

Saudi-American Forum



SAF Item of Interest

January 29, 2004

United States-Saudi Arabian Relations in Light of the Current International Crisis

A joint conference presented by California State University,
San Bernardino, and King Saud University, Riyadh
Summary by Mary E. Morris

Editor's Note:

The Saudi-American Forum would like to thank Ms. Mary Morris for this summary of the joint U.S.-Saudi conference held at California State University, San Bernardino on January 22, 2004. Click [here](#) to read the paper Ms. Morris presented at the conference, "At a Crossroads: American Policy and the Middle East." We also thank Mr. Alan Llavore of California State University, San Bernardino for photographs and a report from the conference.

United States-Saudi Arabian Relations in Light of the Current International Crisis

A Joint Conference presented by California State University, San Bernardino, and King Saud University, Riyadh

Summary by Mary E. Morris

Participants to the one-day conference included a delegation of Saudi scholars along with several American counterparts. They were:

Saudi Participants:

- Khalil A. Al-Khalil, Assistant Professor, Imam Mohammad bin Saud University; regular contributor to *Al-Jazeera* and *Asharq Al-Awsat*
- Salleh Al Malek, Professor of Sociology; member of Majlis Al-Shura
- Sulaiman M. Al-Jarallah, Professor of Oriental Studies, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University
- Saleh A. Al-Mani, Professor of International Relations, Dean of the College of Administrative Sciences, King Saud University
- Adel A. Al-Abdulkarim, Professor of Political Science, King Saud University
- Ilham M. Al-Dakheel, CEO of Asrary Educational Incubator
- Norah A. Al-Yousef, Economic Consultant, Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals; Deputy Chairman, Dept. of Economics, King Saud University
- Abdul Rahman S. Alorabi, Editor-in-chief, Al Nadwah Daily Newspaper
- Hend M. Al-Khuthaila, Professor of Education, former Dean of Girls University Studies Center, King Saud University

- Selwa A. Al-Hazzaa, Head and Consultant of Ophthalmology, King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center
- Abdulrahman H. Al-Enad, Professor of Mass Communication, Member, Majlis Al-Shura
- Haifa R. Jamal Al-Lail, Public Relations specialist; Dean, Effat College
- Abdullah I. Alaskar, Chairman, Dept. of History, King Saud University
- Siham A. Alsuwaigh, Specialist in Early Childhood Education; Educational Consultant, Royal University of Women, Bahrain
- Othman Y. Al Rawaf, Professor of Political Science, Member, Majlis Al-Shura
- Ibrahim A. Al-Beayez, specialist, comparative media systems; Assistant Professor, Mass Communications, King Saud University

American Participants:

- John A. Conley, Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, California State University at San Bernardino
- William C. Green, Associate Professor of Political Science and National Security Studies, California State University at San Bernardino
- Albert K. Karnig, President, California State University at San Bernardino
- Jon E. Mandaville, Professor and Director, Middle East Studies Center, Portland State University
- Mary E. Morris, Consultant, Morris Middle East Consultants; Vice President, Los Angeles World Affairs Council
- James H. Noyes, Research Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University
- J. Gregory Payne, General Director, Saudi American Exchange Director, Emerson College Political Media Study Group
- Ralph H. Salmi, Professor of International Relations and American Foreign Policy, California State University at San Bernardino; conference organizer

Summary

This was a unique opportunity for a frank exchange of opinions between Saudi and American scholars. The large number of participants on the Saudi side was indicative of the Kingdom's desire to maintain the close association with America and Americans that has been the hallmark of the U.S.-Saudi relationship for many years. Clearly, there is concern and dismay on the part of the Saudis, who feel (quite properly) that they are under attack. Several of the delegates said that the Kingdom was slow to understand the power of Al Qaeda within Saudi Arabia, that there was a degree of denial, beginning with the 9/11 attacks and the revelation that the majority of perpetrators were Saudi, but that this is no longer the case. Many also made the point that there is more similarity between Saudis and Americans than differences: in values, in interests, in hope and designs for the future. There were offline discussions as well about the role of the media, and about ways in which to present the Saudi/Arab view to an American population that has little real knowledge about Saudi Arabia in particular and the Middle East in general.

It is to be hoped that more conferences and symposia of this nature can be held-and that both countries can regain the trust and confidence in each other that is necessary for addressing the problems of a troubled but vital Middle East.

Summary of Remarks

Dr. Albert Karnig, President of California State University at San Bernardino, opened the day's proceedings, greeting the Saudi delegation and panel participants and stating that the issues discussed during the conference were those that are likely to affect the history of relations between the two countries. Dr. Karnig discussed the crisis of confidence, with criticism and suspicion on each side, that has led to a deterioration of the relationship. President Karnig also noted that CSUSB was the first of three U.S. universities to host a conference on U.S.-Saudi relations; the university was also the first in the Cal State system to offer Arabic language courses. *Dr. John Conley*, Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, also greeted the participants.

