

**Arab Funding of American Universities:
Donors, Recipients and Impact**

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Introduction

As I documented in *The Arab Lobby*,¹ Middle Eastern governments and their supporters understood early on that American universities would be useful to train specialists who would appreciate their point of view and who could work directly and indirectly on its behalf. “The rulers of the Arab oil states are neither simple philanthropists nor disinterested patrons,” former English diplomat John Kelly observed. “They expect a return upon their donations to institutions of learning and their subsidies to publishing houses; whether it be in the form of subtle propaganda on behalf of Arab or [Islamic](#) causes, or the preferential admission of their nationals, however unqualified . . . or the publication of the kind of sycophantic flim-flam about themselves and their countries which now clutters sections of the Western press and even respectable periodical literature.”²

Colonel William Eddy, a former intelligence operative, Aramco adviser, and State Department representative to [Saudi Arabia](#), reported that Aramco began funding programs as early as the 1950s. In 1956, he wrote to his son, “ARAMCO contributes to institutions like Princeton, the Middle East Institute, at [sic] Washington, and the American University of Beirut not only because these centers prepare future employees, but because they also equip men to come out to the Near East in the Foreign Service, or in teaching or in other capacities, which strengthens the small band of Americans who know the Arabs and understand them.”³

Since that time, donors from [Arab states](#) have quietly made contributions to American universities to create centers and chairs to propagate their views. The [Arab lobby](#) succeeded in hijacking the field of Middle East Studies and now has faculty across the country who use their positions to advance political agendas that are typically pro-Arab (often specifically related to the Palestinians), anti-Israel, and uncritical of radical Islam. The Saudis, for example, hope “to encourage and develop communication between Islamic culture and other cultures, to encourage greater understanding of the true nature of Islam by clearly explaining the beliefs of Muslims and correcting false conceptions and caricatures, and to show that Islam welcomes knowledge with enthusiasm.”⁴

The lobby seeks to influence U.S. policy and the next generation of decision-makers by reaching a broad spectrum of students. Aramco’s magazine observed that courses “once tailored for diplomats and missionaries now draw students who plan careers in banking, business, law, public health, education and urban studies,” and “university ‘outreach’ programs are developing and providing courses on the Middle East for both high school [actually k-12] and adult-education programs.”⁵

Gifts to American universities are also designed to enhance the image of the Arab states and their rulers. Saudi Arabia, for example, wanted Americans to forget that 15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudis. More recently, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has sought ties with prestigious American universities to promote his image as a progressive leader who is modernizing his country and to offset the negative attention he has received for his alleged role in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Harvard’s Grif Peterson observed that a financial relationship with institutions like MIT and Harvard “allows Mohammed bin Salman to project an image of being a Western-leaning progressive leader” and gives “legitimacy to this growing power base that he’s creating.”⁶

“I don’t think there’s any doubt that the Saudis have seen such donations as a way to acquire goodwill, legitimacy and support in U.S. academia,” NYU professor Zachary Lockman observed. “And, of course, donors want to ensure that the people filling these chairs and running these programs will be sympathetic to the policies of these countries’ regimes, though they cannot always make that happen.”⁷

In recent years, [Qatar](#) has been the largest investor in universities. It, too, has an image problem as a funder and supporter of terrorist groups – [Hamas](#) and the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) – and the home of the rabidly anti-Israel anti-American Al Jazeera television network.⁸ Qatar also solicited help from the United States to end the embargo against it imposed by other [Gulf countries](#).

Universities have been willing enablers. College presidents, whose jobs depend more on their ability to raise money than their ability to educate students, see dollar signs when they look to the Middle East and have been prospecting for petrodollars for decades.

Not surprisingly, universities deny they are influenced by foreign gifts. Douglas W. Elmendorf, the dean of Harvard's Kennedy School, for example, acknowledged that his school receives Saudi financial support but insisted, "Our principal standards for such work are whether it maintains our tradition of scholarly excellence, whether it can be conducted without donors' attempting to influence the conclusions of our scholarship, and whether it has positive effects on people in the societies where we are engaged." He added, "We believe that our work in Saudi Arabia meets those standards and have made no changes in that work at this point."⁹

Not all foreign gifts are overtly political; however, universities understand that large amounts of money are available to institutions that do not antagonize Arab donors.

How big are the incentives?

According to the Department of Education (DoE), between 1986 and October 17, 2022, colleges and universities received nearly \$44 billion from foreign sources, and nearly one-fourth – \$10,826,665,022 – came from Arab individuals, institutions, and governments. Although the department has cracked down, and some universities have reported previously unreported gifts and contracts, we don't know how many have not been disclosed. Even more concerning is that after issuing earlier reports disclosing some of the names of giftors, the DoE acceded to university requests not to provide the names or addresses of donors, thereby significantly reducing the level of transparency.¹⁰ The only information included in the report is the legal name and the government name of restricted transactions.

Who Are The Funders?

Section 117 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 mandates that universities report twice each year foreign gifts and contracts of \$250,000 or more. For years, universities paid scant attention to the obligation, and the DoE did not enforce it. Hence, we sometimes only learn of contributions and contracts if they are publicized by the university. Reports became more detailed starting in 2019-2020 when the department called for greater transparency. Under President Biden, however, the department moved in the opposite direction and no longer reports the giftors to universities, so we know only the country they come from and whether the funding came from the government. We can no longer find out the names of individuals, companies, or institutions making donations.

When *The Arab Lobby* was published in 2010, I noted the DoE had reported that between 1986 and 2007, donors from Arab countries made more than 100 contributions worth more than \$320 million to American universities. Most of the funding came after 9/11 as Arab states, particularly the Saudis, looked to improve their image in the United States. Nearly half of the gifts in the report came from Saudi sources. By far the largest donation on the list, nearly \$85 million, was a contract between Qatar and Carnegie-Mellon for a council for information and technology. I noted in the book that it was likely the list represented only a fraction of the actual gifts.

A combination of more conscientious reporting and a significant increase in foreign gifts is reflected in the most recent DoE report, which indicates that between 1986 and October 17, 2022, 273 universities received 10,081 contributions (gifts and contracts) worth \$10,826,665. Of those, 6,245 were unrestricted contracts worth \$7,701,874,375, 2,176 restricted contracts worth \$1,750,531,763 and 1,349 were unrestricted gifts worth \$1,170,252,838, and 310 were restricted gifts totaling \$204,006,047. In the table below, you can see the changes since our November 2021 report.

Up until 2020, the DoE listed the country of the giftor but not whether a government source was the funder. Unless the university reported the donor, the gifts could come from individuals, companies, foundations, or

other sources within the country. In the latest report, 3,720 donations (37%) were from government sources, 1,205 (12%) were not, and for 5,155 (51%) contributions worth more than \$6.7 billion (62% of the total), there was no information as to whether or not they came from a government source. Only one-fourth (2,486) of all contributions, totaling nearly \$2 billion, specified the purpose of the donation. Only the source country but not the donor is provided for 7,899 contributions (78%) worth nearly \$10 billion or 91% of all contributions universities received from Arab sources. Clearly, one of the gaping loopholes in the reporting requirement is that universities have been able to avoid disclosing the specific sources of the donations they receive.

Three countries contribute 79% of all Arab funding. Qatar is the leading source of funds – 1,056 donations worth \$5.1 billion (48% of the total), followed by the Saudis – 5,735 donations worth \$2.9 billion (28% of the total), and the UAE – 1,159 donations worth \$1.3 billion (12% of the total). If Kuwait (1,177 donations worth \$858 million) is included, they make up 95% of Arab giving and 23% of all university donations.

