Donvan:  
For side?

Female Speaker:  
Pro side. Yes.

John Donvan:  
[affirmative]

Female Speaker:  
As evidence, you stated how the rights of people of Saudi Arabia are being denied, proving that we cannot support this relationship. But if we go back to 300 years ago, to the Revolutionary War, we had slaves and we had unequal rights to women and both -- Native Americans. Would France and Spain both leave us because of what we had done? Thank you.

1:16:17
John Donvan:  
I'm going to allow it --

[applause]

Let's go and see what Madawi --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:  
I think the words "leave us" is not on the agenda of this debate. It is about changing what is called a special relationship, the unconditional relationship, into something that is more complicated. It is not a straightforward either-or situation. We are not asking the U.S. to intervene in Saudi Arabia's domestic affairs. But we are asking the U.S. to put conditions on the arms sales that kill people in neighboring countries -- in Yemen, for example -- or allow Saudi Arabia to become hawkish. We talked about Mubarak. And this is something that Jim mentioned, that the U.S. cannot just jump and save countries because it doesn't work.

1:17:11

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In 1979, the major ally of the U.S., the shah of Iran fell under the pressure of a mass revolution, and the U.S. couldn't do anything despite the fact that the U.S. had a close connection with intelligence services of Iran, with the -- with the Iranian government. And the same thing will happen in Saudi Arabia. If there is a problem, the U.S. cannot, and perhaps will not be able to save the regime. So it is time to switch that relationship from an unconditional support to the regime to a support of the Saudi people who are actually going to be there after the regime disappears. And the relationship will become stronger if the U.S. distances itself from the excesses of the Saudi regime.

John Donvan:
Okay. I want to take one more question. Right down the aisle here, sir.

1:18:07
Male Speaker:
Good evening. My name is Connor Osteen. My question is for the against side. Going to the geopolitical interests, I think I'm still a little confused on some of this. So as I understand it, you presented three geopolitical interests that we have for Saudi Arabia. We have oil, we have containing Iran, and we have intelligence sharing. What I'm a little confused about still is what exactly is our interest in containing Iran at this point. These are two powers that both have regional aspirations. Why do we choose one over the other? In terms of intelligence sharing, we have very strong signals intelligence. Our human intelligence is very weak. To what extent does Saudi Arabia actually help us in the intelligence that we use to protect ourselves? And in terms of oil, it seems like we could defend our ability to acquire -- the world's ability to acquire oil --

John Donvan:
You know, I --

Male Speaker:
-- without having a relationship --

John Donvan:
You opened up as a question that would take six or seven minutes to answer. Which one would you want to pick; the intelligence?

Male Speaker:
Actually, containing Iran, I think would be the most --

John Donvan:
Containing Iran. Okay, so why -- you know, between Saudi Arabia and Iran, we're choosing Saudi Arabia. Why?
James Jeffrey:
Yeah. That's a good question. And believe me, the last administration actually wrestled with that, and it came to the conclusion, "Saudi Arabia, you've got to learn to share the Middle East with Iran," and Iran that we thought -- encouraged by the negotiations for the JCPOA or the nuclear agreement would start behaving. 600,000 dead Syrians later, I think this issue is no longer on the table. Iran -- essentially, there are two kinds of countries in the world from a geopolitical standpoint: Those who are trying to change the global order in some kind of illegitimate and typically violent way -- that's the Soviet Union, it was Japan and Germany. It was Milosevic in the Balkans. It was Saddam. It's been Iran. It's North Korea. And there's those regimes, some of which are pretty deplorable internally, that basically are willing to live with and to one or another degree, halfheartedly in a goofy way often sometimes with full intelligence sharing, sometimes with signals, yes, human no, are willing to work with us to preserve that international order which benefits us all.

1:20:20
Saudi is in the latter category. Iran is the former category. For me, that closes the case.

[applause]

John Donvan:
Okay. You know, I'm -- I would love to -- I'm trying to find some women to ask some questions.

Female Speaker:
I'm here!

[laughter]

John Donvan:
I'm trying to find some women who are sitting in a place where you can see them. Yeah, thanks. Over in the corner.

My name is Bahar [spelled phonetically]. My question is for the "for" team. So given the recent executive order on immigration, do you feel that this special relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia has unfairly excluded Saudi Arabia from the list of possible -- of countries said to have basically hot beds of terrorism?