The morning's first session, entitled "Saudi-U.S. Relations," was chaired by *Dr. Ralph Salmi*, CSUSB professor and the conference organizer. *Professor Othman Al-Rawaf*, member of the Majlis Al-Shura, discussed "Saudi-U.S. Relations: The Impact of September 11 and Future Perspectives." He cited the strategic, philosophical, and economic links between the two countries, such as their joint perception of the Soviet threat and common philosophical values. The U.S., he said, is basically a religious, conservative society, as is Saudi Arabia. Challenges to the relationship, he said, come from several sources, including the continuing Palestine problem, and a social and cultural gap, aggravated by the events of September 11, 2001. The fact that 15 of 19 terrorists were Saudis has led, in the U.S., to erroneous perceptions of Saudis and the relationship between Saudi society and Al Qaeda.

Dr. William Green, CSUSB, then discussed "U.S.-Saudi Security Ties in the Post-Iraqi War Environment," reviewing the basic relationship between the two countries and the reasons for its establishment. These included partnership in the global Cold War, which, he said, ended a decade early in the Middle East, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion discredited Soviet Communism as a plausible model for action, even as the ability of the Soviet Union to mount opposition to the West deteriorated. The Iran-Iraq war took the place of the Cold War in the region, leading to tremendous destabilization.

The United States, said Dr. Green, has sought always to bring wars to a swift conclusion—the overarching U. S. goal has been stability and gradual reform. Yet the current situation, with increased U.S. influence and presence, puts stability in peril. The intrusive U.S. presence, beginning with the 1991 war to liberate Kuwait, also has created a divergence with Saudi Arabia over common goals. To reduce this friction, the U.S. is reducing its presence in Saudi Arabia, although that presence will remain in Iraq for an undetermined period of time.

Session II, "U.S. Policy in the Middle East," was chaired by Professor Abdulrahman Al-Enad, member of the Majlis Al-Shura. The first speaker, Dr. Adel Al-Abdulkarim, discussed the Saudi contribution to the security of the Middle East, with a special focus on the Palestinian issue. The title of his paper was "Saudi Arabia's Contribution to the Security and Peace of the Middle East: The Case of the Palestinian Issue." There is a consensus, he said, that the peace process has taken a critical path. He referred to the period immediately following the 1991 Gulf war, and the convocation of the Madrid conference, which offered a framework allowing for both bilateral negotiations between Israel and Arab states and multinational talks on issues such as water, refugees, and Jerusalem. He discussed then the 1993 Declaration of Principles resulting from

the Oslo negotiations, and noted that both Madrid and Oslo postponed discussion of critical issues until the end of the process.

Dr. Abdulkarim then discussed the historical roots of Saudi foreign policy regarding Palestine, with first the peace plan offered by King Fahd, which offered a comprehensive settlement and remains the basis for resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and then the Arab peace initiative put forward two years ago by Prince Abdullah. Prince Abdullah's plan built upon King Fahd's plan and calls for full Israeli withdrawal from lands taken in 1967 and implementation of UN resolutions. He noted the three principles underpinning Saudi policy: commitment to Arab unity and protection of Islam; commitment to the Palestinian cause; and the promotion of a just peace as the goal of any conflict.

He noted that following World War II and the cementing of the U.S.-Saudi relationship with President Roosevelt, Saudi foreign policy extended past the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, the Kingdom emerged as a spiritual and political force under King Faisal and later under King Khalid. Dr. Abdulkarim noted that Saudi Arabia continues to respond to regional and worldwide challenges, and that Saudi foreign policy in the last two decades has exhibited unprecedented activism.

Mary E. Morris followed with "U.S. Policy: The Perspective From the Middle East," in which she discussed the impact that current U.S. actions and policies have had on regional perspectives of the United States. She noted that public opinion in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East are currently more anti-American than at any time in history, due to both the U.S. invasion of Iraq without international validation and the lack of a strong U.S. support of an unbiased settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. [See the GulfWire Perspective for Ms. Morris's paper.]

Session III, "Saudi Arabia: Culture, Religion and Society," was chaired by *Dr. J. Gregory Payne*, General Director, Saudi American Exchange Director, Emerson College Political Media Study Group. Speaking first was *James Noyes*, Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. His topic was "Equilibrium for a Conflicted U.S.-Saudi Relationship." His points included: Saudi Arabia and the United States are mutually dependent; it is too early to judge success or failure in Iraq; further military intrusions by the U.S. are likely in countries where terrorism exists; a new regional security structure is required; the intifada is likely to continue until there are leadership changes in Israel, Palestine, and the United States.

