

AUGUST 12, 2002

SAUDI ARABIA: ALLY OR ENEMY?

=====GulfWire~~Perspectives=====

EDITOR'S NOTE

On August 12, 2002, Regional News Network Television's Washington Bureau Chief Jeff Santos and Producer Rich French in New York interviewed "GulfWire" Publisher Dr. John Duke Anthony for its afternoon news show on the topic, "Saudi Arabia: Ally or Enemy?"

RNN describes itself as a politically centric, independent television news network, based in New York City, with an estimated three million viewers in the states of New York and New Jersey.

Dr. Anthony also gave an interview today to ABC Radio.

Following are rough and unofficial transcriptions of the interviews.

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SAUDI ARABIA: ALLY OR ENEMY?
Regional News Network Television

RNN: We continue to hear the debate about whether Saudi Arabia is enemy or ally. Dr. Anthony, what is your view?

ANTHONY: Saudi Arabia has been a friend, an ally, and a strategic partner of the United States for more than sixty years.

RNN: That's not what I hear. There's a lot of talk about the Kingdom being a hotbed of terrorism and extremism.

Just the other day, there was a report about a Rand Corporation consultant briefing the Department of Defense's Policy Review Board that, and I quote, "The Saudis are active at every level of the terror chain, from planners to financiers, from cadre to foot-soldier, from ideologist to cheerleader."

Of course, subsequently numerous people in the U.S. Government were quick to say that this is not true. But what do you have to say about that?

ANTHONY: I disagree with what the individual said. Many others disagreed as well.

RNN: But it seems to me that there's a lot more to it than that. The Saudis have been contributing millions to terrorists, to suicide bombers, to terrorist groups like Hamas and others.

I'm hearing a lot of people saying that the Saudis support our enemies and oppose our friends. They have sent more than 230 million dollars to so-called charitable organizations that have funneled money to Hamas.

They have been behind thousands of madrasahs in Afghanistan and Pakistan that are critical of Israel and preach hatred of the United States.

ANTHONY: The kingdom has not contributed any moneys to suicide bombers - not one. It has contributed to humanitarian causes, just as we have, just as the European Union has. It is not true that it has contributed to a single suicide bomber.

RNN: Well, there's disagreement among people regarding this. And it is well known that Saudi Arabia has been behind the building of thousands of madrasahs in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

ANTHONY: That's true. So were we. We were together in this. Both of us were committed to various "hearts and minds" programs for the poor of these two countries. We were together in wanting to ensure that neither country's peoples followed the radical way of Ayatollah Khomeini. This was the objective. We were together on this.

RNN: Look, you cannot tell me that 15 of the 19 hijackers on September 11 were not Saudi Arabians, that its schools are not critical of Israel and that its schools do not teach hatred of the United States.

ANTHONY: You're absolutely right about 15 of the 19 being from Saudi Arabia. All I can tell you is that the Kingdom acknowledges this, that it is as shocked by the fact as anyone, that, indeed, it is appalled by what happened.

But that has nothing to do with the fact that the Kingdom has been, and remains, an ally of the United States, a key partner in the campaign against terrorism, of which Saudi Arabia itself has been a victim and remains a major target.

What many tend to lose sight of is that the Kingdom continues to be a safe, stable, and secure source of the energy that drives our economy and is key to the material well being of everyone on this planet.

RNN: But this flies in the face of a lot of discontent that people have about Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi Islam is an extremist sect. The Kingdom is spreading it to the Gulf, where, it is becoming clear that people don't like it. And the Kingdom has no elections; it is not a democracy.

ANTHONY: If you're going to talk about democracy, neither we nor any other country has a democracy, either.

What others and we have is not the same as "democracy," certainly if one is definitionally accurate and precise. "Demos" stands for "people," and

"cracis" stands for "rule." No country in the world has that. What we have instead is varying forms of representative or unrepresentative government.

What one has in Saudi Arabia is a system different from ours, but one that is nonetheless not unrepresentative. It's a system that is based heavily on consultation and consensus.

RNN: But this hardly squares with the fact that many regard it as a hotbed of extremism.

ANTHONY: The country has its faults. But it is far and away a country with a degree of domestic peace, stability, and security that would rival any country in the 140 nations that constitute the developing world.

In terms of its low incidence of crime, compared to us, it puts us to shame. In terms of its low levels of violence, drugs, alcoholism, broken families, and respect for the family, compared to us, it puts us to shame.

In addition, Saudi Arabia has been a major leader in and contributor to many of the world's most important international organizations. Together with the United States, it's a co-founder of the United Nations and the UN Charter.

