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24th Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference

U.S.-Arab Relations at a Crossroads: What Paths Forward?

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“GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL: ROLE IN REGIONAL DYNAMICS”

Chair:

Ms. Elizabeth Wossen - Principal and Lead Consultant, Energy Links Group LLC

Speakers:

Dr. John Duke Anthony – Founding President and CEO, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Ambassador (Ret.) Dr. Richard J. Schmierer – Distinguished International Affairs Fellow and Member, International Advisory Committee, National Council for U.S.-Arab Relations

Mr. Khaled Almaeena – former Editor-in-Chief, Saudi Gazette (2012-2014)

Dr. Abdullah AlShayji – Professor of International Relations and Chairman, American Studies Unit, Kuwait University

Remarks as delivered.

[Ms. Elizabeth Wossen] Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon. My name is Elizabeth Wossen. I am a member of the board of the National Council on US-Arab Relations, a very worthy and effective organization for US-Arab relations.

Before I introduce these distinguished speakers let me briefly state the panel's theme. That is, that the GCC states, both collectively and individually, have been involved in a multitude of dynamics in the MENA region, in addition to developments in their own countries. Ambassador Chas Freeman stated this morning that when he was appointed to be ambassador in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, apparently President Bush noted that, by the way, nothing much happens there – meaning nothing much happens in Saudi Arabia.

Well, today we almost yearn for those quieter years in the region, especially the GCC countries in this regard. Now back to the speakers.

We have at the podium four experts, and really experts, with a wealth of knowledge on the GCC and beyond in the MENA region and GCC-US relations, MENA-US relations. We look forward to having them speak and then ask them to unpack these complicated roles of the GCC in regional dynamics and also individual developments in the countries of the GCC.

Each speaker will have about ten minutes, or at the most 12 or less, so that we can have ample time for questions and answers. While I ask you to refer to the booklets and the National Council's web site and Google and Twitter to read the bios of these speakers I simply want to mention one liners on each.

Dr. Anthony needs absolutely no introduction. He is obviously the President and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations. He is the driving force not only behind this conference but behind the US-Arab relations in sort of totality in this town. He will be the first speaker.

The second speaker will be Mr. Khaled Almaeena. Mr. Almaeena is the former editor-in-chief of the Saudi paper Arab News as well as the Saudi Gazette. He runs an organization together with his wife, Mrs. Samar Fatany, an organization called Naam. It is based in Paris. It's mission is interfaith dialogue, labor issues, human rights issues as well as strong women's issues. By the way, Mr. and Mrs. Almaeena have hosted a number of US delegates to Saudi Arabia that the National Council has sent and now we get to thank them officially for having seen at least 220 people. Right? From this group. So, thank you.

For the third speaker it is Ambassador Richard Schmierer. He is a distinguished international affairs fellow and member of the Advisory Committee of the National Council on US-Arab Relations. He is a former ambassador to Oman as well as former

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy at the State Department. He will have a unique perspective on US ambassadors view on Oman. We look forward to hearing that.

The last but not least, we will be hearing from Dr. Abdullah AlShayji from Kuwait, professor of international relations and chair of the American studies unit at Kuwait University. Dr. AlShayji is a keen observer as I know him of the U.S. politics and we look forward to hearing an overall perspective of US-GCC relations.

And without further ado, Dr. Anthony.

[Dr. John Duke Anthony] Thank you, Ms. Wossen. I'm not sure that people are aware that in terms of our board of directors, other than the chairman and the president, we are equal on the gender front. We have an equal number of women and equal number of men. I'm not sure that that's the case with any of the sister organizations in the field. But this is yet another example of what we're trying to do to make a difference even if it's only at the margins seen by others.

In terms of my opening remarks here I want to try to focus on what the GCC is and what it is not, in terms of its formation and its evolution within ten minutes no longer than 12.

It is often compared with the European Union and rightly so for the following reasons, but fairly and unfairly and insightfully and misleadingly. So the fair part of it is the following. That each was established by six countries; Six in the EU, six in the GCC. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar the United Arab Emirates and Oman geographically from north to south. From the tip of the, the end of the Gulf to the entrance of the Gulf.

