

commentary

from other pens...

Is alliance worth keeping? Most experts will say yes

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Saudi Arabia, says former CIA Director James Woolsey, “deserves a very large part of the blame for Sept. 11. I do not think we should do anything more with them right now than be cordial.” Woolsey’s is a minority view. It certainly is at odds with that of the Bush administration and of other outside experts, several of whom believe the United States has no choice but to enhance cooperation with the recalcitrant but strategically placed oil-rich kingdom. Woolsey’s biting comment about Saudi Arabia refers in part to the Saudi practice, both at the government and private levels, of financing true-believing Muslim activists in distant lands, including Central and South Asia. In some cases, their militancy has been transformed into support for terrorism, and the Saudis’ lack of internal controls to keep tabs on these radicals has come back to haunt them. American diplomats report the Saudis were horrified to learn that 15 of the 19 al-Qaida terror network operatives who participated in the Sept. 11 suicide hijackings were Saudi nationals. Woolsey, who served as CIA director from 1993 to 1995, says the United States should hold the Saudis accountable. “The Saudis have exported an extreme form of Islamist philosophy,” he says. “Much of the money for al-Qaida has come from Saudi Arabia.” James Phillips of the Heritage Foundation agrees the Saudis acted irresponsibly in “allowing their money to slosh around in volatile parts of the world.” But he says the Bush administration is right to look at the big picture, pointing to the Saudi role as the world’s single largest oil exporter and as a voice of moderation in the Arab world. Phillips adds if the Saudi monarchy were to fall, the successor regime almost certainly would be far more hostile to the United States. The Bush administration has been unwavering in defense of Saudi cooperation in the war on terrorism, insisting the Saudis have willingly done all that has been asked of them. This has not prevented a slew of media accounts suggesting the Saudis have been less than fully cooperative. A recently retired U.S. diplomat — a veteran Saudi-watcher — says Saudi cooperation has been grudging. The Saudis have been engaged in a balancing act, taking steps to preserve their long-standing alliance with Washington in a way that doesn’t alienate local Islamic militants long opposed to the U.S. for its support of Israel, the former diplomat said. The most notorious Saudi militant, of course, is Osama bin Laden, purported mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks. One of his chief grievances is the presence of U.S. forces — “infidels,” as he sees them — on Saudi territory. Many of bin Laden’s compatriots share his outrage. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies said the Saudis thought they were buying stability by financing Islamic emissaries, but the strategy backfired. It was the United States, he said, that persuaded the Saudis to carry out these activities in Afghanistan during the 1980s to counter the Soviet military presence there. After the Soviet withdrawal and the breakup of the Soviet Union, he said, many Americans urged the Saudis to continue their operations as a hedge against Russian expansion into the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Cordesman proposes increased cooperation with the Saudis, including data sharing on terrorist finances, on Saudis who leave their homeland and on those who live in the United States. He added that the Saudis must also do a better job of monitoring Islamic radicals operating inside their own country. “If you want to get results, you need partnership,” he said. Cordesman has little patience with what he calls the lobby in Washington trying to blame the Saudis for the events of Sept. 11. “The Saudis are not innocent,” he said, “but neither are we.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



Harry was a quiet Christmas guest

Harry crawled under the bed and spent his entire Christmas vacation in a corner. That was exactly how he liked it, daughter Lindsay said, as she carefully set the box turtle down in her room the day she arrived home. As pets go — Harry did. I didn’t see him again until she pulled the bed away from the wall as she was getting ready to leave and retrieved the missing terrapin from his hidey hole. She claimed that she had fed him during the week he was under the bed. You couldn’t have proved it by me, but she showed me the meal worms she had kept on top of our television for the week. There were, she said, several missing. I was ecstatic. Especially since I hadn’t bothered to look in the little box on top of the television. Meal worms are just that — fat, ugly, slug-like



cynthia haynes

• open season

worms that get in meal. I’m certainly glad there were fewer of them, but I could have wished that the turtle could pick a less disgusting diet. Lindsay said he prefers June bugs but they are hard to come by in the middle of the winter, so she buys him meal worms at the pet shop. That’s almost as bad as the times I’ve had to go to the pet shop to buy crickets to feed my son’s lizards. Harry is, by the way, the class turtle at McLouth

Middle School, where Miss Lindsay is a science teacher. We were slated to get the class rabbit also, but at the last minute, one of the munchkins took him home. This was fine for us, I found out, but not so good for the rabbit — he became lunch for the family dog. I guess we’re really lucky that daughter only keeps a few animals in the classroom. One science teacher here kept snakes, lizards and a tarantula in her classroom. I’m not sure I’m ready to deal with any spider that’s big enough to have mice for lunch. Maybe daughter could just overfeed the meal worms and use them as pets for her class. Her seventh and eighth-graders should love that. Especially the girls.