1:20:55
John Donvan:
I'm going to pass on the question because it's a question about current policy as opposed to relationship. So I'll go to the seat in front of you.

Female Speaker:
Hi.

[applause]

The kids gave me courage to speak. So, given the center -- given the religious center of power in Saudi Arabia, I have been given no confidence that there are going to be significant changes possible. So this goes to the proponents’ side. What indications have you seen that, within Saudi Arabia, there are concessions that are going to be feasible?

John Donvan:
Well, you would -- why are you asking this side, because again, they're not sounding very confident about --

Female Speaker:
Well, the reason I'm asking this side is because you mentioned, sir, that you're not suggesting a complete walk-away, correct?

1:21:49
Mark Lagon:
Right. I think we need conditionality and to actually forward some requests.

Female Speaker:
Perhaps to the other side --

John Donvan:
Yeah, I think it's more to --

Female Speaker:
-- what indications have you seen that some concessions are feasible?

Gregory Gause:
Well, we're not arguing that there should be concessions. We're not arguing that American policy --

Mark Lagon:
What kind of relationship is that--

Gregory Gause:
We're not -- we're arguing that we have --

Mark Lagon:
No concessions?
Gregory Gause:
Thank you, Mark. Thanks for your help. I'll take it from here.

[laughter]

We're not arguing on our side that we should be pressing Saudi Arabia for concessions on their domestic politics. We're arguing that the leverage we have with Saudi Arabia should be used to secure America's chief interests in the region, vis-a-vis counterterrorism, al-Qaeda, and ISIS, where we do share interests.

1:22:44
But, as Mark said, we don't maybe share priorities. I think the Saudis have prioritized the fight against Iran, whereas we have prioritized the fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda, trying to get them to do less in Yemen and more --

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yes, because Saudi Arabia --

Gregory Gause:
-- and more -- excuse me. More --

John Donvan:
No, your -- your --

Gregory Gause:
-- more against ISIS I think would be an excellent way to use our leverage. I think the questioner is absolutely right that what leverage we have on Saudi Arabia is not going to move this huge boulder about social change in Saudi Arabia. We should use that leverage for specific foreign policy goals where we might actually get some movement.

John Donvan:
And that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our motion is the special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. In a moment we're going to move on to round three. It will be opening statement -- closing statements by each debater in turn. They there be two minutes each. And immediately after that, we're going to have you vote again.

1:23:44
So remember how you voted the first time. So, round three, closing statements by each debater in turn. The motion is: The special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. Here making his closing statement for the motion, Mark Lagon, a fellow and
distinguished senior scholar in the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

Mark Lagon:
Thanks for listening to our case. Professor Al-Rasheed and I will end on some more personal notes. Like Jim Jeffrey, I served as a diplomat at the State Department. In late 2008, I visited Saudi Arabia as the ambassador at large to combat human trafficking for the United States. There's a large problem of human trafficking in Saudi Arabia. Of the 27 or 28 million people who live there, a good 10 million of them are foreigners who are working as migrant workers or as domestic workers or in other forms.

1:24:37
Of all the countries I visited as the U.S. envoy to combat human trafficking, in Latin America, Europe, Eurasia, multiple regions of Africa and all over Asia, in no capital did I feel that I was received with more of a distinct air of dismissiveness than in Riyadh. And that includes all of the autocratic allies of the United States of the Gulf. Why? Because on the human trafficking report, Saudi Arabia was in the lowest category. And on religious freedom, a country of particular concern subject to U.S. sanctions. But we waived them. Why was the Saudi regime so unconcerned about dialogue? Not as a human rights question, but because the special relationship is largely unconditional. We argue the United States doesn't need Saudi Arabia as much as it once did, especially for oil.

1:25:35
That an unquestioning association with Saudi Arabia, given its executions, its gender apartheid, it's harm to civilians and its actions in Yemen, hurts U.S. standing and interests. And we would argue that the regime and the relationship are sturdy enough that it can withstand some conditions and some demands. Please support the position of the resolved idea that the U.S. special relationship has outlived its usefulness in its present form. Short of a divorce, unquestioning alignment with Saudi Arabia needs to end.

John Donvan:
Thank you, Mark Lagon.

[applause]

The motion, the special U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness. And here making his closing statement against this motion, Gregory Gause, professor and head of international affairs at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A & M.

