



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General**

**Inspection of Embassy Riyadh, Saudi Arabia,
and Constituent Posts**



Exterior of Embassy Riyadh

Few countries are as important to the United States as Saudi Arabia, whose influence throughout the Muslim world and whose role as the world's largest oil exporter have long made it a crucial policy partner. New issues now crowd the bilateral agenda. Key U.S. objectives in the relationship are rooting out terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia, controlling the flow of money to extremist groups abroad, and support for political, economic, and social reforms.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that the Ambassador and deputy chief of mission effectively manage these issues and the mission's personnel. They do so in an environment shaped by continuing security concerns, including managing the trauma of the December 2004 armed attack on Consulate General Jeddah. OIG found that there is an inherent and unacknowledged conflict between the U.S. government's desire to expand this policy agenda and the current staffing mix and level. Because of continued security concerns, nonemergency employees and dependents were ordered to leave in April 2004. However, the Department's decision to assign staff to one-year, unaccompanied tours of duty imperils good management. There are long staffing gaps in key positions, inexperienced first- and second-tour officers in middle-grade positions, and only a handful of seasoned officers available to supervise and coordinate. Coordination between the section chiefs at Embassy Riyadh and the inexperienced officers at the constituent posts has been irregular and inconsistent.

The staffs of the consular sections and of the Department of Homeland Security operations in Riyadh and Jeddah coordinate well to fulfill their mandated visa-issuance requirements. Nonetheless, they are increasingly unable to meet on a timely basis the rising Saudi interest in travel to the United States for business and study. OIG endorses the mission's plans to reinstitute nonimmigrant visa issuance in Dhahran, once a permanent staff is in place and the necessary construction is completed.

The mission's public diplomacy strategy suffers from a lack of clarity. Embassy Riyadh and the two consulates general need to discuss in a more coordinated and continuing fashion their goals for media contact and public diplomacy. Although key reporting areas were left uncovered, Embassy Riyadh and the consulates general have produced a large amount of informative and influential reporting, despite staffing limitations that particularly affect the mission's reporting elements. The United States is losing upwards of \$5 billion a year in sales because many U.S. companies have removed representatives from Saudi Arabia due in part to the Department's travel advisory.

All three posts provide good administrative services and generally satisfactory management controls. The three information management sections are well managed and proactive about improving their operations. Morale is generally good among Americans and locally employed staff. In a climate of revolving-door management by Americans, the locally employed staff has performed extremely well.

Background



Map of Saudi Arabia

In a close alliance, Saudi Arabia's monarchs and its religious establishment have presided over and controlled the nation's dramatic transformation, which followed the discovery of oil in 1938. In this period, the nation's largely nomadic population of a few million grew to a heavily urbanized total of approximately 18 million. The nation has a growth rate of about four percent, resulting in an indigenous population that is 75 percent under 25 years of age. Oil exports account for approximately 75 percent of the nation's gross domestic product and have allowed tremendous improvements in the physical and social infrastructures.

Over the last ten years, the country has been racked by a number of violent incidents. The worst year on record, 2004, saw a rash of killings of Saudis and expatriates, attacks on foreign housing compounds, and the December assault on the American consulate general in Jeddah, where five locally employed staff members were killed.

As homegrown Saudi terrorists turn their attention to domestic targets, the Saudi government has come to share Western concerns and to accept the need for greater cooperation in the war on terror. The political, economic, educational, and social reforms that have been long-standing items on the U.S. agenda, have also to some degree become matters of interest for the Saudi leadership.

Saudi Arabia is the protector of two of Islam's holiest cities and the world's major petroleum exporter. This makes the Saudi government a major factor in the global economy and in every political issue in the region. The Saudi government regularly alters oil-production levels to stabilize the international market, and Saudi financial contributions to other countries are so significant that they can have a major positive impact. For instance, these contributions helped drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan in the 1980's and provided substantial and immediate relief for natural disasters such as the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

In past years, Saudis liked to travel to and study in the United States. Such travel declined significantly after September 11, 2001, but is currently on the upswing. Delays in the issuance of visas are affecting a massive new scholarship program, which was instituted after the visit of the nation's then-crown prince to the President's Texas home in April 2005. That visit is just one indication of a warming trend in bilateral relations. Another is the decision of the two governments to launch a high-level strategic dialogue.

Office of Inspector General

The Office of Inspector General conducts independent audits, inspections, and investigations to promote effective management, accountability, and positive change in the Department of State, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the foreign affairs community.

OIG's Office of Inspections provides systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department of State, its posts abroad, and related activities. Inspections cover policy implementation, resource management, and management controls. As part of the inspection, particular attention is given to consular, security, and information technology operations.

February 9, 2006