It's also a co-founder of the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. It's played a major role within the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Ask the members of any of these organizations and they will tell you that Saudi Arabia's leadership and membership has been consistently moderate and responsible.

It's not a hotbed of foment and support for terrorism. I know this flies in the face of what many pundits and commentators imply - indeed what many are keen to make explicit in their half-baked analyses -- but it's the truth.

RNN: Well, it seems that a lot of people disagree. Still, I bet you that if we decide to invade Iraq, Saudi Arabia would not let us take off from any of its bases.

ANTHONY: One of the reasons is that, along with nearly every other country in the world, it does not believe we have made a credible case for our doing so.

RNN: Thank you.

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SAUDI ARABIA: FRIEND OR FOE?
ABC Radio

ABC RADIO: In the ongoing talk about the United States invading Iraq, there's increasing background noise about whether Saudi Arabia is a friend or foe. Do you feel that it's one or the other?

DR. ANTHONY: Yes, it's a friend. It's been one for more than sixty years. There's a continuum of American national interests with regard to Saudi Arabia from which the United States has derived immense benefit. It begins with strategic interests related to the larger issues of war and peace. It continues through economic interests, from which the benefits the United States has received are the envy of the rest of the world. It extends through political, commercial, and regional defense interests, in all of which the United States has benefited.

ABC: In your view, are we likely to invade Iraq?

ANTHONY: A clear and convincing case of the need for us to do so has yet to be made. As one can see, despite a continuous campaign in the direction that we do so, it is hard to find a single country among the 189 members of the United Nations that has stated it will stand with us if we insist on doing this. This means that, after all this time, we remain alone, and alone abroad, if one can help it, is not where one would ever want to be.

ABC: And now we see even leading members of Congress express reservations about invading Iraq.

ANTHONY: Their reservations are a case in point. They're relevant.

ABC: Then what's driving all this talk about Saudi Arabia being a foe?

ANTHONY: There are a great many things driving it. One can see that it's picked up steam since March when the Kingdom's Crown Prince announced his Mideast peace proposal with a view to settling the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. What was unique with regard to the proposal is that all the other 21 Arab states endorsed it.

It's been a long time since a degree of Arab unity on something that important has been achieved. That, in itself, has been and is a cause of concern to some in Israel and among Israel's more ardent supporters in the United States.

If one looks at the larger picture over time, whenever there has been any semblance of Arab unity on this particular issue, many in the United States, and elsewhere, too, have looked for ways to weaken that unity and to find ways to constrain it. So this is one piece of it.

ABC: But if we were to invade Iraq for the purpose of removing Saddam Hussein and ridding the country of its weapons of mass destruction, would that be the end of it? Would Iraq try to develop such weapons with or without Saddam?

ANTHONY: The likelihood is, yes, that other Iraqi leaders would want to develop such weapons -- for two reasons, at least. A large number of Iraqis believe that one of the reasons they were not defeated by the Iranians in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war is that Iranians were aware that Iraq had such weapons and, because of this, they did not wish to push the conflict between them to the brink.

Many Iraqis also believe that one of the reasons the United States did not continue the war after expelling Iraq from Kuwait was American knowledge that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. This kind of thinking and reasoning would likely be compelling to any Iraqi leader.

There's also the fact that Iran has such weapons, that Pakistan and India, as well as the Israelis, Chinese, Russians, the French, the British, and we ourselves have them.

ABC: But some argue that one of the reasons President Bush wants to invade Iraq has to do with the fact that there is unfinished business relating to his father. Could that have anything to do with why he wants to invade Iraq?

What is likely to happen? If one looks after next year, to the period in which the son will likely be looking to be re-elected President, do you think this could be one of the reasons he would want to invade Iraq?

ANTHONY: Hardly. For one, trying to look beyond next year is laced with surmise and the hypothetical. It's one thing to say that the sins of the father are often visited upon the son. But in this instance, I would rule out such a motivation being one of the primary determinants of such a decision by the commander-in-chief of the United States.

ABC: Have you been following what Secretary Rumsfeld has said regarding the United States is going to use Special Forces to combat terrorism in various places around the world?

ANTHONY: Yes.

ABC: What do you think about that?

ANTHONY: There's logic to it. Special Forces are trained for a variety of unconventional missions. We've had them a long time. We've used them in quite a few places. Granada and Panama are two. Somalia's another. Earlier, albeit not successfully, there was Iran.

ABC: Thank you very much.

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o Dr. John Duke Anthony, Publisher of GulfWire, is also President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. All three are Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and non-governmental organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.