Secondly, the GCC has stated on numerous occasions that the EU is an example that they would like to emulate. They have watched its successes. They have learned lessons in terms of how far and how fast they can go and the necessity for compromise and to overcome internal divisions and tensions. It is often faulted for being not unified. But what sub-regional or international organization really is unified. Indeed, what country that may even call itself unified is really unified on certain issues, right to life, immigrations, things of that nature. Alright?

Secondly, with regard to the EU, this is the only Western organization with which the GCC has a formal agreement. And this has to do with the period since 1987 when both sides searched; it's been ever elusive since the beginning to have a free-trade agreement between the two, which came to a screeching halt in the last several years by the GCC in objection to the EU's continuing to move the goalposts of what would be required of the GCC countries in perceived if not actual beyond rhetorical intrusion in the domestic affairs of the GCC countries.

But because of that agreement there is an office in Brussels where everyday there is a GCC representative who works with and has a staff, their fellow counterparts in the European Union. There is no organization in the United States, there is no office in the nation's capital, where someone in a session like this could hand you a business card and could say she or he is part of a GCC liaison office in the nation's capital of the world's strongest, most powerful country.

So it is similar but misleading in that regard.

More tellingly it is misleading in the following ways. And I want people to focus on the implications of this because it's not widely known, except among us specialists. And by the way there are no experts. I'm not one. I've never met one in this region. We're all in a university from which there's no possible graduation. Only on the best of days do we get an incomplete and lots of us have overdue library fines that we have spent a lifetime repaying.

But in this particular regard what did the European Union going for it. It had going for it the following. It had a preexisting organization upon which it built. In terms of mutuality of benefit and reciprocity of rewards and this was the European Coal and Steel Community which showed the measurable, tangible results of interstate cooperation having to do with material well-being of its citizens.

There was no such comparable organization between and amongst the GCC countries at their founding. On the contrary, not only did they trade to a minimum extent between and amongst themselves for all six they traded more extensively with countries beyond the GCC region and that remains the case to this day.

Thirdly, is a psychological factor. The founders of the European Union were peoples where countries whose leaders' psychological well-being had been shattered, in some case just literally to smithereens by World War II. And so these aspects seared themselves into the consciousness of the European Union's founders, Schuman and Monet and others that if we don't get our act together and cooperate and find common ground and consensus and consult continuously and find the benefits between ourselves and overcome historical animosities there will be a Third World War. We've had two within 40 years. So nothing remotely comparable in the GCC region. They had not been invaded, attacked, and bombed and occupied there by Western, non-Muslim forces. So that was absent and yet they still formed.

Fourthly, they had their back covered in terms of the NATO and the United States as a formidable, formal leading power within NATO and the world's then superpower as such. There is to this day no formal, comparable signed defense agreement as was alluded to in the previous session between the United States and any of the GCC countries let along all six of them. So that was absent and yet still they formed themselves even though death was on their doorstep with the Iran/Iraq war, two countries that were far more populous. Iraq's population being as great as all of the

six GCC countries combined, and Iran's population being double that of all of the seven of the eight Arab countries of the Gulf combined.

Fifthly, and lastly, was the Marshall Plan, which was linked in its own way to the NATO alignment, NATO from 1949. But the Marshall Plan from June 1947, where the economic reconstruction of Europe was aided by the injection of capital and technology cooperation and trade and investment between the United States and the European Union's founders. There was no such external Western superpower, foreign economic assistance, training and development program aiding the six GCC countries, and yet in spite of that they formed themselves.

So these five things that aided the European Union, all five were absent in the case of the GCC countries. They are often maligned, they are often ridiculed, they are often laughed at. People on the defense scale say they couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper bag. They have not done what they should do, what they could do, what they might do, what they must do, and therefore, so let's get serious because they are not serious.

