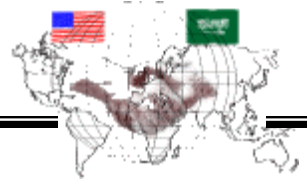


Saudi-American Forum



SAF Item of Interest

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Pumping Up Online Resources to Fuel Saudi-US Relations

by Molouk Y. Ba-Isa • *Arab News* Staff

These are difficult days in the Saudi-US relationship. Voices of reason are being drowned out by shrill rhetoric from extremists — both East and West. In the midst of the madness, two websites have been launched to provide resources for those still interested in maintaining and growing the fruitful ties, developed over many decades, which have served both nations well.

The Saudi American Forum (www.saudi-american-forum.org) was created last autumn through the direct involvement of Americans — “expatriates” — who have lived, worked and traveled in Saudi Arabia, and who have enduring memories of their experiences in the Kingdom.

According to Patrick Ryan, manager, Saudi-American Forum (SAF), it is hoped that the forum will be a venue for stakeholders in the Saudi-US relationship to contribute their experiences, ideas and opinions on the issues of the day and a vehicle to communicate their views with elected officials and media outlets.

Those who are members in the forum are able to join its mailing list free and receive SAF newsletters, essays, commentary and “action alerts.” The action alerts draw attention to events and developments in the Saudi-US relationship, which members may choose to comment upon. SAF provides an automated action center to facilitate communication with US officials and news media. The action alerts give SAF members the opportunity to effectively share their views and to rebut erroneous claims.

“Forum members have a wealth of experience and understanding of the mutual interests that connect America and the Kingdom, making them well-suited to set the record straight,” Ryan asserted.

Ryan is also the manager for the recently launched Saudi-US Relations Information Service (SUSRIS), a follow-on to SAF. Whereas SAF focuses on “stakeholders” in the US-Saudi relationship with an “action” orientation, SUSRIS is an Internet venue providing information and discussion space for anyone interested in learning about the Saudi-US relationship or keeping up with news and issues. The site is building content to serve as a ready resource. Its newsletter service is an umbrella resource, giving readers news, reference data, links to items of interest, an update of on-going forum discussions and other current, relevant information. The newsletter service is free, with sign up at www.saudi-us-relations.org .

“The Saudi-US relationship is too important to be left to TV pundits and Op-Ed page critics,” said Ryan. “We are compiling thoughtful essays and background material from leaders, analysts and other observers of the relationship. It is, after all, a historic, multifaceted relationship, that deserves more consideration than sound bites or clever quips.”

Both SAF and SUSRIS are sponsored by the Washington-based National Council on US-Arab Relations (ncusar.org), a non-profit educational organization that seeks to increase understanding of the Arab world among Americans. The websites are a public service of NCUSAR as an element of its mission — “to educate Americans about Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world through leadership development, people-to-people programs, lectures, publications, and grassroots outreach.”

“Many of the Saudi-American Forum members are Americans, who now or in the past have lived and worked in the Kingdom, and who have first-person insights into the ties that bind Americans and Saudis,” Ryan commented. “The forum has also attracted other citizens with little previous experience or knowledge of the relationship who are interested in learning more.”

One of the highlights of SAF are its commissioned essays covering a broad spectrum of topics in US-Saudi relations such as defense and security, business and economics, and cultural and historic subjects. This month SAF published the essay, “In the Eye of Yet Another Storm: US-Saudi Relations and the Iraqi Campaign.” The author, Gregory J.H. Dowling, offered the insight that “a media without a well-grounded familiarity with something as complex and enigmatic as the Kingdom can be held hostage to ‘insights’ and ‘analyses’ proffered by commentators and organizations that have a particular policy agenda to peddle.”

In addition to the essays, SAF provides other items of interest including reprints of important articles on the Saudi-US relationship that have been published in US newspapers and magazines. Ryan cited the recent Washington Post report, “US-Saudi Ties Prove Crucial in War,” reprinted at SAF, as one example of information forum members might otherwise have overlooked.

Both SAF and SUSRIS are already attracting quite a bit of attention and feedback. “This is wonderful and much needed. I believe some of our politicians and the media are really trying to build a wedge between Saudi and us,” wrote one visitor to SAF. Another visitor commented: “I think it is good you are sending information (about) the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I do hope that the deposing of Saddam Hussein leads to a more stable region and the rebuilding of Iraq benefits Saudi Arabia... I would like to say that I hope that not only in Saudi Arabia, but all of the Middle East that we can have better relations with the people of that part of the world and we can live in peace.”

And, finally, one SAF member noted insightfully, “I was interested in the article from the Washington Post. It contained many truths that are not known to most Americans like how (Saudi Arabia) prevented a really bad oil crisis by having foresight and containing the market. Most Americans are critical of Saudi Arabians because of the oil. However we Americans are the ones who consume the most oil.”

The attention frequently focused on the state of current and future Saudi-US ties has often been dominated by voices and views that lack an understanding of the history, breadth and depth of the mutual interests that have sustained the relationship. Ryan believes that it is past time for proactive moves to ensure that a balanced perspective on Saudi-US ties is made available to a wide audience.

“The challenges to the relationship are being exaggerated by some with agendas that benefit neither America nor Saudi Arabia,” said Ryan. “Through SAF and SUSRIS, we seek to highlight the strengths of the relationship and how they can be maintained. When all the rhetoric is peeled away, the mutual interests — in defense and security, the war on terrorism, commerce, culture, and more — must and will remain as a centerpiece for Saudis and Americans. They are the components upon which Saudis and Americans began to build our strong ties over 60 years ago, and upon which the relationship endures.”

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ABOUT THE SAUDI-AMERICAN FORUM

The Saudi-American Forum is an information service designed to provide you timely information -- background and current issues - - impacting the Saudi-U.S. relationship.



The Forum is a resource for Americans who value the relationship 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.

The Saudi-American Forum is a FREE service provided to the public by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. The Forum consists of a web site and an email information service. Visit the web site at: <http://www.saudi-american-forum.org>

CONTACT INFORMATION

You can contribute your ideas and feedback to the Forum through use of the "Feedback" form on the website or through direct email to the Forum at: info@SaudiAmericanForum.net

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