Given the total of its contributions, it is not surprising the largest gifts and contracts have come from Qatar. In fact, of the top 25, all but three (from the UAE and one from Saudi Arabia) came from Qatar. The largest was a \$151 million contract reported in July 2020 to cover the budget for the establishment and operation of Weill Cornell Medicine in Qatar. The next two years, Cornell received \$137 million and \$149 million for the same purpose. From 2012-2019, Qatar signed contracts with Cornell each year for the peculiar amount of \$99,999,999. Other large transactions from Qatar included ones for 95, 88, and 83 million dollars to Texas A&M for an unspecified purpose; \$84 million and \$77 million to Carnegie Mellon (and \$74,130,684 per year from 2016 to 2019); and eight other contracts worth more than \$50 million each to Cornell. The UAE made two \$75 million gifts to the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. The largest Saudi gift was, strangely, to the University of Idaho for tuition and fees for students.

Sources of Funding by Country

	Total Donations	Amount	Largest	Recipient of Largest
Qatar	1056	\$5,177,893,434	\$151,000,000	Cornell University
Saudi Arabia	5735	\$2,979,248,893	\$74,119,050	University of Idaho
UAE	1159	\$1,289,011,024	\$75,000,000	MD Anderson (2)
Kuwait	1177	\$857,970,510	\$11,338,954	USC
Oman	596	\$180,667,586	\$10,144,906	West Virginia University
Egypt	110	\$125,799,882	\$31,831,520	Harvard
Bahrain	47	\$93,928,121	\$25,770,000	Cal State Northridge
Iraq	42	\$50,128,527	\$39,108,635	Arkansas
Jordan	73	\$26,680,944	\$3,768,265	NY Institute of Technology
Lebanon	45	\$24,288,730	\$2,500,000	Harvard
“State of Palestine”	21	\$10,161,000	\$775,000	Harvard
Libya	11	\$7,247,030	\$2,210,000	Tufts
Syria	5	\$2,605,641	\$1,240,939	University of South Florida
Tunisia	3	\$1,033,701	\$574,650	Harvard

While it is not surprising the wealthy Gulf countries were responsible for the lion’s share of the gifts/contracts, it is startling to see sources from Egypt as the sixth largest donor, given its economic problems.

Perhaps more shocking is that donors from the non-existent “State of Palestine” made 19 contributions worth \$9.3 million. This is troubling because it gives credence to the Palestinian narrative and is contrary to U.S. policy which recognizes no such state.

Two restricted contracts to Indiana University of Pennsylvania were from the “Palestinian Territory, Occupied” and none from the [Palestinian Authority \(PA\)](#). That same school, enrollment 8,832, received all but five of the donations, three others went to Harvard and two to Brown. Each gift to Brown of \$643,000 in 2020 was to provide support for a professorship in Palestinian Studies within Middle East Studies. No purpose was listed for the Harvard gifts. Ten of the donations to Indiana were restricted contracts for payment of tuition and fees for students from “Palestine.” The others were undocumented.

The DoE reports are not clear about the actual donors of the money. It appears none came from the PA itself. If any did, that would be a scandal given that the PA relies largely on foreign aid to subsist and spends approximately \$270 million on salaries for terrorists in Israeli prisons and families of suicide bombers.¹¹ Palestinians would rightly wonder why their money was being spent in the United States.

For those who may wonder about [Israel’s](#) contributions. The government, individuals, and companies made at least 925 donations (gifts/contracts) worth \$303 million dating to 2003. As in the case of the Arab donations, few of those from Israeli sources (8% worth \$22 million) describe their purpose. Only 53 contributions were from the Israeli government. This is misleading, however, because some universities reported funding they received from the [Binational Science Foundation \(BSF\)](#), which is jointly funded by the United States and Israel to support basic science research. The latest report lists eight bilateral research projects, presumably financed by BSF, worth \$256,420. Other projects are described primarily as research projects or clinical trials. The largest foreign donation from Israel was \$7 million in 2018 by an unspecified donor to Brigham Young University. Five of the six largest contributions (\$4 million and up) from Israel went to BYU, and the other, for \$4.5 million, went to Carnegie Mellon. Gifts to create centers, programs, and chairs for Israel Studies come from American citizens and foundations, not the government of Israel, so they need not be reported to the DoE.

Who Are The Largest Recipients?

While it is not surprising the Arab lobby has focused on funding elite universities, its largesse has been distributed to 273 institutions in 48 states (missing [Alaska](#) and [Maine](#)) and the [District of Columbia](#).

Cornell is by far the largest beneficiary, with 130 transactions worth more than \$1.8 billion. It is followed by Georgetown with \$830 million, Carnegie Mellon with \$823 million, and Texas A&M with more than \$806 million. George Washington University received by far the most gifts/contracts – 1,172. The top five recipients received 45% of the total value. The top 15 received 66% of the funds.

Top 15 Recipients of Funding From Arab Sources

Institution	Gifts/Contracts	Value
Cornell University	130	\$1,800,257,718
Georgetown University	86	\$830,832,409
Carnegie Mellon University	48	\$823,328,426
Texas A&M University	376	\$806,813,842
Northwestern University	118	\$648,358,895
University of Colorado*	344	\$578,083,724
Pennsylvania State University	156	\$254,804,340
Harvard University	145	\$228,190,843
George Washington University	1,172	\$200,949,689
Virginia Commonwealth University	49	\$225,628,587
New York University	112	\$180,154,766
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	103	\$176,661,346

University of California***	325	\$159,642,500
University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center**	8	\$152,908,069
George Mason University	60	\$118,191,194

*Including Boulder, Colorado Springs, and Denver

**University Texas campuses, excluding MD Anderson has received, \$55,330,321

*** Of the nine UC campuses, Berkeley received by far the most money – \$56,345,422.

What’s Missing?

In the past, due to lax compliance and enforcement, universities have not reported many of the gifts they have received from foreign sources or only disclosed partial amounts. At least \$3.4 billion in gifts/contracts were not reported. The lion’s share of that came from the Qatar Foundation. According to ISGAP, between 1986 and 2018, six U.S. universities with campuses in Doha received \$4,879,315,375 from the foundation but reported only about 60% of that amount – \$1,905,613,216 – meaning nearly \$3 billion was not disclosed.¹² In the latest report, the Qatar Foundation signed five restricted contracts with Northwestern worth more than \$108 million covering 2007-2028 for the establishment of the Doha campus. The report does not explain if the amount is per year or over the life of the contract. The foundation also signed a ten-year agreement to continue to operate Texas A&M University at Qatar and the university reports restricted contracts of \$95 million, \$88 million, \$83 million, \$6.5 million, and \$1.7 million.

In 1999, the government and people of Oman funded the Sultan of Oman Professorship in International Relations at Harvard. The size of the gift was not reported that year. The Sultan was described in a study of Harvard professorships as a “courageous supporter of the Camp David peace accords and an active participant in the search for peace in the Middle East.”¹³

Since gifts are not attributed to particular departments at the universities, it is not clear if any or all of the contributions made by sources in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to Harvard’s Belfer Center were reported. The same is true for gifts by Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice.¹⁴

In 2001, Cornell announced the creation of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University in Qatar. The emirate agreed to spend \$750 million on the school over 11 years, including a fee to Cornell that was not disclosed.¹⁵ According to ISGAP, Cornell received nearly \$64 million through 2018 but did not report nearly \$1.4 billion (by far the largest share of unreported funds from the Qatari campuses).¹⁶ Cornell did report \$151 million as the annual budget for the Weill College and two other restricted contracts worth a total of \$286 million to establish and support the college and noted, “ In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.”

I noted in *The Arab Lobby* the DoE reports did not include Saudi Prince Talal’s \$20 million gifts to Harvard and Georgetown in 2005. The former was for “a university-wide program with an endowed chair, three senior professorships, and support for research, tuition, fees, and stipends for graduate students” and “an Islamic Heritage Project designed to preserve and digitize historically significant Islamic materials and make the resulting images available via the Internet.” The Georgetown funds went to expand its Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. Georgetown did report other gifts from the Prince of \$4 million (2005), \$3 million (2006), \$4 million (2007), \$5 million (2009), and \$6 million (2010). It is not clear if those payments were related to the \$20 million gift or separate donations. None of the 10 Saudi contributions worth more than \$30 million list a donor in the current report.