2002 dawns as a year of progress, hope

If 2001 was a year of violence and despair, then 2002 dawns with the prospect of a year of progress and, if not peace, at least hope. The old year opened in America with a president taking office with as slim a margin — some would say no margin — as anyone could remember. Then, President George W. Bush watched as his party lost its shaky hold on the Senate. His appointments languished as Democrats took the reins. The county seemed unable to escape the tribulations of Congressman Gary Condit, who’s intern had disappeared. While he admitted having a relationship with the young women, he denied having anything to do with her disappearance. And for weeks, it seemed as though there was nothing else in the news. Sept. 11 changed all that. We went from a nation with no news and no sense of purpose, to a nation glued to the news. Millions of Americans watched in horror as, over an over again, the World Trade Center towers were struck, burned and collapsed. The weak-mandate president took charge, sending our military to hunt down those responsible. The results so far have been nothing short of spectacular. In three short months, American troops and pi-



steve haynes

• along the sappa

lots have helped Afghan forces accomplish feats which the entire Soviet Red Army could not do. The evil Taliban regime has been swept from power, it’s leaders fleeing into the hills. Osama bin Laden has gone to ground, fleeing his seat of power, running (presumably) into the mountains of tribal Pakistan. Unsure at first of what we wanted to accomplish, America has been welcomed as a savior by the Afghan people. Thousands of women shed their wraps, and thousands of men lined up for a shave. There was celebration in the streets as the Taliban fled. Though we have yet to capture bin Laden or the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, we do have more than 300 al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in custody. Our military star has never shown more brightly.

Our performance in the field and in the air has been spectacular. Our losses, though regrettable and tragic, have been strikingly few. At home, our president is accepted as a world leader, a serious symbol of American determination. Around the world, other nations look to our country to lead the fight against terrorism. All is not right. There is far too much death and destruction in the Mideast. India and Pakistan are facing off once again, the first time with nuclear arms on both sides. There are still nations in Africa and the Mideast that sponsor and support terrorism. But at home and abroad, the picture is far more rosy that we might have expected by this time. Even the 9/11 death toll continues to shrink as officials account for hundreds of people once thought to have been in the towers. In New York, workers have cleared away debris into the subbasements. Crews are clearing away the rubble at the Pentagon, preparing to rebuild the damaged section. There have been no more attacks, though we continue to fear them. As always, there is the hope that mankind will continue to move not toward darkness, but as we have throughout history, toward the light. That is the gift of 2002.

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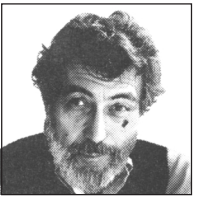
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Is free speech un-American?

It has long been evident many college students have been badly educated in why they are Americans. If they were told Bismarck said the most remarkable invention in world history was the American Constitution and its Bill of Rights, their eyes would glaze over. Conservative student newspapers have been stolen and burned, and conservative speakers have been booed down on many campuses. Last year in New York, when I wrote in support of a proposal to mandate the teaching of American history at the city university, I was attacked by several of its department heads for being jingoistic. Actually, as the American Council of Alumni and Trustees has shown, most of the nation’s elite colleges and universities do not require courses in our history or Constitution.



nat hentoff

• commentary

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more insistent, the beleaguered speaker asked what the president’s creation of military tribunals says “about our willingness to suspend a suspect’s rights.” She said: “I absolutely agree with President Bush. Our liberty will not be assured until terrorism is wiped out. But... we should question what the long-term effect of the administration’s recent policies will have on our values.” With three minutes left of her speech, she could no longer be heard, and left the stage. The majority of the letters and e-mails to her newspaper, The Sacramento Bee, attacked her — not those who suppressed her First Amendment right to speak. Said one indignant writer: “The graduates deserved and expected a speaker who was inspirational and motivational. Heaphy, instead, chose to deliver an emotional, depressing speech that had nothing to do with the Class of 2001.” It is clear Heaphy’s “depressing” speech was intended to get the students to think about the decisions being made by our government that, she told them, “will shape America’s future — your future. As you take your role in society, you’ll have the chance — through words and deeds — to impact those decisions. We need your perspective. We need your thinking.” Instead, as Robert Salladay of the San Francisco Chronicle wrote, the fallout from her speech “is continued evidence of how dramatically public discourse has changed since Sept. 11,” including, he added, John Ashcroft’s warning that those who criticize his actions are aiding the terrorists. As Sacramento Bee columnist Daniel Weintraub wrote, those who booed her off the stage joined “the ranks of the politically correct speech police which until now have been dominated by liberals foolishly

seeking to shut down conservative speakers or to destroy college newspapers carrying their commentary.” This, at the end of her speech, is what Heaphy would have said, had she not been shouted down: “America was founded on the belief the freedom to think as you will and speak as you think are essential to democracy. Only by exercising those rights can you ensure their continued existence.” Just who is the enemy of these American values? Heaphy, or those who exercised what is called, in law, “the heckler’s veto.” Heckling is protected speech — until the speaker cannot continue. Does John Ashcroft have anything to say to the patriots who forced Heaphy and the First Amendment off the stage? Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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