These are cheap shots. They are below the belt shots in a metaphorical male frame of reference. The reference to the previous panel's speaker about the glass being half full rather than being half empty is where I am. Unbeknownst to the Western world largely because it's not reported in the media, when it's not reported in the media it didn't happen. So if a tree fell in the forest and there was no one there, did it make a sound? We're not sure about that.

But there have been more than 700 meetings of the GCC's leaders and their staff and their technicians and their advisors and functional kinds of committees to try to sort of speak get their act together, to harmonize their educational curricula, to seriously consider the benefits and the demerits of a common currency, to link their electricity grids, to have an arbitration court, to build a causeway between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and considering a causeway between Bahrain and Qatar.

These kinds of cooperative arrangements escape the notice of Westerners in general but are the slow but sure building blocks of an edifice that has legs so far, and fully in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations. Articles 47 through 53 are the backbone of the UN Charter and there have been from the beginning the United Nations Secretariat's encouragement of other efforts of countries to get their act together and to cooperate and to be partners for a greater cause. So these are some of the distinguishing factors of the GCC's existence, something about what it is and what it is not.

Thank you.

[Wossen] Mr. Khaled Almaeena, please.

[Mr. Khaled Almaeena] Good afternoon. Whenever people speak of the GCC they think of it as a monolith. I tend to disagree because the GCC states, while they are together and share common values, religion, language, have common denominators but there are varying differences between them, for example, in social mores in the way they look at things, the treatment of women, but yet there is that aspiration to forge a link together so that we can be, not to just play a powerful role, but for the betterment of the people.

However, there are four major challenges that one has to look at. One is the demographic challenge, which is the spiraling of the population. The other is the economic challenge. The political challenge is the third. And the security challenge.

People have already spoken on the security challenge on the dangers from abroad. But I'd like to focus on two issues that to me are very important. One is the demographic challenge and especially the young people. I've sat with a lot of them and I've been researching for the past year, moving, criss-crossing Saudi Arabia and other parts and the message that I get from them is that young people are asking, we would like to be stakeholders in a country that we think also belongs to us. They would like to be passengers on the road of life, not mere bystanders.

They are hampered in that effort by (A) the education system which had grown up and had quantity but not quality. But again, the recent changes that have come, whether the government has instituted reforms to allow foreign universities to set up in Saudi Arabia and to allow private individuals and institutions and organizations to make universities is turning out a new breed of Saudis who are capable and whose quality of education gives them the chance to go into the workforce.

Most young Saudis previously would love to go and work in the public sector. It's a safe job. It's a 9-4 job. And there are no challenges. But right now I can see a change in this trend with people who like to work in international companies where you are gauged on what you do, and if you don't do well you are asked, and shown the door.

These are issues that young people are caring about. What other things I think that young people aspire for is to be like other young people abroad. To have a voice heard, to be able to express themselves, to form institutions, to form organizations, all within the parameters of what the country and ideology stands for.

Now this differs from country to country in the GCC.

Unemployment.

Now the three countries that have unemployment rate are Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman. Saudi Arabia has an 11.2 percent unemployment as per the Jadwa report of last month. And one of the reasons I think is that young people are not able to come into the new companies that are coming in to build the airport, the

desalination plants, the railroads, because they do not possess the technical skills to go and work. As such it's a paradox of geography and history that while we would love to have our people in, at the same time we get people from abroad so that they will come in and participate in our economy and its progress.

This also causes another problem, the dichotomy between the workers that have come from abroad and also the people here. In recent months the media has attacked company owners, business people, industrialists, for not focusing on young people. Again, I think you'll see this attack is unfair because we do not have the right quality and the right technical assets that needs to be pushed into the workforce.

Another issue that is of concern to me is that while we are rich in one of the greatest resources, which is oil, which fuels our engine of progress and causes us to go ahead we are also scarce in many other resources. One is water. And to me that is a nightmare. While we are building desalination plants but these are also very vulnerable to any terror attack, they're vulnerable to any cyber attack; they're vulnerable to any maintenance problem so we have to really focus on these issues.