In 2005, Harvard also received \$5 million from Prince Talal for postgraduate education and research at the Harvard Medical School Dubai Center.¹⁷

In 2003, Columbia actively resisted complying with not only the federal requirement to report foreign gifts but also a similar state law. The university took money from the United Arab Emirates and others to endow a chair in Middle East studies named after Edward Said, thereby institutionalizing an anti-Israel faculty position on the campus. Predictably, the chair was filled by an outspoken critic of Israel, Rashid Khalidi. For many months, efforts were made to learn where the estimated \$4 million had come from for the position, but the university refused to disclose the information until bad publicity forced it to reveal the names of the donors.¹⁸

In 2010, Columbia established a Center for Palestine Studies which Khalidi, the center's co-director, said was funded through the university's Middle East Institute.¹⁹ According to its 2018-2019 Annual Report, the center received funding from 18 donors, none of which were identified as foreign gifts.²⁰

In 2012, MIT signed a memorandum of understanding to expand the research and education partnership between MIT and Saudi Aramco.²¹ The amount of money involved was not disclosed, but MIT did report receiving more than \$4 million from Aramco from 2014-2017.

Johns Hopkins received "an undisclosed but 'transformational' amount" from the UAE to build a hospital building that opened in 2012. In 2018, the UAE gave \$50 million to Johns Hopkins Medicine to create the Sheikh Khalifa Stroke Institute to transform treatment for stroke patients across the globe.²²

Cornell, Stanford, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Texas at Austin all entered lucrative relationships with King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) worth \$25 million or more over five years.²³

Yale did not report the \$10 million it received in 2015 from Sheikh Kamel for the Abdallah S. Kamel Center for the Study of Islamic Law and Civilization at Yale Law School.²⁴

In 2015, the Al Jalila Foundation partnered with Harvard Medical School "to cultivate the next generation of local medical talent in line with the vision to position the UAE at the forefront of medical innovation." The foundation was created by the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The foundation also provided funds to NYU Abu Dhabi and research fellowships from 2014 until at least 2018 to the University of Pennsylvania, the Cleveland Clinic, and the University of Alabama Birmingham.²⁵ There are no reports listing this foundation as a donor to any of these universities.

In 2016, the University of New Haven signed an agreement to assist King Fahd Security College in Riyadh develop a bachelor's program in security studies.²⁶ It did not report any funding from Saudi Arabia until 2019, when it recorded only one contract for \$1.3 million and two monetary gifts totaling \$7.8 million.

In 2016, Babson Global, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Babson College, entered a partnership with Lockheed Martin, Emaar (a Saudi real estate firm), and Prince Mohammad Bin Salman's MiSK Foundation to establish the Prince Mohammad Bin Salman College of Business and Entrepreneurship. The college was established to promote the crown prince's agenda of increased economic growth, tourism, and social mobility in Saudi Arabia. Babson Global anticipates receiving about \$52.2 million over a 10-year period that began in 2014.²⁷ So far, Babson reported receiving only \$136,100 in 2018 and \$140,500 in 2019.

In 2017, Harvard announced that Prince Turki bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was providing an undisclosed amount for the Project on Saudi and Gulf Cooperation Council Security at the Kennedy School of Government. The school also presumably receives funding for the Evidence of Policy Design initiative with the Saudi Ministry of Labor. The Belfer Center also receives funding from the prince for its Project on Saudi and Gulf Cooperation Council Security. Another undisclosed amount comes from the MiSK Foundation for a summer leadership development course. According to Shera Avi-Yonah, "While Harvard websites make no mention of the group, MiSK's site lists the university as an official partner."²⁸

In 2020, the Munib and Angela Masri Foundation committed to a multi-million-dollar gift to the University of Texas at Austin to create a century-long endowment at the University's Jackson School of Geosciences. Nothing has been reported yet to the DoE regarding the actual amount of the gift.²⁹

In addition to the American universities with campuses in Qatar, several schools have received funding for campuses in the UAE, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. None of the following are referenced in the current report.

Sharjah, UAE

American University has a partnership arrangement with AU Sharjah, which was founded in 1997. AU reported only one contract in 2005 for \$2,232,417, which raises the question of how much it received for the other 20+ years the campus has been open. If \$2.2 million is the budget for one year, the total unreported income could be more than \$40 million.³⁰

Al Ain, UAE

Johns Hopkins Medicine International signed a 10-year management contract (amended in 2010 to management services) in 2006 with Abu Dhabi Health Services Company (SEHA) for services at Tawam Hospital.³¹ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Johns Hopkins Medicine International signed a management agreement in 2008 with Al Rahba Hospital.³² No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

The MIT & Masdar Institute Cooperative Program was a collaborative project with Abu Dhabi in which MIT provided advice and guidance to the Masdar Institute. The program ran from 2006 until May 2018. No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.³³

Abu Dhabi committed \$50 million to establish a New York University campus in the emirate in 2008.³⁴ In 2010, the campus celebrated its 10th anniversary and presumably received additional funding after the initial investment. No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

Dubai, UAE

Boston University Institute of Dental Research and Education opened in Dubai in 2008. No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

In 2006, the Dubai Harvard Foundation for Medical Research was created with the support of the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Among the founders was Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Al Saud, who created a fellowship for medical and biomedical research. The chair of the board is the dean of Harvard Medical School. The foundation "supports cutting-edge collaborative research, and seeks to establish sustainable research and education programs focused on diseases relevant to the population in the broader Middle East region."³⁵ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

In 2015, Harvard Medical School opened a global health center in Dubai. No funding specifically identified with the program was reported to DoE, but a \$3 million gift and \$490,000 contract from the UAE were reported.

Michigan State opened a campus in Dubai in 2008 and was forced to close it in 2010 because it was losing so much money. Reports on the campus do not mention any funding from the UAE and none was reported to the DoE.

Rochester Institute of Technology opened its Dubai campus in 2008. RIT announced it would build a \$136 million 30-acre campus funded by the government of the UAE.³⁶ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

Ras al Khaymah, UAE

George Mason was one of the first institutions to launch a campus in the UAE. It opened in 2005 but closed in 2009 without graduating a single student.³⁷ It was funded by a government-supported foundation known as the RAK Education Company (Edrak), which cut its support by roughly half and made it untenable for the campus to remain open.³⁸ GMU did report funding it received for the campus – \$2,243,016 over four years – which gives an indication of how much the other universities are *not* reporting.

Lebanon

Johns Hopkins Medicine International and Clemenceau Medical Center began an affiliation agreement in 2002 to offer consultation related to designing and developing the hospital, which opened in 2006. The agreement has been extended to run through 2026.³⁹ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Johns Hopkins Medicine signed an affiliation agreement with the King Khaled Eye Specialist Hospital (KKESH).⁴⁰ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Johns Hopkins Aramco Healthcare is a joint venture between Saudi Aramco and Johns Hopkins Medicine that began in 2014 with a term of 10 years. Johns Hopkins owns 20% of the joint venture.⁴¹ No funding identified with the program was reported to DoE.

It is possible that some of the funding for these programs was reported to DoE without attributing it to these campuses (a major flaw in the reporting requirement), but that seems doubtful given the amounts that were reported during their years of operation. Since the budgets of overseas campuses are in the millions of dollars, and ISGAP identified more than \$3 billion in unreported funds for campuses in Qatar alone, it is likely that tens of millions have gone unreported by universities with satellites in other countries.

