In the aftermath of 'September 11', much commentary was directed at the alleged clash between Islam and the West. As a long-time ally of the United States and a figure-head of Islamic politics, Saudi Arabia was caught in the middle. As fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were of Saudi origin, and with accusations of Saudi co-responsibility for the direction radicalized Islam had taken, the royal family was placed in the awkward situation of being called to account for the behaviour of a few Saudi citizens who were in fact simultaneously targeting the Al Saud themselves. Indeed, after 9/11 Saudi Arabia came to be seen, in some quarters, not so much as a victim but rather as a source of the problem. At the same time existing issues of concern relating to Saudi Arabia’s economy, its ‘social contract’, and its place in the region and the world, were further highlighted.

Combining the roles of perhaps the world's key oil exporter, the guardian of the holiest places of Islam, and a crucial ally of the West in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia has acquired a high international profile involving inevitable tensions. Yet its internal affairs remain opaque to most outside observers. Moreover, the tensions between the Kingdom’s roles at the regional and global levels in a changing international system intertwine with the dilemmas being faced at the domestic level. There is a need, therefore, to address these interlocking issues systematically, by drawing on the insights of a variety of Saudi and specialist outside observers. The workshop (and the associated book project) will attempt to do just that. This is particularly timely since many Saudis themselves—both among the leadership and elsewhere—are currently increasingly debating and acting on these questions.

The workshop Saudi Arabia between 9/11, the Iraq Crisis & the Future will take place in Leiden and Amsterdam from 20 to 22 February 2004. It is organized by Paul Aarts (University of Amsterdam) and Gerd Nonneman (Lancaster University, UK). The project is sponsored by the ISIM, the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Lancaster University and benefits from close support by the European University Institute’s Robert Schuman Centre (Prof. Giacomo Luciani).

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