Gregory Gause:
Our friends on the other side want to eat their cake and have it too. They would have you think that the United States would not lose anything in terms of the values -- the value -- the foreign policy values that it gets from its relationship with Saudi Arabia by putting domestic Saudi issues at the forefront of the relationship.

1:26:46
I think that this audience is too smart to buy that. You know that if something -- if you change something people are going to want to change how they deal with you. The Middle East is in flames right now. Weak and failed states are at the root of that crisis from Libya to Syria to Iraq to Yemen. I think it would be the height of folly to put at risk a relationship that has endured for decades and been valuable for the United States, the height of folly to put that relationship at risk when that country, Saudi Arabia, is itself pretty stable and has influence in the various conflicts occurring in the region.

1:27:33
I think it would be a profound mistake for us to experiment with this relationship at a time when so many parts of the Middle East are unstable, convulsed in wars, civil wars, where regional war is a possibility. I think it would be a grave mistake for us to begin an experiment with a country that has had a very productive relationship with the United States. So I ask you to vote no on this motion. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donvan:
Thank you, Mark Lagon. And the motion again, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. And here making her closing statement in support of the motion, Madawi Al-Rasheed, a visiting professor at the Middle East Center at the London School of Economics.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
I go back to my original statement that this U.S.-Saudi relationship has outlived its usefulness and when talking about the domestic affairs I brought them up so that you are aware that suppressing the Saudi people is counterproductive and it is going to implode if not today, in the future.

1:28:48
My colleague, Professor Gause, wrote on the back of one of my books and I quote "No one writing in English followed the Saudi political scene more closely and more critically than she does." He knows that he and I cannot be sitting in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, debating this. And this is the problem. By oppressing Saudi people, by the depression that is so prevalent in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia loses the brightest people who are actually the future of the country. Like today there are a hundred thousand or even more than that, slightly more than that, Saudi students studying in the U.S.
If those people utter a word of criticism of the Saudi government they sabotage their scholarship and also they can get their passports confiscated or even their nationality withdrawn. Those people are going to seek asylum nowhere but in this country and if we, all our -- the Saudis who have been educated leave the country were again to leave in the space a vacuum that is going to be filled by people exactly the same people who perpetrated that horrible act on 9/11. So there will be a vacuum created and this vacuum is going to hit not only Saudi people, but the U.S. I just want to conclude by giving you one personal story and allow me to share it with you. I was in the process of publishing a book called, "A History of Saudi Arabia," and the Saudi -- their efficient intelligence services found out that I was writing this book in London.

So they called my father. As a woman they don’t want to talk to me so they have to go to my father to warn me. So, the Saudi ambassador in Paris calls my father and said to him, "If your daughter publishes that book --"

John Donvan:
Madawi.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
-- we are going to take disciplinary action."

John Donvan:
Madawi, I'm sorry. You're a minute over, but we're going to have a break where you can complete telling that story.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Okay.

John Donvan:
All right. Thank you very much. Let's give her a round of applause.

[applause]

Our motion is this, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. And here making his closing statement against the motion, James Jeffrey, a distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute.

James Jeffrey:
Thank you, John.

[applause]
Mark's visit to Riyadh rings true because I've had a visit very similar to that on a somewhat different subject, with a somewhat similar response. But I want to talk about a third visit of American officials to Riyadh in the summer of 1990. Saddam had gobbled up Kuwait in two days, and everybody was worried that the whole Middle East would blow up. The Saudis were horrified and frightened of Saddam. They were also frightened about American possibly deploying troops, leading to upheaval in the Kingdom.

1:31:54

The American delegation came out and said, "We'll stand by you, but you have to stand by us. We have to go all the way if we have to. This isn't just defending Saudi Arabia, although we'll do that. This is going into Kuwait and throwing them out if we can't get them out diplomatically." The Saudis thought long and hard, and they said yes. For 12 years, good things flowed in that region from that one decision: the defeat of Saddam, the liberation of Kuwait, a Kurdistan in Northern Iraq that is one of the real success stories of the Middle East, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians, the peace between Jordan and Israel, and many other things as well. That's what the Saudis are there for. This president -- or the next one -- is going to get one of those famous calls at 3:00 in the morning. And it probably will be involving the Middle East.

1:32:52

He or she is immediately going to think, "Where is Saudi Arabia?" My argument tonight is we need that country. That country needs us. If we tamper with that relationship, for whatever superficial or secondary reason, they may not be there the way we need them, at a very, very dangerous moment for both them and for us. Thank you very much. Please vote against this.

