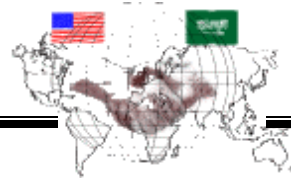


Saudi-American Forum



SAF Interview #1/Part 3

September 25, 2003

Saudi-American Forum Interview Ambassador Chas W. Freeman Part III - A Relationship in Transition -- What Is To Be Done?

The Saudi-American Forum is pleased to present the final segment of our interview with Ambassador Chas Freeman who, in a career of distinguished service for the United States, served as U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia 1989-1992. SAF talked with Ambassador Freeman by telephone on September 4, 2003.

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A Relationship in Transition -- What Is To Be Done?

Saudi-American Forum: You have said that despite the transformation in the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and the post-9/11 vilification of the Kingdom in American media, the two continue to share important interests. You also talked about the past inadequate level of effort to build understanding between people on both sides. What factors currently contribute to further damage to the relationship?

Ambassador Chas Freeman: I think the most important negative effect has been caused by changes in U.S. visa policy and entry procedures, which essentially dried up the arrival of students in the United States from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Consequently, an important part of the relationship -- the previous generation had a good understanding and sense of connection to the United States -- has suffered. The next generation will not have that understanding or that connection, not having studied here.

In the business area, the difficulty of getting visas and the well grounded fear of humiliation at the border, or by law enforcement officials in the United States after arrival, or by airline crews, or by others has essentially dried up business travel. New business is not being done and old business relationships are atrophying, and exports from the region are rapidly declining.

The terrorists' focus on the American expat community in the kingdom and in the region more broadly, and various incidents like the [May 2003] Riyadh bombing plus the negative image of Saudi Arabia in the United States have significantly reduced the flow of American travelers to the region and led to an outflow of the resident Americans there.

The two countries really need to sit down and talk about how to reverse the trends that are ensuring that the basic human fabric from which the relationships have been sustained does not

fray and disappear. We must ensure that the future generations of Americans and Saudi Arabians do not grow up in ignorance of each other - that they do not have negative views of each other formed by the absence of contact. These are very real possibilities.

Saudi-American Forum: What should be done to reverse the estrangement between Americans and Saudi Arabians?

Ambassador Chas Freeman: It seems to me that some useful things could be done here, and some of them are really fairly simple. If the American visa system, for example, which now records three names for Arab visitors -- meaning the given name, the father's name and family name or tribal or place name -- were expanded to parallel the Saudi passport system, which has four names, mainly the given name, the father's name and the grandfather's name and the tribal or place name or the family name. Then, there would be far less confusion by computers about people who the United States ought to welcome to our shores versus people who we have a justified concern about.

There are a series of technical fixes that could be worked out if the two sides sat down and talked earnestly about how to reverse current negative trends, which I think they should do. My feeling is that there needs to be a much larger effort made by Saudi Arabians and their government on a much more institutionalized and long-term basis to build a base of understanding and support in the United States to replace the current suspicion and ignorance. There needs to be a dialogue between the two governments in the ways of reversing the current trends towards estrangement at the popular level and rebuilding the relationship.

Obviously the trend in Saudi Arabia toward openness needs to continue, such that the press here does not criticize Saudi Arabia for imaginary faults but perhaps criticizing it for things that are genuinely wrong. I think that's been the trend, and I give the government of Saudi Arabia a good deal of credit.

I should also say I've been very impressed by the extent to which Saudi Arabia, in the wake of 9/11, has engaged in introspection and taken on some tough problems that it had avoided addressing for many decades. These include cleaning up elements of its education system, not just the sexual apartheid issue of separate women's educational management system but also the curriculum.

Crown Prince Abdullah has, in effect, staked out the positions that Americans ought to applaud on a wide range of issues: the need for Arabs broadly to cease blaming others and to correct their own faults; the willingness of Arabs -- if the Palestinians and Israelis can work out a mutually satisfactory peace -- to step in with their own normalization of relations with Israel; and to buttress that, with the Arab Reform Charter. These things are very positive and represent progress.

I'm sorry to say that I do not see the same level of introspection and consideration by Americans of what it is we might do to reduce friction with countries and peoples in the Middle East. There has been no examination of our policies in the region which may have played a part in producing the threat to our own security we now confront. Actually, I think we could learn a lot from the

Saudis in terms of facing up to the need to take a good hard look at ourselves and our behavior.

Saudi-American Forum: There has been great a reluctance to examine the roots of terrorism, especially in terms of US foreign policy. An episode that comes to mind is former New York mayor Guliani's rejection of a \$10 million donation to a 9/11 victims' fund from Saudi Prince Walid bin Talal. Guliani returned the check when he learned Prince Talal suggested Washington should examine its policies in the Middle East.

Ambassador Chas Freeman: Well, that was of course the classic example of this, but it's far from the only one.

Also, I think with better organization, with better funding, with a commitment to a long-term effort in education, some of the slanders that have been put forward about Saudi Arabia or Islam -- there are many in the United States -- would find a more effective rebuttal.

Saudi-American Forum: There is no shortage of people putting forward charges - I think earlier you called it misinformation and disinformation - and each new round of rhetoric stands on the shoulders of those who have been bashing the Kingdom for years.

Ambassador Chas Freeman: Well, they're creating their own reality in terms of perceptions that are quite dubious, but which linger and are very hard to erase. There are a fairly wide range of books that have now been published about Saudi Arabia, most of them -- you mentioned Baer -- most of them are polemics, they're not fair and balanced examinations of the kingdom. There are a great number of people who have historically, on the basis of very little knowledge, have been detractors of Saudi Arabia. They don't have any more knowledge now than they did before, but they feel much more able now to voice their criticism in public, and there's a great deal more receptivity to it.