The list of unreported funding also does not include publicized gifts for unspecified amounts. For example, Saudi Arabia supported the creation of two chairs, one in Molecular Medicine and another in Oncology and Pediatrics at Johns Hopkins.⁴² Endowed chairs at prestigious universities can cost several million dollars.

The Lebanon-based Hariri Foundation, created by the former Lebanese prime minister, has made several gifts to universities through a nonprofit organization it set up in the District of Columbia – Hariri Foundation-USA. This allows universities to avoid reporting them as foreign gifts (but the foundation must list its grants on U.S. tax returns). In 1992, for example, the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the American University of Beirut began a joint research program related to reforming the Lebanese public sector. A year earlier, the foundation endowed the Raifk Hariri Professorship of International Political Economy at Harvard and, in 2009, funded fellowships at the Carr Center for Human Rights. The foundation also has a scholarship program at Boston University and funds high school students to attend a program associated with MIT.⁴³

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) has “consistently called for open and full disclosure of funding sources for research, conferences and teaching programs, since MESA has been concerned about restrictions on academic freedom that can be imposed—explicitly or implicitly—by funders, whether American or foreign.” MESA has opposed funding from the CIA and Department of Defense because such connections create

“dangers for students and scholars by fostering the perception [abroad] of [their] involvement in military or intelligence activities.” When it comes to Arab funding, however, they are less concerned with transparency and more worried about “blanket accusations that funding by Middle East governments necessarily means that those governments control the academic content of the programs and the hiring of faculty.”⁴⁴

Unreported Funds and Country of Gifto 1981-2020

American University ^B	1984	\$5,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Berkeley	11/26/1998	\$5,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Berkeley	1998	\$2,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Berkeley	2008	\$28,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Carnegie Mellon ^A	1986-2018	\$122,410,305	QATAR
Cornell ^A	1986-2018	\$1,398,144,660	QATAR
Cornell	2008	\$25,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
George Washington ^D	2/18/2011	\$4,500,000	KUWAIT
Georgetown ^A	1986-2018	\$138,597,917	QATAR
Georgetown	12/12/2005	\$20,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Georgetown	1993	\$6,500,000	PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY
Harvard	1982	\$600,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	1982	\$1,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	12/12/2005	\$20,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	2001	\$500,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	1993	\$5,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	1994	\$1,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	1982?	\$1,500,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Harvard	6/20/2005	\$5,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Johns Hopkins	2/1/2018	\$50,000,000	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
MIT	2018	\$23,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
New York University	2008	\$50,000,000	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Northwestern	1986-2018	-\$12,342,876	QATAR
Rice	1996	\$1,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Rochester Institute of Technology ^C	2008	\$136,000,000	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Stanford	2008	\$25,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Texas A&M ^A	1986-2018	\$739,424,927	QATAR
University of Arkansas	1994	\$20,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
University of Texas Austin ^E	2008	\$25,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Virginia Commonwealth ^A	1986-2018	\$587,467,226	QATAR
Yale	2015	\$10,000,000	SAUDI ARABIA
Total		\$3,444,302,159	

^ASource: ISGAP.

the remainder of the funds came from.

^BAU later said the pledge was not paid.

^EThis amount is mentioned for the program, but UT's share is not specified.

^CEstimated.

^DThe chair was created but no report was issued indicating where

Where Does the Money Go?

Until 2020, the DoE did not report how foreign gifts were used by universities and, even now, most are not explained. Three-fourths (7,594) of the contributions have no description. A total of 2,486 (25%) list a purpose. Of those, at least 2,162 (87%) are for tuition, fees, scholarships, or other type of financial aid, and 79 are for unspecified research activity. These donations total \$1,954,537,810, which means there is no public record of how 82% of the funds from foreign sources are used.

Large numbers of students come from Arab countries to take advantage of the American education system. In 2020/21, for example, more than 34,000 students came from 11 Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority.

Saudis are the fifth-largest group of all international students on U.S. campuses (more than 18,000).⁴⁵ Most received funding from the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program.⁴⁶

In general, providing Arab students with scholarships to attend American universities is a positive way to introduce them to the United States and our democratic values. Many Arab students are campus provocateurs engaged in promoting BDS and demonizing Israel but it would take a lot more investigation to determine which and how many are on campus thanks to the largesse of their governments and whether any are encouraged or paid to be political activists.

In previous reports, George Mason, for example, reported receiving \$58.9 million from the Saudi embassy since 2012 for scholarships. No purpose was recorded for any of the contributions in the most recent report.⁴⁷ Tufts has received nearly \$60 million since 2005 from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (the latest report only lists two donations. Much of that funding was to provide “Saudi students with access to education, training and research experience in healthcare and the life sciences.”⁴⁸

Of the 2,486 contributions with a description of their purpose, at least 2,162 (87%) are for tuition, fees, scholarships, or other type of financial aid, and 79 are for unspecified research activity.

Only three of the donations were identified with a political purpose – two \$643,000 contributions to Brown in 2020 from a giftor in “The State of Palestine” to provide support for a professorship in Palestinian Studies within Middle East Studies and one for \$67,969 for the same purpose from the UAE. The report did not identify the donors but an official from Brown acknowledged the Palestinian contributor was the Munib and Angela Masri Foundation.⁴⁹

Given the high percentage of contributions for tuition and fees, it is likely many of the unreported and unidentified gifts are for similar purposes. But it is possible they are for more political purposes and that is why they are not reported as in some of the cases cited below.

The acknowledgment of foreign donors and the purpose of their gifts has typically been disclosed only if universities decide to publicize them or the press learns of them in some other way. Specific descriptions of gifts in this report are derived from these sources.

The first donation to an American educational institution was probably made in 1969, to tiny Ricker College in Houlton, Maine, which closed in the mid-1970s. It received funding from King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, the government of Kuwait, and Aramco to support the first undergraduate program on the Muslim world in the United States and offer academic credit to students spending their junior year abroad at a college in a Muslim country.

Starting as early as 1976, Arab governments and individuals began to make large gifts to universities to create chairs and centers in Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic studies. More than ninety universities sought assistance from the Saudis, but the first endowment was created at USC with \$1 million. Though universities usually jealously guard their prerogatives to choose their faculty and normally refuse to allow donors a say in hiring, the Saudis were given the opportunity to approve the appointment of the King Faisal Chair in Islamic Studies. Willard Beling, an international relations professor who had worked for Aramco, was given the position. USC president John Hubbard, whose office had a photo of him with Saudi King Khalid, claimed in a 1978 interview that the Saudis had moderated their oil policy “because of the USC connection.”⁵⁰

Investigative journalist Steven Emerson suggested that the choice of USC as the first recipient of Saudi aid might have been related to the fact that many Saudis attended the school, including the ministers of industry, commerce, and planning. Later gifts to universities have also been made because Arab donors or other countrymen attended them.

