

SAUDI ARABIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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His Royal Highness, chairman of the King Faisal Center for Research & Islamic Studies in Riyadh, was the head of his country's general intelligence service for 24 years. The following is the text of his address to the 22nd annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference in Washington, D.C., on October 22, 2013, sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations.

Saudi Arabia, with its stability and influence, plays an important regional and international role. Working diligently to address many of its major international and domestic concerns, the Kingdom is a confident participant in world affairs and keeps an ever-vigilant eye toward its own internal safeguarding.

Why is the Kingdom confident? For a number of reasons. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, a religion that today has an estimated 1.2 billion adherents. Saudi Arabia represents over 20 percent of the combined GDP of the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region (and an estimated quarter of the Arab World's GDP, according to the latest IMF numbers), making it the economic engine of the region and an effective partner and member of the G-20. The Saudi stock market represents over 50 percent of the entire stock market capitalization of the MENA region, and the listed Saudi companies make up five of the top 10 companies in the region, the top two slots being the Saudi conglomerates Aramco and Sabic. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), the Kingdom's central

bank, is the world's third-largest holder of foreign-exchange reserves, managing just about \$850 billion; holdings of \$500 billion are in private hands. Last but not least, Saudi Aramco, the Kingdom's national oil company, is the world's largest producer and exporter of petroleum and has by far the world's largest sustained production capacity infrastructure at about 12.5 million barrels per day. It also has the world's largest spare capacity, currently estimated at about 2.5 million barrels per day, or about 70 percent of unused global capacity.

Along with these impressive numbers, our nation is a peninsula, not an island. A look at our neighbors reveals significant challenges that fall under the rubric of my overriding theme: change and no change. The unchanging factors are history and geography. Whatever occurred yesterday is unchangeable today and forever. The geographic location of Saudi Arabia is equally unchanging. Our neighbors are permanently situated by our side. We have to deal with them as they have to deal with us.

On the side of change, our overall goal vis-à-vis other nations is to strengthen our allies in the region and beyond and to

assist, in whatever way we can, in helping our neighbors maintain stability. Saudi Arabia firmly believes that peace in the region, and a conclusion to various longstanding conflict-resolution efforts, must be a primary objective of the next decade. This peace will only be achieved through cooperation that is built on trust, dialogue and engagement. This is why Saudi Arabia will continue to take the lead in negotiating between and with conflicting parties and nations. Furthermore, the Kingdom firmly believes that the next decade's most vital security issue is progress. There must be economic, political and social progress for the people and governments of the Middle East so that peace, not conflict, is clearly seen as the gateway to prosperity.

The first issue, without any prioritizing, is Iran. Since the Iranian revolution, the leadership there has assumed a pugilist's stance towards the world community, and we assume an embracing stance. While Saudi Arabia has the world's largest petroleum reserves, Iran has the second-largest. Saudi Arabia is Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the birthplace of Islam, and as such it is the eminent leader of the wider Muslim world. Iran portrays itself as the leader of not just the minority Shiite world, but of all Muslim revolutionaries interested in standing up to the West.

In addition to these differences, Saudi Arabia has two other concerns about Iran. First, it is in our interest that the Iranian leadership does not develop a nuclear weapon, for their doing so will make nuclear-arms proliferation in the Middle East the norm. I have suggested that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members should carefully weigh all options, including acquiring a nuclear deterrent, if the Iranian leadership succeeds in building a nuclear weapon. This is why, through vari-

ous initiatives, we are sending messages to them that it is their right, as it is any nation's right, and as we ourselves are doing, to develop a civilian nuclear program, but that trying to parlay that program into nuclear weapons is a dead end, and that wiser choices will result in wider riches. A Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction is the best means to get Iran and Israel to give up nuclear weapons. Such a zone must be accompanied by a rewards regime that provides economic and technical support for countries that join, plus a nuclear security umbrella guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council. It should include a sanctions regime that puts economic and political sanctions on countries that don't join, plus military sanctions on those countries that try to develop weapons of mass destruction — also guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council.

Sanctions alone are not deterring the Iranian leadership from reaching their goal, but I also heartily agree with those in the international community who possess the blessed wisdom to know that unilateral military strikes would be catastrophic. Alas, [Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu, observing Mr. Obama's lamentable conduct in Syria, is saying he may opt for a unilateral strike, in spite of the dire consequences. The Iranian leadership will welcome such a strike and may provoke it. After Rouhani's sweet talk and Obama's open-arms approach to him, the Iranian people will certainly rally behind their leadership.