Mr. Noyes was followed by *Khalil Al-Khalil*, Professor at Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University, who discussed "The Saudi Education System." He provided a brief background: the Saudi education system was established in 1924 with only 5 schools and a 99 percent illiteracy rate in the country. There was no oil, no money, no organizations, and so education was carried on in mosques or in small houses-the madrassas. Female education began in 1960, and education on all levels has taken great leaps. By next year there will be four universities, 25 colleges, and 5 million students, 400,000 of them non-Saudis in a system constantly under reform. School building is having difficulty keeping up with demand: 420,000 new students enroll every year.

Dr. Selwa A. Al-Hazzaa, Head and Consultant of Ophthalmology, King Faisal Specialist

Hospital and Research Center, then discussed the role of women in Saudi Arabia. She noted that 50 percent of the population in Saudi Arabia are women, and that in the 40 years since women have entered the educational system, they have assumed leadership positions as doctors, educators, administrators, and businesswomen. Fifty-three percent of current high school and college graduates are women, and they can be found in most sectors of the economy. Women hold 39 percent of bank deposits in the Kingdom. Dr. Al-Hazzaa reminded the audience that Saudi Arabia is still a young country, and that with that consideration, the country's progress-and women's progress-has been outstanding. She stressed that Saudi Arabia is a conservative, religious society, and so it wants evolution, not revolution. At the same time, culture and tradition prevail over religion, and Saudis do not want their cultural values to change. And she noted that in Saudi Arabia there is a brick ceiling for women. The glass ceiling in the West shatters, she said. The brick one in Saudi Arabia can be taken apart, slowly but surely.

Dr. Jon Mandaville, Professor and Director of the Middle East Studies Center at Portland State University, followed Dr. Al-Hazzaa, discussing "Religion and Reform from American and Saudi Perspectives." He discussed the second National Dialogue on Excess and Moderation, recently held in Mecca, and noted that Islam is a continuous flow of change and information, responding to changing times. Thus, he said, the shape of Islam in Saudi Arabia will gradually change. He talked about the separation of church and state, and noted that the government of Saudi Arabia has always been separate from the judiciary. The National Dialogue, he said, is a recall to the basic tenets of Islam, including transparency in politics and separation of powers. The purpose of the Dialogue is to modernize the religious message to conform to modern times. One of the important decisions of the Dialogue was that individual *fatwas* dealing with public policy should not be allowed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary E. Morris is a private consultant on the Middle East to private industry, individuals, and government entities. Ms. Morris was previously the Associate Director of the Greater Middle East Studies Center at RAND in Santa Monica, as well as a senior researcher and Associate Director of the Strategy and Doctrine Program in RAND's Arroyo Center, which performs research for the U.S. Army. She has been an instructor in international conflict resolution at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

For the past two decades, Morris has worked on a number of projects related to events in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, ranging from military and political analyses to development of political gaming techniques for resolving crisis situations to enhancing regional potential for cooperation on environmental issues. She has been a featured speaker at numerous meetings and conferences, and has coordinated several conferences on the Middle East, including a workshop on Palestinian refugees at the Jewish-Arab Center at Haifa University, Israel, for RAND.

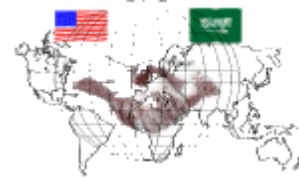
Ms. Morris is the author of reports, monographs, and journal articles on the Middle East, including: *Issues of Engagement and the Course of Future U.S.-Saudi Relations Post-September 11*, Saudi Studies Center, 2002; "Regional Economic Cooperation in the Middle East: Prospects

and Problems,” in *Smoothing the Path To Peace: The Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian Triangle*, Conference Proceedings, University of Haifa (1998); *Water and Security in the Middle East*, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, United Arab Emirates (May 1998); “What Do Women Want? Gender and Politics in the Middle East,” in *Middle East Policy* (September 1997); “Water and Conflict in the Middle East: Threats and Opportunities,” in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Spring 1997; *Where Environmental Concerns and Security Strategies Meet: Green Conflict in Asia and the Middle East* (RAND, 1995), *The Persistence of External Interest in the Middle East* (RAND, 1994), and “Poisoned Wells: The Politics of Water in the Middle East,” in *Middle East Insight* (1993).

Ms. Morris received both B.A. and M.A. degrees in History at Mount St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles. She is a member of the Middle East Institute, the Middle East Studies Association, and the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies, and is a charter member of the California Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the Advisory Council for the Von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies at UCLA. She is a Board member of the International Studies Academy at Manual Arts High School.

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@Saudi-American-Forum.org

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