

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
November 8, 2005

Statement of Senator Russ Feingold for the
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
"Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the War on Terror?"
November 9, 2005

I thank the Chairman for holding this hearing, which gives us the chance to assess one part of our efforts to defeat violent extremism and combat terrorism around the world. Today's hearing is especially important in reviewing benchmarks of progress in US-Saudi Arabia cooperation.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, the U.S. rightfully demanded Saudi Arabia's cooperation in combating terrorism. By sharing intelligence, refusing to turn a blind eye to the violent activities of extremists, and cutting off terrorists' sources of financing, Saudi Arabia could play a significant and positive role in this most urgent priority.

Attacks by Islamic militants within Saudi Arabia, most notably, in 2003 and 2004, underscore the fact that international terrorism threatens the Saudis themselves. However, it does not appear that the Saudi government has adequately reformed itself or distanced itself from extremist ideologies. Troubling reports continue to question Saudi Arabia's efforts to curb terrorist financing. Saudi officials have yet to clearly separate themselves from radical Islamic charities that seek to manipulate misperceptions of the US and its relations with Israel and to promote violence.

Recent news reports have noted that al-Qaeda is promoting its hateful doctrine in mainstream media and seeking to unite followers in opposition to the U.S. We cannot afford to let this effort go unchallenged and I hope that the Administration now appreciates that fact. Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes heard first hand during her recent trip to the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, about growing anti-American sentiment. Saudi Arabia needs to understand that we expect it to be a helpful ally in the war against terrorism and that there will be serious consequences for the U.S.-Saudi relationship if it is not.