The other concern we need to address in the coming decade is the Iranian leadership's meddling and destabilizing efforts in the countries with Shia majorities, Iraq and Bahrain, as well as those countries with significant minority Shia communities, such as Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen. And

Iran still occupies the three Emirati islands in the Gulf and refuses to talk about them. Their invasion of Syria is underway and growing. This must end. Saudi Arabia will oppose any and all of Iran's interference and meddling in other countries. It is Saudi Arabia's position that Iran has no right to meddle in other nations' internal affairs, especially

those of Arab states. Indeed, Iran takes this position as well; it is very sensitive about other countries meddling in its

own affairs. The Kingdom expects Iran to practice what it preaches. King Abdullah welcomed the election of President Rouhani and expressed his best wishes for Rouhani's term as president of Iran. Any measure to free Iran from the clutches of the extremists in Khamenei's entourage and the revolutionary guard will bring stability to our region. We Saudis observe President Obama's efforts in this regard. The road ahead is arduous. Whether Rouhani will succeed in steering Iran towards sensible policies is already contested in Iran. The forces of darkness in Qum and Tehran are well entrenched. Khomeini's expansionist ambition and legacy challenge the well-meaning words of Rouhani. We still have to see Rouhani's ability to implement his words or failure to do so, as Khatemi and Rafsanjani before him witnessed the dashing of their sweet rhetoric on the rock of Khamenei. We are prepared for either eventuality.

One cannot discuss Iran without also mentioning Iraq. Iraq has a great history

as a pivotal member of the Arab community. It has been, and it can still be, an important force in the Arab world. It is a founding member of the Arab League, the United Nations and OPEC, possessing vast natural-resource wealth, and may someday be a major player in the energy markets. It sits in the heart of the Middle

East and has a capable and diverse population. But much of its potential is being crushed by Iranian interference. Be it preferable to us or not, it

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is a new fact in the region that an Iraq that once waged a horribly bloody war against Iran has now become a significant arena of growing Iranian influence, thanks to the aftermath of the U.S. invasion. There are people and groups in Iraq that are, though they deny it, completely beholden to Iran; that is not only unacceptable, it is bad for the future of an ethnically and religiously diverse country. It is our goal for Iraq to remain an active participant of the Arab world and throw off these destructive foreign influences.

This is the major reason we continue to maintain the same distance from all Iraqi factions. However, let me point out that, because we still have serious and deep-seated reservations about the formation of the current Iraqi government, we are the only country not to have sent a resident ambassador to Iraq. What is the cause of these reservations? Let me give you one example. In the weeks preceding the formation of the current Iraqi government, there was a certain Iranian general

in Baghdad negotiating on behalf of the current Iraqi prime minister with Shia and Kurdish groups, seeking their support for the new mandate. These are the kinds of actions that are not missed by Saudi Arabia. We cannot agree with them, and we will do everything in our power to make them end. In short, it is the Kingdom's full intention to continue to work with the people of Iraq to ensure that their country becomes a stable, positive and independent member of the Arab world.

I will now briefly address the current situation with one of Saudi Arabia's closest neighbors, Yemen. For the Kingdom and, indeed, the rest of the world, an increasingly unstable Yemen represents a very real security threat, due to the potential for terror cells to take root there. This rough, rugged southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula, with a population of over 20 million, has been an arena for al-Qaeda operations since Osama bin Laden established training camps there in the 1990s; and, according to intelligence sources, Al-Qaeda's influence is disruptive in the country. This is largely due to the fact that the Yemeni central government's authority in the mountainous areas outside the capital and other cities is not up to par. Extremists have reportedly made deals with local tribal leaders for supplies and protection, creating a sanctuary not unlike Pakistan's Tribal Areas.

What are our plans for the coming decade vis-à-vis this volatile situation? We have, in essence, a tripartite approach. The Kingdom has had a decades-long program of economic and financial support for the Yemeni people. It is now on hold until the country settles down. We are strengthening our borders to prevent Yemeni refugees and al-Qaeda terrorists from crossing into our country while also increasing

our counterintelligence efforts to attempt to pinpoint and destroy al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen. Our work with the world community to eliminate the terrorist threat continues.

Let us now turn to the Kingdom's approach to the volatile and important nations of Lebanon and Syria. Due to the raging civil war next door in Syria, Lebanon is very much on the brink of its own civil war, as Hezbollah continues to push its agenda regardless of law and order. With the collapse of the Mikati government, we see to what extremes Hezbollah is willing to go, literally risking the very foundations of the nation, to prevent the Assad regime from being overthrown and stopping any scrutiny of an international tribunal whose only goal is bringing fair justice upon those who perpetrated a series of horrible assassinations. Hezbollah's reckless interference in Syria is further destabilizing Lebanon; witness the recent car bombs in the Hezbollah neighborhoods of Beirut and in Tripoli. Saudi Arabia believes that law and order must prevail in Lebanon and supports all efforts to neutralize Hezbollah's intervention in Syria and bring their leaders to justice for the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The Kingdom is providing financial aid to Lebanon. This is a serious effort to rebuild a stronger, more stable Lebanon, and an attempt to roll back the influence of Iran's leadership. We have for years pushed for the disarming of Tehran-backed Hezbollah and supported the government with nearly \$1 billion in financial support and credit for weapons purchases for the Lebanese Army, and we will continue to do so in the coming decade.

In Syria, the past two and a half years have proven absolutely disastrous. Gut-wrenching images of unspeakable, in-

discriminate violence against civilians in Syria have shocked the world. By the latest United Nations estimates, over 100,000 Syrians, including many children, have lost their lives as a result of the Assad regime's criminal behavior. There are now two million Syrian refugees in bordering countries and more than four million displaced persons inside Syria. Whether through the murder of peaceful protesters, the shelling of residential quarters, the execution of soldiers who refuse to open fire on their countrymen, or the use of chemical weapons, a picture has emerged of a regime systematically defying even the most basic international moral and legal standards. Unless the world is content to see these massacres continue, the Syrian regime, along with its instruments of oppression, must be decisively removed from power. The shameful way that the world community accepts the impunity of the butcher of Syria is a blot on the conscience of the world. The dithering of leadership in the West and the callous, cynical and cavalier attitude in support of Bashar by Russia and China are a stigma that they will bear forever. The Iranian leadership's support for Assad, from the beginning, is a criminal act, and they should be tried in the International Criminal Court. The current charade of international control over Bashar's chemical arsenal would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious, and designed not only to give Mr. Obama an opportunity to back down, but also to help Assad to butcher his people. If you believe that Kerry's remarks, giving Russia a chance to make their play, was off-hand, then you will believe anything. If the world, and especially the American people, believe that removing Assad's chemical weapons will end his slaughter of innocent children, women and men in Syria, then all

semblance of rational thought, humanitarian care and national self-interest will be thrown to the wind. Preventing Assad from using his killing machine by any means, including targeted strikes on his air force and command and control centers, is the only way that a politically negotiated end to the carnage in Syria can be achieved. You delay that now, and you will have to do more when the carnage spreads to Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Alas, General Dempsey has announced that the Pentagon has no plans to supply the Syrian opposition with weapons. This comes after the promise to do so was publicly stated by Secretary Kerry and after Mr. Obama declared that Assad must go. Why make such a statement, when it can only bring comfort and solace to the criminal and chagrin and despair to the victim? How one can reconcile such contradictions is beyond me.

Egypt holds a special place in Saudi security interests. It is the largest Arab country, with close and historically deep and significant ties to the Kingdom. King Abdullah held the closest of relations with President Mubarak for over 30 years. Abandoning him or any close ally during a revolutionary uprising was not and will never be a policy option for the Kingdom, which must uphold and defend its values. However, once President Mubarak resigned and the Egyptian people expressed their will, King Abdullah not only recognized the new reality, but he also extended the hand of friendship and \$4 billion in financial aid to the new leadership. But this new leadership, entirely beholden to the Muslim Brotherhood, proved unable and incompetent to govern a country such as Egypt. After barely a year in power, the majority of the Egyptian people withdrew support from them and demanded a refer-

endum on the viability of the president's legitimacy. When he refused, they turned to the streets in the largest-ever demonstrations, anywhere. These millions asked the armed forces to restore legitimacy and dignity, and they did. They transferred power to a newly appointed temporary civilian government to save the Egyptian state from disaster. The Egyptian government has issued a four-month roadmap to return to normalcy, including a constitu-

tion, parliamentary and presidential elections, and the inclusion of all political parties in the process. King Abdullah was the first leader to congratulate

the Egyptian leadership and has led the regional push to support this action. Saudi Arabia unconditionally authorized \$5 billion in grants, loans and deposits to Egypt's emerging government, which stands in stark comparison to the conditional loans that the United States and Europe have promised and keep threatening to freeze.

Now to Bahrain. This nation is geographically and historically the closest to Saudi Arabia. Right after the 1979 revolution in Iran, Khomeini began trying to export his revolution to all Muslim countries. This resulted in eruptions of violence not only in Muslim countries, but also among Shia communities in other countries. Those who claim that the recent disturbances were not instigated by Iran forget that Khomeini's creation, Hezbollah in Bahrain, still exists and that Iranian

propaganda broadcasts beamed at Bahrain have never ceased. Iranian officials have frequently issued statements that Bahrain is a province of Iran. When King Hamad delegated his crown prince to negotiate with the protesters on their demands, the Kingdom publicly endorsed the negotiations and still does. The Gulf Cooperation Council has extended a 10-year economic package of \$10 billion dollars, mostly from the Kingdom. The deployment of Saudi-

supported GCC troops at the request of a member country of the GCC to protect its strategic infrastructure like the refineries, the airport, the seaport,

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and economic installations is a duty that the Kingdom will always fulfill. No GCC personnel have been engaged in any action against protesters. King Hamad has continued to call for negotiations, and the Kingdom continues to support that call. But let's be clear: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will never accept Iran's taking power in Bahrain. This is a fantasy if anyone, including in the West, believes that such an eventuality can happen on Saudi Arabia's watch.

Of course, a full analysis of the Kingdom's situation vis-à-vis the region cannot be considered complete without discussing, what is perhaps the most important issue, and that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As we have recently seen, Israel's unwillingness to cease its unlawful colonization and continual refusal to grant the Palestinians their own homeland is the core reason

that this conflict continues. There is no lack of proposals for peace, many of them completely rational, fair and viable. Indeed, the only viable one today remains the Arab Peace Initiative, originally outlined by King Abdullah in 2002. It was even recently used as the basis for President Obama's call for Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders and for the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestine bordering Israel, Jordan and Egypt.

The Kingdom continues to urge Israel to take the necessary steps toward peace and justice. It

also continues to support the Palestinian Authority in its attempts to build lasting institutions for its people, and it remains, counter to recent ac-

cusations, the world's largest contributor to the Palestinian Authority. Pledges ranging into the millions of dollars have been made to support the Palestinian Authority, and the Kingdom has delivered hundreds of millions of dollars in the past few years for rebuilding and developing Palestine — money that is being spent on schools, roads and security. Funding, engagement and a call for a two-state solution remain the center pieces of the Saudi position in the coming decade. The Kerry effort to bring an accord during the next nine months, while laudable, is still a shot in the dark. If Mr. Obama dithers on what is needed to convince Netanyahu to reach an accord, as he is doing on Syria, there will not be one.

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world community to support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that the Kingdom declined a seat on the Security Council was in regard to the Council's treatment of the Palestinian people. The Kingdom's stance has been met with varying views; internally with overwhelming public support. All the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference — made up of 57 countries, including all the Arab states and states from Africa, Asia and Europe — have expressed un-

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derstanding and support. France and Turkey were equally understanding. But here in the United States, the following words have been used to describe the

Kingdom's move: petulant, scared, shaky, hand-wringing, foolish, shortsighted, angry. These are some of the words used to describe the Kingdom's recent decision to decline membership in the Security Council (SC). Let us look at the first article of the UN Charter, which states:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.

Article 24 of the chapter on the Security Council states: "UN members confer on the SC primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security."

Article 39 states: "The SC shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, and shall make recommendations or decide what measures shall be taken to maintain international peace and security in accordance with articles 41 and 42."

Article 41 states: "The SC may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions."

Article 42 states: "Should the SC consider that measures provided for in article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land to maintain or restore international peace and security."

Article 49 states: "The members of the UN shall join in affording mutual assistance in carrying out the measures decided upon by the SC."

Has the Security Council fulfilled these obligations? Certainly not.

Ladies and Gentlemen, petulant, scared, etc., those who used the words to describe Saudi Arabia's declining the UN Security Council seat have not been listening to us. Since 1947, the Kingdom has sought to bring about the implementation of various resolutions passed by the General Assembly or the Security Council, without success. Resolutions 242 and 338 of the SC are examples where the veto of one of the permanent members has stymied their implementation. More recently, the vetoes of two members have quashed efforts to stop the killing and bloodshed in Syria. Other examples of the SC failing to do its job as stated in the articles of the UN Charter I mentioned before abound.

The Kingdom's Council of Ministers has, over the years, called upon the SC to do its job; but to no avail. The Saudi foreign minister, in 2008, when Israel launched its murderous assault on Gaza, called upon the SC to stop the attack and warned that if it failed to do so, then, "We will turn our backs to you."

There is nothing whimsical about the decision to forego membership in the Security Council. It is a decision based on the ineffectual performance of the body and the necessity of prodding all the members of the UN to enact the reform that will allow for the Palestinian people to shed the inhuman and immoral Israeli occupation of their land; that will rid the Middle East of the lewd display of dancing around nuclear proliferation by the P5+1 and Iran, and removing the Syrian chemical weapons while Israel continues to build up its nuclear, biological and chemical arsenals; and that will bring to a stop the butchering of the Syrian people by a bloodthirsty president who is now enjoying the protection of the Security Council.

Let me conclude by reaffirming that Saudi Arabia has a vital responsibility and role that goes beyond the Arab world. We are critical to the well-being of the global economy. We see our work in that area as part of our overall role in the broader Islamic world. We hope to increase our peaceful foreign engagements with nations in the name of improving our common humanitarian good, and also to foster a sense of Islam as a religion of collaboration and progress. Through the King Abdullah Center for Cultural and Religious Dialogue, now established in Vienna, Saudi Arabia extends the hand of friendship to all peoples of the world.