But with a rising increase in population there also is a call by certain writers that we should also have family planning. This of course, caused the man in the pulpit to be very angry, because they thought of it to be anti-religious to have family planning. So, you see the government then has to maneuver itself in such a way to please all parties.

I have also seen in the past few years and one can say without hesitation that the last ten years have seen quite a few changes in Saudi Arabia. I think that Abdullah's reforms, his inclusion of women in the Shura, his focus on young people I think has started the ball rolling and there's no turning back.

You know usually people ask what happens when a new king comes or goes. You cannot change the basic formation of the country. It has to go on. There is no way that we can regress. As was said this morning we are fortunate to have two of the holiest places in Islam so we have to have exemplary character. We are fortunate to have people come in so we have to provide better services. All this means a lot of effort and this is where I think the focus is on a better education. We have to strive hard and at the same time focus within.

The strength of Saudi Arabia will not come with the F-16s and the Abrams tanks. It will come from within the youth, the people who would like to play a role, provided they are being given a chance to enhance social mobility and be pronounced as stakeholders in that country which has been happening. There are many changes coming up. There are now elections in December and people are getting to go ahead.

People often say why are you people slow. I think I will not say the usual that we are special people, because that is the answer given. I think slow because of equilibrium. It's not easy to manage that country. It is a country that is patriarchal, information

flows up and down. It's tribal, the same thing. So how do you marry all of these composites and come out and do something that will be in the future, be somewhat in a way which is good.

Having said that I think the government should realize, and it has realized, that not only in Saudi Arabia and in other parts of the Gulf States, the involvement of young people. Whether it's in Kuwait, or Bahrain, or Oman, the UAE, you find younger elements now taking part in the decision making process. You find people, previously there were no societies in which one could debate. Now you have the Majlis and you have other institutions where people are saying that. I think also what's needed is more focus on young people, more focus on what is happening.

The focus also on our food security. When there was a plague in India a lot of the vegetables and other food products could not come to Oman and the UAE. For 16 days there was a big rush on the supermarkets. So we'd like to see food security. We'd like to see the young people play a role in their education. And we'd like to see a something where there was equal opportunity for everyone.

I think this is very important. We are plagued by external things, because by an accident of history we are living in a bad neighborhood and we have to live with that. But I think by reason and logic and statesmanship I think we'll be able to cross through.

Thank you.

[Wossen] Ambassador Richard Schmierer.

[Amb. Richard Schmierer] Thank you, Elizabeth. And thank you, John, for the opportunity to be here. It's a pleasure to be back. I've spoken at this event in years past although I think this is my first time since I'm no longer an official American so I can probably be a little more frank than maybe I was in the past.

As Elizabeth mentioned my most recent experience was as U.S. Ambassador in Oman. And I think my own experience there in Oman's situation in history, being unique, provides an interesting window on where we have seen, kind of the U.S. approach to the Gulf, to the GCC in particular, but to the Gulf more broadly under the Obama administration.

So what I'd like to do is use that window and look back to the beginning of the Obama administration and kind of see where we are. And this is of course triggered by the recent conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal. So, we've traveled a certain path, we're at a certain point and maybe for a few minutes we can take an assessment.

First, I think it's very important to remember that President Obama in the very first days of his administration reached out to Iran. In other words he made it clear that he was willing to reassess and recalibrate our approach to Iran. Obviously we all

remember that under the previous administration there was fairly harsh rhetoric vis a vis Iran. It seems clear, you may recall he had a Nowruz message to Iran in the first few months of his administration where he was kind of offering, the way he put it, was to have engagement that was honest and grounded in mutual respect. I think that was in March of 2009.

Then he followed up with a letter to Ayatollah Khamanei. I don't think either of those initial outreach efforts gained a whole lot of positive response. But I do think it set a tone that at least potentially caused the Iranian leadership to think, well maybe there's a possibility for some improvement here.