Three years later, the Saudis gave \$200,000 to Duke for a program in Arabian and Islamic studies (which was doubled to \$400,000 three years later); Libya donated \$750,000 for a chair in Arab culture at Georgetown; and the UAE gave Georgetown another \$250,000 for a visiting professorship in Arab history.⁵¹

In 1980, the UAE gave Georgetown \$750,000 to endow a chair in Arab studies. Rev. Timothy Healy, Georgetown's president, said the gift would "help to continue the slow growth of understanding and the work of peace about which all of us at Georgetown care."⁵²

Harvard received its first donation from the Saudis in 1977, \$300,000 to establish a chair in Islamic law. In 1982, the Saudi royal family gave \$600,000 to preserve photographs of Middle Eastern life at the Semitic Museum. That same year, Khalid al-Turki made a one-million-dollar contribution to establish a professorship in contemporary Arab Studies. While universities, especially elite ones that can afford to ignore donors' wishes, maintain they do not allow strings to be attached to gifts, there was reportedly an unwritten understanding that the position would go to Walid Khalidi. The university denied the funder determined the choice for the position, but it did go to Khalidi.⁵³

Palestinian billionaire Hasib Sabbagh, who was the original funder of the Center of Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown, funded the Hasib Sabbagh Professorship of Cell Biology at Harvard in 1998. He also endowed the Diana Tamari Sabbagh Chair in Middle Eastern Studies at Rice (he also endowed a chair at the Council on Foreign Relations).⁵⁴

In 2001, Saudi businessman Khalid al-Turki added \$500,000 to the \$1.5 million he had already given to establish the contemporary Arab studies program at Harvard. The university also received \$5 million for the King Fahd Chair for Islamic Studies in 1993 and hosted the H. E. Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani (the former head of OPEC, who led the campaign to turn the oil weapon against the West) Islamic Legal Studies Fund and the Bakr M. Binladin [Osama's brother] Visiting Scholars Fund, and the government of Kuwait endowed the first chair in the world in the history of Islamic science. The commemorative book published on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies noted that the center's outreach program was funded by the federal government, Harvard, and Aramco.⁵⁵

The Sultan Endowment for Arab Studies was established in 1998 at Berkeley with a \$5 million gift from the Prince Sultan Charity Foundation.⁵⁶ According to the university, "The Sultan Program supports teaching, research, and public outreach on topics related to the Arab and Arab-Islamic world, with the overarching goal of promoting a deeper understanding of this important region."⁵⁷

Georgetown received \$100,000 from the sultan of Oman to develop Arab studies programs and \$250,000 from the UAE to support a visiting professorship of Arab civilization; two-thirds of the funding for its Center for Contemporary Arab Studies came from Arab countries (its board of advisers included representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE).⁵⁸

Georgia Tech has received more than \$20 million from Saudi Arabia (and one gift from Lebanon). About \$7.5 million came from Aramco, which is used to offer employees of the oil company the opportunity to study information security and cybersecurity.⁵⁹

Many foreign gifts are essentially consulting contracts. Michael Sokolove noted that "at least 25 universities have contracts with Aramco; Sabic, the petrochemical company; or the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, a government research facility in Riyadh." These are apolitical, focused Sokolove says, on "technical aspects of oil and natural gas extraction and processing."⁶⁰

In 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited Boston and several new agreements between Saudi Arabia and MIT were announced.⁶¹ No funding was mentioned but Michael Sokolove said the total was \$23

million.⁶² This does not appear to have been reported (\$5.4 million in unidentified monetary gifts from Saudi Arabia were reported in 2018). These were the new projects:

- A collaborative agreement between Saudi Aramco and MIT focused on global energy, climate, environmental sciences, and the transformation and sustainable development of the energy sector.
- Extension of the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship program at MIT with the support of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST). The program brings post-doctoral Saudi women scientists and engineers to MIT to conduct research and advance as leaders in their respective fields.
- A collaborative agreement between SABIC and MIT that focuses on design and testing of a novel reactor for combustion pyrolysis of methane.
- A collaborative agreement between KACST and MIT to further support the Center of Complex Engineering Systems to advance interdisciplinary research in complex engineering systems such as air and rail transportation systems, urban development, and the improvement of electrical grid and water distribution networks.
- A collaborative agreement between KACST and Brigham and Women's Hospital for the Center of Excellence for Biomedicine to focus on three key medical research projects.
- A collaborative agreement between King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), Research Products Development Company RPDC, and Saudi VAX. This agreement will establish the Saudi Vaccine and Bio-manufacturing Center at KAUST.

Bin Salman's foundation already was a member of MIT's Media Lab, which focuses on computing and technology and requires a commitment of at least \$250,000 annually.⁶³ These contributions are either not reported or, if they are, not attributed to Bin Salman's MiSK Foundation or the prince.

Donors from the nonexistent "State of Palestine" made several gifts. Since no specific giftors are mentioned, it is not clear from the report if the money is from the Palestinian Authority (PA) or donors living there, though it is most likely the latter. In addition to the aforementioned gift to Brown, Harvard received gifts originating in the "State of Palestine" in 2017 (\$275,000), 2018 (\$775,000), and 2019 (\$525,000). The DoE filing does not say who provided the money, but Harvard said it was not the PA. The university did not report the purpose of the gifts and Harvard did not respond to requests for an explanation or disclose the name of the donor.

It is not hard to understand why donors would target two Ivy League schools; however, it is a little odd that ten other gifts from "Palestine," worth a total of \$4.6 million, were made to Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2018-2019. The purpose was listed for only four grants worth \$1.8 million, all payments of tuition, expenses, and fees for students from "Palestine" without a giftor identified. The rest of the money has no purpose attached in the latest report, but previously was recorded as contracts with the Arab American University, Ramallah. It seems likely all the gifts were from the same source for financial aid.

Because it fell below the \$250,000 threshold, Harvard did not have to report a 2011 gift of \$150,000 from the Palestinian Monetary Authority to establish an annual graduate public service fellowship to support a student from the "occupied Palestinian territories" for three years. Harvard said it also received individual donations of unspecified amounts from Palestinian businessman Bashar Masri to fund fellowships for Palestinian students attending the school. These may have also been below the required threshold for informing the DoE as they do not appear in the department's reports. In the latest report, Harvard acknowledged three unspecified contributions from a giftor(s) in "Palestine" of \$275,000 in 2017, \$775,000 in 2018, and \$525,000 in 2019.

In addition to fishing for money in the Gulf, and offering to set up new departments of Middle East, Arab, and Islamic studies if given the resources, universities also have sought lucrative deals with Gulf states to fund

branches of their campus in the Middle East. This is not entirely new since the American University in Beirut was established in 1866. Today, as noted below, more than a dozen universities and affiliate programs have established campuses in Qatar, the UAE, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

One of the most heavily publicized examples is New York University, whose president, John Sexton, was referred to as the “Emir of NYU” in a *New York* magazine article about accepting a “blank check” to become the first university to open an American liberal arts college functioning as an equal with the home campus on the desert island. According to the article, Abu Dhabi committed \$50 million to the program and agreed to finance the Middle East campus as well as parts of the New York campus.⁶⁴ Years later, faculty remained angry about Sexton’s actions. “It was negotiated secretly and announced to the rest of us with only a veneer of serious faculty consultation,” said one professor, “but we knew it was a *fait accompli*.” Others expressed concerns about academic freedom and diluting NYU’s brand.⁶⁵ The latest report does not specify how any contributions have been used by NYU, so we don’t know how much was related to the Abu Dhabi campus. NYU has received more than \$152 million (of its \$162 million in Arab contributions) from the UAE, making the relationship financially beneficial.

Compromising Values

Universities have largely escaped government scrutiny – at least until recently – for their fundraising in Arab countries. It may seem paradoxical that institutions widely viewed as bastions of liberalism seem to have no compunction about soliciting and accepting funds from some of the world’s most despicable regimes. It is indicative of the tendency for universities to place raising money ahead of either education or principles. This is reflected not only in foreign gifts from the Middle East but also from serial human rights abusers such as [China](#), [Turkey](#), and [Venezuela](#).