John Donvan:
Thank you, James Jeffrey.

[applause]

And that concludes our closing statements. And now it's time to see which side you judge has argued the best. I'm going to ask you again to go to the keypads at your seat and vote the same way. After hearing the arguments, if you agree with the motion -- The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness -- push number one. If you disagree, push number two. If you became or remain undecided, push number three.

1:33:47

Okay. We're going to have the results in just a minute. Before we do that, the first thing I want to say is I so respect or appreciate the spirit in which these debaters -- who obviously all do respect one another -- brought a robust argument, in a civil, fact-filled
way. It's what we aim for, and I think it's what we achieved. Congratulations to all of you for doing that.

[applause]

I also want to thank everybody who got up and asked a question, and that includes the questions that I might have passed on.

1:34:17
I totally respect your -- the courage and guts it gets to take to stand up, and I also believe I understand the passion of some of the questions, even on those I passed on. So, I don't want to communicate any sort of disregard for those questions. I respect that you did that. And for the guy I helped a little bit, I want to see you back here, and I'll call on you again if you do that. So, to everybody who got up and moved the conversation along by doing that, thank you.

[applause]

And the other thing that broke my heart tonight was cutting off Madawi in the middle of your story. So, Madawi, the floor is yours to finish.

Madawi Al-Rasheed:
Yeah. I was just -- so, the ambassador, Saudi ambassador called my father and said that he's going to take the scary action if I publish a history book. And I was actually outside Saudi Arabia. Imagine what would have happened to me if I was in Saudi Arabia. So, basically, I went ahead and published the book.

1:35:14
So, what I'm saying is that --

[applause]

-- there are many Saudis, women and men like me, who would like to see a better future. And they get disillusioned when the U.S. supports this repressive regime.

[applause]

We're not saying that -- it is those people that we lose because of this double-standard that applies in its relationship to Saudi Arabia. Then U.S. interests will be affected, simply because the people who have the prospect for change, who want to change in positive ways, would leave the country. And we've already seen so many Saudis, on scholarship in the U.S., asking for asylum in order to stay here. If all of those people don't go back, then there is no future. Not only for Saudi Arabia, but for a U.S.-Saudi relationship.
John Donvan:
Thank you, Madawi. Tough time to be asking for asylum, though.

1:36:15
[applause]

Thank you. I'm sorry that I had to cut you off on that. I -- while we're waiting for the results, I just want to say this about our organization, Intelligence Squared U.S. We aspire to do what we achieved here tonight -- as I just said, civil debate, robust, tough testing of ideas by smart people, in a fair-minded way. We -- I want to point out that we do this as a non-profit exercise. We are a philanthropy. We put this out to the world in the form of podcasts and radio broadcasts, and the price that you pay for tickets takes -- helps in a very, very small way. But we are very, very grateful to people who are supporting us in bigger ways -- big ways and small. We would appreciate it, if you were moved to do so, if you would make a donation to Intelligence Squared U.S., and you can do so by going to our website. Also, I've said this before, but I want to remind you that this will -- debate that you witnessed will exist as a podcast, minus all of the parts where I made mistakes. Those will somehow magically disappear. It happens every time.

1:37:14
So, you can listen to that. You can check with your local radio listening -- listings for the public radio stations covering it, but also, you can look online through -- we exist on the Roku App, and also, we have an app through the Android Play store and through the Apple store. That will give you access to all of our debates, all of them that we've done so far, including this one. Our next debate will be here on Wednesday, March 1st. The motion will be: "Charter Schools are Overrated." We would love to see you there. Okay. So, it's all in now. I have the final results. You have voted twice. Remember, it's the team whose numbers have changed the most between the first and the second vote that determines our winners -- the motion being this, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. In the first vote, 28 percent of you agreed with that. 26 percent were against. 46 percent were undecided. Close to a split. In the second vote, the team arguing for the motion, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness, they went from 28 percent to 31 percent in the second vote. That's -- they picked up 3 percentage points, which is the number to beat.

1:38:24
Let's look at the other team -- against. The first vote was 26 percent. Their second vote was 58 percent. They picked up 32 percent –

[applause]
-- the team arguing against the motion, The Special U.S.-Saudi Relationship Has Outlived Its Usefulness. Our winners. Our congratulations to them. Thank you from me, John Donvan, and Intelligence Squared U.S. We'll see you next time.

[applause]