Saudi-American Forum: Can you talk about the comments you made on the lawsuit - the \$1 trillion suit by 9/11 victims and families against top-ranking Saudis -- talking about how it would further unravel the Saudi-U.S. partnership?

Ambassador Chas Freeman: When I was asked by the lawyers for the National Commercial Bank whether I would be willing to write a statement in connection with the lawsuit, I immediately agreed in part because I believe in the importance in the U.S.-Saudi relationship. I believe this lawsuit is potentially, profoundly disruptive to that relationship. But, mainly, I believe the Constitution gives the executive branch responsibility for conducting U.S. foreign relations and that the United States can only have one government at a time. We may have a separation of powers domestically -- that may be how we reach decisions domestically -- but internationally we can only speak with one voice.

It seemed to me to be completely anomalous to have the executive branch praising Saudi cooperation with us in connection with our struggle against terrorism, obviously arguing with the Saudis for even greater efforts on their part on the one hand, while on the other the courts might accede the views of the plaintiffs that the Saudis are criminals who should be punished and they're incorrigible.

I think the action of a court would jeopardize not only the U.S.-Saudi relationship but more broadly our ability to conduct foreign relations and successfully to cooperate internationally against terrorism. So, I had two motives in joining this and in putting myself forward in public with the full expectation that I would receive the sort of slanderous ignorant attacks that I have received. I've always believed that if you consider yourself a friend of someone or the supporter of a cause, you should not duck that issue, even when standing up is going to cause people to take pot-shots at you.

Saudi-American Forum: We appreciate your candor in that regard and for the insights you've shared with us.

Ambassador Chas Freeman: Well, I don't think there's any reason for us to throw up our hands in defeat. I think actually this all presents a fairly rich agenda that we ought to be addressing. And the point of identifying the problems is to focus us on dealing with them. So, that's my point.

Saudi-American Forum: Do you have any last thoughts on US-Saudi relations?

Ambassador Chas Freeman: I mentioned that I believe Saudi Arabia needs to make more serious long-term efforts -- not just making new friends in the United States but helping its existing friends to be friends. Sometimes it's difficult to be a friend to Saudi Arabia. The current atmosphere brings you no public credit instead it brings you sometimes vicious criticism. So, that's the other side of this. Americans need to do a lot more to educate ourselves about the world and defend our own interests, but the Saudis need to do a lot too.

Saudi-American Forum: Thank you, Ambassador Freeman.

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Ambassador Chas. W. Freeman, Jr. succeeded Senator George McGovern as President of the Middle East Policy Council on December 1, 1997.

Ambassador Freeman was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs from 1993-94, earning the highest public service awards of the Department of Defense for his roles in designing a NATO-centered post-Cold War European security system and in reestablishing defense and military relations with China. He served as U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm). He was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs during the historic U.S. mediation of Namibian independence from South Africa and Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

Chas. Freeman served as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires in the American embassies at both Bangkok (1984-1986) and Beijing (1981-1984). He was Director for Chinese Affairs at the U.S. Department of State from 1979-1981. He was the principal American interpreter during the late President Nixon's path-breaking visit to China in 1972. In addition to his Middle Eastern, African, East Asian and European diplomatic experience, he served in India.

Ambassador Freeman earned a certificate in Latin American studies from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, certificates in both the national and Taiwan dialects of Chinese from the former Foreign Service Institute field school in Taiwan, a BA from Yale University and a JD from the Harvard Law School. He is the recipient of numerous high honors and awards. He was elected to the Academy of American Diplomacy in 1995. He is the author of *The Diplomat's Dictionary (Revised Edition)* and *Arts of Power*, both published by the United States Institute of Peace in 1997. Ambassador Freeman is Chairman of the Board of Projects International, Inc., a Washington-based business development firm that specializes in arranging international joint ventures, acquisitions, and other business operations for its American and foreign clients. He also serves as Co-Chair of the United States-China Policy Foundation and Vice Chair of the Atlantic Council of the United States. He is a member of the boards of the Institute for Defense Analyses, the regional security centers of the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Washington World Affairs Council.

Previous Positions

1995 - Present Chairman of the Board, Projects International, Inc.
1994-95 Distinguished Fellow, United States Institute of Peace
1993-94 Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs
1992-93 Distinguished Fellow, Institute for National Strategic Studies
1989-92 U S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
1986-89 Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, African Affairs

Recent Honors

1995 Elected to American Academy of Diplomacy
1994 Distinguished Public Service Award (Policy innovation in Europe)
1994 Distinguished Public Service Award (Contributions in Defense Policy)
1994 Order of 'Abd Al-'Azziz, 1st Class (Diplomatic Service)
1991 Defense Meritorious Service (Desert Shield/Storm)
1991 CIA Medallion (Desert Shield/Storm)
1991 Distinguished Honor Award (Desert Shield/Storm)

Recent Major Publications and Writings

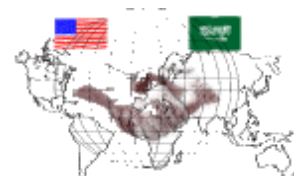
Arts of Power: Statecraft and Diplomacy, U.S. Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1997.
The Diplomat's Dictionary, Second Edition, revised, U.S. Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C. 1997

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- impacting the Saudi-U.S. relationship.

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between the United States and Saudi Arabia and who want to act in response to erroneous and misleading depictions of the relationship in the media and elsewhere. The Forum is a vehicle for stakeholders in the Saudi-U.S. relationship to contribute their experiences and their ideas and opinions on the issues of the day.

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Thank you for your support of the Saudi-U.S. relationship and the Saudi-American Forum.