One of the concerns about universities opening campuses in the Gulf is that they will be forced to adhere to discriminatory laws and cultural norms. Some critics of NYU’s deal with the UAE, for example, raised questions about the wisdom of collaborating with a nation that has a record of human rights abuses and [anti-Semitism](#). President Sexton seemed unconcerned about potential problems that might arise for gay students (homosexuality is illegal) or Jews (Abu Dhabi was home to a think tank that [denied](#) the [Holocaust](#)), or Israeli scholars (Israelis were barred from the country). He would only grant that anyone on the NYU Abu Dhabi campus would have to accept the norms of the society. The coordinator of the program from the Abu Dhabi government was blunter, “NYU was aware of our local culture and rules and guidelines,” said Mubarak Al Shamesi, “and our policies on Israelis or homosexuality were clearly not a concern for them.”⁶⁶

In February 2020, the Qatar Foundation prevented a Lebanese band with an openly gay singer from speaking on Northwestern’s Doha campus. The university cited “safety concerns” for the cancellation following an anti-gay backlash online but a spokesperson for the foundation said it had no safety concerns and “placed the highest value on academic freedom” so long as it does not conflict with Qatari laws or social and cultural customs.⁶⁷

As I noted in *The Arab Lobby*, few universities have the courage to reject hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of dollars, offered by Arab donors. When Georgetown received a \$750,000 donation from Libya for an endowed chair in 1977, for example, columnist Art Buchwald chastised the university for accepting “blood money from one of the most notorious regimes in the world today” and suggested the university also consider establishing a “Brezhnev Studies Program in Human Rights or an Idi Amin Chair in Genocide.”⁶⁸

After nearly five years of defending the decision to accept the “blood money,” university president Rev. Timothy Healy returned the money to Libya with interest because of the country’s support of terrorism. He also returned a \$50,000 gift from Iraq, which prompted history professor Hisham Sharabi to call Healy a “Jesuit Zionist.”⁶⁹

In the late 1970s, Saudi arms merchant Adnan Khashoggi offered \$600,000 to establish a Middle East studies program at Swarthmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr, but the deal fell through after revelations about his alleged involvement in passing bribes on behalf of Northrop.⁷⁰ After that firestorm blew over, he offered \$5 million to American University in Washington, D.C., where he served on AU's board of trustees from 1983 to 1989 (when he was kicked off for failing to attend board meetings).⁷¹

His 1984 contribution to construct the Adnan Khashoggi Sports and Convocation Center provoked a great deal of criticism, with one professor suggesting they rename the center the Khashoggi Sports and Guerrilla Warfare Center." The decision was defended by university president Richard Berendzen who, in a book on his life as a university president, had written about being invited to parties at Khashoggi's New York apartment where he met movie stars.⁷²

After criminal charges surfaced, the issue of keeping the building's name was debated. Khashoggi was eventually acquitted of all charges but, in 1986, he admitted to advancing \$5 million toward the shipment of arms in the Iran-Contra scandal, and the university came under pressure to remove Khashoggi's name from the center. One evening, in the middle of the night, his name was surreptitiously removed, which was later attributed to his failure to pay his financial pledge.⁷³

Harvard's Divinity School took \$2.5 million in 2000 from Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahayan, the dictatorial ruler of Abu Dhabi. Besides presiding over a country condemned for its human rights abuses, Zayed established a think tank that promoted Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, and anti-American conspiracy theories. Rachel Fish, a graduate student at Harvard, began to raise questions about the propriety of accepting money from a source that promoted hatred of Jews. She also produced the terms of the gift agreement, which said a liaison officer would "advise the UAE on procedures relating to application and admission to the University." Fish persisted in arguing after she graduated that the gift should be returned. In 2003, Harvard put the funds on hold and said it would reassess the gift. When it became clear Harvard was likely to return the money, Zayed asked for his money back.⁷⁴

Some universities have stood on principle – at least some of the time.

In 1975, Saudi Arabia was asked to finance a \$5.5 million teacher-training program, but several schools, including Harvard, would not participate after the Saudis banned Jewish faculty from participating. MIT also lost a \$2 million contract to train Saudi teachers because it insisted that Jewish faculty be allowed to participate.⁷⁵

The Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan State, and Minnesota) won a contract to give curricular advice to the University of Riyadh but withdrew after four Jewish professors were denied visas to enter the country. David Johnson, the dean of international studies at Wisconsin, said, "We are not really dependent on an infusion of Arabian funds. Even if we were, this organization is not going to prostitute itself for oil money."⁷⁶

The University of Nevada at Las Vegas turned down Dubai's offer to open a campus because of concerns about human rights.⁷⁷ Boston University, Harvard, Michigan State (now closed), and the Rochester Institute of Technology had no such qualms.

The Saudis and other Arab donors do not have to worry; most universities are happy to accept their money.

Georgetown and Harvard, for example, accepted \$20 million gifts in 2005 from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, whose offer of money to victims of 9/11 was rejected by then-mayor Giuliani because of the prince's suggestion that America rethink its support of Israel. Georgetown's funding was used to support a center for Muslim-Christian understanding, which was subsequently renamed the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (the center was originally created in 1993 with \$6.5 million from a foundation

of Arab businessmen led by Christian Arab, Hasib Sabbagh).⁷⁸ As I noted in *The Arab Lobby*, “Prospective Jewish donors to Georgetown might ask why it is not a center for Muslim-Christian-Jewish understanding, but Jews aside, other donors might wonder why a Jesuit university is accepting funding for such a center from a government that does not allow the practice of Christianity.”⁷⁹

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) asked in February 2008 whether “the center has produced any analysis critical of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example in the fields of human rights, religious freedom, freedom of expression, women’s rights, minority rights, protection for foreign workers, due process and the rule of law.” He also wanted to know if the center “has examined Saudi links to extremism and terrorism” or produced any critical study of the “controversial religious textbooks produced by the government of Saudi Arabia that have been cited by the State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and non-governmental groups for propagating extreme intolerance.”

Georgetown president John DeGioia responded by extolling the virtues of Prince Talal as “a global business leader and philanthropist.” Without answering Wolf’s questions directly, DeGioia simply pointed out that the center had experts who had written about the extremism of Wahhabism and human rights issues. He also lauded the center’s director, John Esposito, the man who had said before 9/11, “Bin Laden is the best thing to come along, if you are an intelligence officer, if you are an authoritarian regime, or if you want to paint Islamist activism as a threat.”⁸⁰

To bolster the credibility of the center, DeGioia revealed the real reason for the Saudis’ interest in Georgetown and the ultimate threat it poses: “Our scholars have been called upon not only by the State Department, as you note, but also by Defense, Homeland Security and FBI officials as well as governments and their agencies in Europe and Asia. In fact, several high-ranking U.S. military officials, prior to assuming roles with the Multi-National Force in Iraq, have sought out faculty with the Center for their expertise on the region.”⁸¹

In its investigation of institutional compliance with reporting requirements, the DoE noted that “Prince Alwaleed’s agreement with Georgetown exemplifies how foreign money can advance a particular country’s worldview within U.S. academic institutions.”⁸²

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 presented universities with ties to Saudi Arabia with a more public challenge to their values. With rare exceptions, such as those mentioned above, universities have escaped scrutiny for accepting funds from heinous regimes. The national attention devoted by the media to Khashoggi’s brutal slaying forced recipients of funds from the government and, especially, from the crown prince accused of ordering the assassination to consider the merits of keeping the money. Ethics seems to have played less of a role in the decision-making of universities than the potential downside of negative publicity. Since there is little awareness of Saudi funding, however, that risk is too low to justify returning gifts or hesitating to solicit and accept new ones.

Several institutions said they were reviewing their relationship with the Saudis in the wake of the killing, but none seem to have deemed the incident important enough to cut their ties. Northwestern University, for example, reported receiving nearly \$22 million in gifts and contracts from Saudi Arabia. When asked whether the university would reconsider accepting money from the government following the Khashoggi murder, a statement from the university expressed its condolences but said it had “determined that most of the funds received have been to faculty in the form of grants for basic science research. The results of such research will be shared with the world through peer review published journals with the intent of global benefits. Going forward, the university is asking faculty to assess their relationships with Saudi Arabia.”⁸³

Graduate students wrote an open letter to the president of MIT urging him to sever ties with the Saudi government and condemn its human rights violations:

We know that you and MIT's leadership initially approached the Institute's partnership with Saudi Arabia with the noblest of intentions. However, at this point, MIT's continued collaboration with the Saudi government sends the message that human rights violations can be overlooked in favor of financial considerations. It assures Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, that MIT will tolerate his present and future transgressions. And it enables the regime to profit from MIT's reputation. This both grants the kingdom impunity and damages MIT's reputation.⁸⁴

MIT reviewed its ties with Saudi Arabia and decided only to end the Media Lab relationship with MiSK. One rationale for continuing to accept Saudi money was that some of the funders "served as moderating social influences — for example, by employing female engineers and managers." Jonathan King, the editorial board chairman of MIT's faculty newsletter, said the relatively small amount of money involved did not justify getting "in bed with murderers and a government that imprisons its women activists." He asked why MIT would risk its reputation for "chump change."⁸⁵

Since the controversy arose, MIT has reported additional gifts of more than \$9 million from Saudi Arabia.

