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Monday, 17 February, 2003, 22:23 GMT

Saudis warn US over Iraq war



Saudi Arabia warns the US not to go it alone

Saudi Arabia has warned the United States against a possible war against Iraq in an exclusive interview with the BBC.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal has said that any unilateral military action by the US would appear as an "act of aggression".

“ We think war is going to be a tremendous threat to the region... We think that, especially if it doesn't come through the United Nations' authority, that it would be a dangerous thing to do ”

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal

"Independent action in this, we don't believe is good for the United States," he told the BBC's world affairs editor John Simpson at a meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo.

"It would encourage people to think... that what they're doing is a war of aggression rather than a war for the implementation of the United Nations resolutions."

Saudi Arabia has been a longstanding ally of the US, but relations since the 11 September attacks on New York and Washington have been strained.

The majority of the 19 suicide hijackers came from Saudi Arabia, whose government has been accused in Washington political circles of not doing enough to counter Islamic fundamentalism among its population.

Prince Saud added that if an attack on Iraq was sanctioned by the UN Security Council, it would not be considered an aggression.

"So we are ardently... urging the United States to continue to work with the United Nations... and not to create an act of individual



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aggression, of individually taking charge of the duties of the Security Council."

Regime change

Regime change would lead to the destruction of Iraq, and would threaten to destabilise the entire Middle East region, Prince Saud said.

"If change of regime comes with the destruction of Iraq, then you are solving one problem and creating five more problems.

"That is the consideration that we have to make, because we are living in the region. We will suffer the consequences of any military action."

Regime change can only be a possibility if it is done "indigenously", he said.

"There has never been in the history of the world a country in which a regime change happened at the bayonets of guns that has led to stability."

The worry is rising fundamentalism in America and the West - not in the Middle East, he said.

"Our worry is the new emerging fundamentalism in the United States and in the West. Fundamentalism in our region is on the wane. There, it's in the ascendancy. That's the threat."

The full interview can be seen on BBC World from Wednesday and on Simpson's World on BBC News 24 this weekend (1130 GMT on Saturday, 0230 GMT on Sunday, 1430 GMT on Sunday, 0030 GMT on Monday).

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“ If the choice is you destroy Iraq in order to get Saddam Hussein, it is a self-defeating policy, isn't it? I mean, you destroy a country to get a person out - it doesn't work ”

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal