

US EXTENDED ITS SPECIAL RELATIONS WITH THE SAUDIS ANOTHER DECADE

Back in 2013, then Saudi Interior Minister and current Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef came to the US for a great coming out party (and, seemingly, to herald Obama's second term foreign policy team). While here, he signed an extension to the Technical Cooperation Agreement first signed back in 2008.

The TCA is basically a cooperation agreement to get direct help from us—including training and toys—to protect Saudi infrastructure and borders, particularly its oil infrastructure. As part of it, the Saudis are developing a 35,000 person force, including a paramilitary force, with US training. But unlike our other defense agreements with the Saudis (and like the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation it was explicitly modeled on, which had been in place from the 1970s until 1999), this one includes a special bank account to fund it all.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will establish a dollar disbursement account in the United States Treasury. Any funds required by the United States for agreed-upon projects will be deposited by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the account in such amounts and at such times as are mutually agreed, and the United States may draw on this account in the amount so agreed. If upon termination of this agreement there are funds remaining in the special account after all

expenses have been paid, such funds will be refunded to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

That account could fund contractors and toys. But at least at first, it could not fund US government employees.

The United States will pay for all costs of U.S. Government direct-hire employees assigned to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform services under this Agreement.

Less than a year into the agreement, that changed, with MbN agreeing the Saudis would also pay for US personnel salaries.

MbN was grateful for USG efforts and assured us full funding would soon follow the signing of these documents, and reconfirmed the SAG's commitment to pay all OPM-MOI costs. He also agreed to fund all USG employee costs, concurring with any necessary TCA changes to allow such payments, commenting that "hopefully the lawyers will not cause us any problems."

And already by the time MbN made that agreement, the US was installing military and State employees to oversee this effort (see more on these personnel here).

After unsuccessfully trying to ask for the TCA, I FOIAed it, which I only finally got yesterday. For the most part, it wasn't worth the wait, as it was only a formal extension of the deal.

That said, I find it interesting that rather than extend the deal 5 years (the original term

of the TCA), they instead extended it over a decade, until May 15, 2023.

Given all the events in the Middle East, January 2013 was an interesting time for MbN to come to the US to preemptively sign this TCA. And it's interesting they've extended it a full decade. I'm also curious about the timing of this release, as MbN just returned to the US (this time as part of the Gulf summit), for the first time as the US-backed heir to the Saudi throne (though maybe it just takes State 2 years to release a totally unclassified document as a matter of course?).