Johns Hopkins is another institution that has been challenged to address the human rights issues in Saudi Arabia. The university has reported nearly \$29 million in gifts and contracts, many related to health care, from Saudi sources. It partnered with Aramco to run the company's health system, for example, and works with a hospital that specializes in ophthalmology. Pamela Paulk, president of Johns Hopkins Medicine International, told the *Baltimore Sun*, "It is not important for us to be involved in politics. Our mission is to provide health care, education, and research."

Peter Danchin, a human rights lawyer and director of the International and Comparative Law Program at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, suggested universities can express their views privately or publicly. "The risk is the regime retaliates and threatens to cancel the joint venture," Danchin said. "As a human rights lawyer, I would think that is a risk worth taking. There is a question about complicity. If you are doing business in a country with human rights violations, at some point, there is a moral and ethical question that arises about what you should do."⁸⁶

There has been no announcement of Johns Hopkins withdrawing from Saudi Arabia, but it has not reported any gifts since the controversy over Khashoggi arose.

No doubt speaking for many universities, Liz Reisberg, an independent consultant and research fellow at Boston College's Center for International Higher Education who has worked as a consultant for Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education, said responding to the Khashoggi murder could be symbolic, but it would be hypocritical unless universities are prepared to cancel academic relationships with other countries that violate human rights. "If universities withdraw from their international initiatives each time there is a violation of human rights or an act of violence committed by academic partner's government," Reisberg wrote, "soon all international academic engagement would probably come to a screeching halt."⁸⁷

Universities do not have to end all relationships with foreign governments, but they could certainly stop taking money from the worst human rights abusers. As the MIT students noted, their university does not have to worry about financial retaliation. "With an endowment of over \$16 billion on which it managed to generate a staggering investment return of 13.5 percent in 2017, MIT cannot be threatened into silence."⁸⁸ Then again, not every university has those resources, and if MIT turns down Saudi money, you can be sure other universities will willingly take it.

What Is the Impact?

Investments in Israeli Studies are made with the intention of improving the quantity and quality of education regarding Israel and are not aimed at demonizing the Palestinians or other Arabs. Similarly, except for some

contributions to Middle East and Islamic studies, Arab states and individuals focus more on enhancing U.S.-Arab ties than disparaging Israel.

One way the Arab lobby hopes to influence U.S. Middle East policy is by investing in presidents. For example, Arab states are major donors to presidential libraries. While this money is contributed after they leave office, it sends a message to future officeholders that favorable policies have rewards. One example of how this strategy was applied at the university level involved a relatively obscure southern governor who asked the Saudis to support his state university. When that governor, Bill Clinton, became a nominee for president, the Saudis made their first donation to the University of Arkansas – a \$3.5 million gift in 1992. One week after he was elected President, Clinton discussed the donation with King Fahd. The university received another \$20 million a few weeks after President Clinton’s inauguration to establish the King Fahd Middle East Studies Center.⁸⁹ Neither contribution was reported at the time. “I don’t believe that, technically, we have to report it,” said Fred Harrison, general counsel for the university system, but he said it would soon do so. The only gifts reported from the king, however, were for \$18 million and \$312,524 in 1995.⁹⁰

Donors typically are allowed little or no control over how their money is spent. Arab donors know, however, that the political positions they fund will be given to academics who share their worldview and are more likely to be anti-Israel and committed to teaching a sanitized version of Islamic and Middle Eastern history.

Princeton’s Bernard Lewis observed that Middle East studies programs have been distorted by “a degree of thought control and limitations of freedom of expression without parallel in the Western world since the 18th century.” He added, “It seems to me it’s a very dangerous situation because it makes any kind of scholarly discussion of Islam, to say the least, dangerous. Islam and Islamic values now have a level of immunity from comment and criticism in the Western world that Christianity has lost and Judaism never had.”⁹¹

Contributions to create a chair in Palestinian Studies at a prestigious Ivy League school were clearly intended to promote the Palestinian narrative to students who are expected to become influential in the future. The chair, named after the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, was funded by a coalition of nine different donors, including E. Paul Sorensen, an alumnus who supported a graduate stipend in Palestinian Studies, Basem Salfiti, Rasha Abu Ghazaleh Farouki, and the Nablus-based Munib and Angela Masri Foundation.⁹² The other donors were not mentioned in the announcement and a representative of the department would not disclose them.⁹³

Munib Masri is a wealthy Palestinian who founded an oil and gas company and the Palestine Development and Investment Company (PADICO). He is a vocal supporter of the BDS movement and was also a contributor to Columbia’s Edward Said Chair in Middle Eastern Studies.⁹⁴ The foundation gift does not appear in the most recent DoE report.

It is too early to tell whether the position will be a platform for advocating a political agenda though A.J. Caschetta speculated, “Brown’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, its Center for Middle East Studies, and its New Directions in Palestinian Studies research initiative will now collaborate in a synergistic venture, spending money and hiring teachers to indoctrinate students and ‘inform the community’ about the evils of Israeli colonialism, while stamping its imprimatur on the virtues of the Palestinian cause.”⁹⁵ It was not a good sign when Beshara Doumani, a supporter of the anti-Semitic BDS campaign, was named the first occupant of the position. Doumani has since also become the president of Birzeit University, which is known for the activism of students associated with terror groups such as Hamas and the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine \(PFLP\)](#).⁹⁶

The allure of Arab money can influence universities in other ways as well. For example, as I wrote in *The Arab Lobby*, Texas A&M effectively censored the PBS station it managed by canceling the broadcast of *Death of a Princess* in 1980, a film the Saudis were desperate to keep off the airwaves because of its unsympathetic portrayal of the kingdom. University president Jarvis Miller explained that his university didn’t want to “risk

damaging international relations by showing a movie that reportedly relies on sensationalism and shock value to attack a culture and religion that is foreign to us. As a university, we are attempting at this very time to establish significant new ties with the people who are most offended by this movie.”

The University of Houston also prevented the film from being shown on its station. A press release explained that the university understood the “strong and understandable objections by the government of Saudi Arabia at a time when the mounting crisis in the Middle East, our long friendship with the Saudi government and U.S. national interests all point to the need to avoid exacerbating the situation.” Several years earlier, the university had signed a lucrative contract to provide instruction for a Saudi princess in Riyadh, and the university received a significant percentage of its donations from oil companies.⁹⁷

While all Arab gifts are sometimes portrayed as nefarious, much of it is for benign purposes such as research in health care and science. MD Anderson, one of the nation’s premier research hospitals, for example, was one of the largest recipients of funding, reporting two \$75 million gifts from the UAE. Another large gift, \$15 million from Qatar, went to Tulane after Hurricane Katrina.

As documented in this report, universities receive millions of dollars in funding to establish campuses in the Middle East. These investments are not likely to have much impact on the views of American students, however, because few attend these schools. According to Open Doors, a U.S.-government-supported project that collects information on international students and scholars studying or teaching at higher education institutions in the United States, and U.S. students studying abroad for academic credit at their home colleges or universities, 5,925 Americans studied at campuses in the Middle East in 2018-19. Nearly 60% of them attended schools in Israel. Only 955 went to schools in the UAE, 62 in Qatar, and 4 in Saudi Arabia.⁹⁸

The thousands of Arab students who come here to study are not necessarily interested in politics; they are more interested in science, engineering, information technology, medicine, and other areas that will help them professionally and serve the needs of their countries. As noted earlier, many of the gifts to universities are to subsidize their education. Furthermore, while here, these students typically focus on their studies and are not actively involved in campus politics.

In the past, there were two main organizations of Arab students, the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) and the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), that received funding from Arab governments and were very active detractors of Israel on campus. GUPS, for example, became a student arm of the PLO’s Palestinian National Council and the principal Arab lobby organization on American campuses in the 1970s and 80s, sponsoring speaking tours by anti-Israel speakers and organizing protests and other activities, but it is no longer active. Neither OAS nor GUPS exists today. Still, with thousands spread across the country, students from Arab countries, particularly those hostile to Israel, could potentially affect the atmosphere if they were to become active in the BDS movement and other anti-Semitic, anti-Israel campaigns.

The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) claimed in its report that Arab funding has “a significant impact on campus attitudes, including the emergence of an anti-Semitic culture and BDS activities at some of the most important universities in the United States.” More specifically, ISGAP asserted there is a “direct correlation” between Arab funding and “active presence at those universities of groups that have been proven to foster an aggressive and hostile anti-Semitic atmosphere on campus, such as the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP).”

No evidence is presented for these assertions and the report admitted no causal link could be established. This is not surprising given the lack of transparency regarding how donations are used. Moreover, in recent years, MSAs on campus have not been a major contributor to the atmosphere on campus. SJPs certainly have been disruptors, but they have been established on some 200 campuses and it is unlikely their presence or activities are related to Arab gifts to universities that go to faculty, not students, except in the case of financial aid

(decades earlier Arab states did support Arab student organizations). It is possible that some of the foreign students may contribute to the climate on campus but most of the hostility toward Jews and Israel is generated by American students, including Jews from groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow.

The relatively small number of professors who hold positions in more political fields that are funded by Arab donors and support BDS, such as the new chair at Brown in Palestine Studies, can potentially reinforce anti-Israel student activity. The evidence, however, is anecdotal rather than empirical. Most faculty who agitate against Israel do so without Arab funding as motivation.

Given that much of the Arab funding is apolitical, it is an overstatement to say that Arab funding, in general, has a deleterious impact. Ironically, some of the most problematic faculty receive money from the *U.S. government* through the Title VI program to support Middle East Studies Centers. As I've documented,⁹⁹ these Centers are often highly politicized and use non-academic materials from sources such as Aramco and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. It is not surprising that these centers, which educate high school teachers, are also targeted for investment by Arab funders. According to ISGAP, these institutions have received nearly \$1.2 billion from Gulf nations.

Universities may believe the Arab donors expect them to be hostile to Israel even when that might not be the case. Still, non-political donations send a message to donees and potential donees that money is available to those who do not criticize or contradict Arab regimes. All universities have an interest in keeping their patrons happy; hence, even donations for politically innocuous purposes, such as health research, come with an implicit quid pro quo.

Sources of Funding for Title-VI Programs

Qatar	\$667,745,466
Saudi Arabia	\$304,553,451
UAE	\$219,446,705
Total	\$1,191,745,622

Colleges with Middle East Studies departments that do not receive Title VI funding received another \$1.2 billion from those countries.¹⁰⁰

F. Gregory Gause III, an expert on the Gulf and the head of the international affairs department at Texas A&M University, questioned whether donations by countries like Saudi Arabia have helped their image. "In general," he said, "if what they're trying to do with gifts to universities is buy goodwill, they've failed."¹⁰¹

There is evidence for his view if you look at Gallup polls on American attitudes toward foreign countries. In 2001, before 9/11, for example, 47% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Saudi Arabia. In the February 2023 survey, the figure was 30%.¹⁰²

While the image of Saudi Arabia may not have improved, this does not mean the Saudis and other Arab donors are not having an impact on students, faculty, decision-makers, and pre-collegiate education. Faculty in political fields who receive funding from these sources can, for example, use their classrooms to advance personal political agendas, be viewed as experts whose opinions are sought by government officials and the media, produce textbooks used by students around the country, train teachers, and develop curricula.

To advance beyond the anecdotal evidence, more research is required to produce an empirical study of the impact of Arab funding on the campus environment. This would involve analyzing curricula and programs for evidence of bias. As Palestinian Studies become more prominent, it will be useful to monitor the research, teaching, and programming of faculty supported by foreign gifts.

Compliance Crackdown

Up until 2020, the DoE paid little attention to university compliance, and institutions did not report many of the gifts. That year the DoE began to investigate whether Yale and Harvard were complying with reporting requirements. Earlier, it launched inquiries regarding Cornell, Georgetown, Rutgers, Texas A&M, MIT, and Maryland. The DoE also published a report on the failure of many institutions to abide by the rules. It was especially interested in contributions from China for both security and political reasons, but also highlighted unreported gifts from Arab governments.¹⁰³

The DoE found that some of the foreign sources of funding that are hostile to the United States “are targeting their investments (i.e., “gifts” and “contracts”) to project soft power, steal sensitive and proprietary research, and spread propaganda.” The higher education industry’s solicitation of foreign sources, it disclosed, “has not been appropriately or effectively balanced or checked by the institutional controls needed to meaningfully measure the risk and manage the threat posed by a given relationship, donor, or foreign venture.”

“There is very real reason for concern,” the report concluded, “that foreign money buys influence or control over teaching and research.” The department expressed particular unease about reported donations listed as anonymous from China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Russia which totaled more than \$1 billion since 2012.

The DoE rejected complaints that reporting requirements were overly burdensome and was incredulous, for example, that Yale reported no foreign gifts or contracts for four years and Case Western Reserve for 12. It noted that institutions have no trouble tracking money paid by students and, therefore, should have no difficulty tracing the sources of foreign funds.

College officials are upset by the crackdown while essentially admitting they have ignored their reporting obligation. According to Elizabeth Redden, they believe DoE has “taken an unnecessarily combative, rather than collegial approach to enforcing a law that *no one much paid attention to in the past*” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁴

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) has been fighting DoE over a new requirement to provide the donor’s name and address, insisting this would “violate institutions’ commitment to donor confidentiality and would preclude institutions from accepting anonymous gifts from foreign sources.”¹⁰⁵

Speaking about the new investigations but also rebutting CASE, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said, “This is about transparency.” She noted that the department was finding that too many colleges and universities are “underreporting or not reporting at all” and emphasized if they “are accepting foreign money or gifts, their students, donors, and taxpayers deserve to know how much and from whom.”¹⁰⁶ This was evident from the examples uncovered here of undisclosed donors from the “State of Palestine.”

In an undated but apparently subsequent “Response to Public Comments,” the department said it would require the name and address of foreign sources but agreed to withhold the information from the public disclosure report.¹⁰⁷

Legislation was introduced in June 2020 to lower the reporting threshold to \$50,000, which would provide greater transparency and a better indication of the extent of Arab funding of American universities. The legislation also would give DoE the authority to punish schools that fail to properly report by imposing a fine. To date, the legislation has not been adopted.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Now that the danger has been identified by the [Trump administration’s](#) focus on foreign funding of universities, the question is whether the [Biden administration](#) will pursue the investigations with equal vigor or revert to the prior policy of ignoring noncompliance with reporting requirements. The fact that the foreign gifts reports issued under the Biden DoE removed the list of giftors to universities is not a good sign.

Given that the overwhelming majority of foreign gifts are reported without any indication of their purpose, it is difficult to assess their impact. Hence, further inquiry is needed to determine how foreign gifts are used and the extent to which they adversely affect our national security, the atmosphere on campus, and the objectivity of teaching about the Middle East.

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