Let me then fast-forward to my own personal engagement. I arrived in Muscat in September of 2009 and you may recall that just shortly before that I had the great good fortune of having been the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq at the time when three Americans were taken, or captured, when they were visiting Iraq, the claim was they wandered into Iran. These hikers were then held in Tehran. So then three months, two months later I arrived in Oman as the Ambassador and our government was looking for ways to try to get these American hikers out of Iran so they were asking are there any countries that might be able to help.

So of course as the Ambassador I approached the Omanis and asked if they might. What was interesting, I had learned a lot about Oman, obviously, before I got there. But there's some very unique and interesting elements about Oman that really, successfully helped with that engagement. I'll just tick off a few of them.

One, I remember visiting the southern part of Oman at one point. And in many locations you see sort of memorials to the Iranian soldiers who fell in the '70s who were sent by the Shah to help the Omanis put down the Dhofar Rebellion. So there is still a memory of that connection with Iran.

The second one of course is the Strait of Hormuz. I think it was mentioned this morning, its strategic importance. What's interesting to note is, of course, Oman and Iran share that, but all the navigable waterways are in Omani waters. So obviously Oman has a very strong interest in maintaining and a responsibility in maintaining the open, the Strait being open and for that a certain amount of cooperation with, and engagement with Iran is important.

Third, Sultan Qaboos has assiduously followed a policy of peaceful coexistence with all of his neighbors and that has included Iran and importantly I think one thing that you hear cited when you are there, during the Iran-Iraq war, Oman did not take sides between the two belligerents unlike the other countries in the region.

So there were reasons to think that maybe Oman had the wherewithal to help out. Perhaps, however, most importantly is the nature of the Islam in Oman. Oman, the majority branch of Islam in Oman is Abadism. Abadism is a branch of Islam that dates back before the Sunni-Shia divide and as a result Oman is kind of seen, at least

by some, as not being a part of the Sunni-Shia distinction. In that sense, potentially enables it to play a more helpful role vis a vis a country like Iran obviously which is a Shia majority country.

So, what we did obviously was to try to find ways to develop a certain amount of good will or rapport or confidence building with Iran such that we could approach this issue strictly as a humanitarian issue. And those of you who know the outcome we did eventually get the hikers released from Iran with the obvious support of the Omanis.

That I think was an initial sort of element or success that I think encouraged our country and possibly the Iranians to think that maybe there were other ways that we could cooperate. At least we could find mutual interest as we continued to fundamentally disagree at least in our approaches to the region. And so that in my view is at least one of the early elements that ultimately led to engagement that as you know has led to an agreement, the Iran nuclear agreement.

So as a diplomat, of course, I applaud the success of those who undertook that. I must say that during the time that I was in Oman I was not terribly encouraged because one would learn of redlines. You kind of thought where is the compromise going to come. Ultimately, obviously, the diplomats who succeeded did a very good job finding those middle grounds that allowed diplomacy to succeed. So I'm very gratified as a career diplomat to see such an outcome.

But to get back to the bigger story, the whole issue of engagement with Iran, I think, has led to a number of misunderstandings. Certainly you hear frequently from our Gulf friends, their concerns, displeasure, however, you might want to describe it. Or perception that somehow America is now allying with Iran, or sort of going in with Iran, which I could not disagree with more. My own perception is that we had a very specific vested interest on behalf of the entire global community in addressing the Iran issue, the potential of Iran to pursue a nuclear weapon. I don't think there was a higher international issue that anybody faced than trying to ensure that that did not happen.

So as we've seen, what the President did was to direct his diplomats to segment out that issue, approach that issue with the support of the international community, again I applaud our diplomats for their efforts to join with the P5+1. When you consider it includes Russia and China it was quite an accomplishment to really bring the kind of pressure really necessary to come to what I think is an equitable agreement and an agreement which actually addresses that specific issue.

Obviously there are a number of people who are disappointed or who feel that somehow it should have been broadened to consider other issues. I don't think that would have been a formula for success in addressing this most critical issue of the Iran nuclear file.

But to gain a little bit more context I think that during the course of the Obama Administration and certainly I saw this when I was in Oman, there were a number of developments that have changed or affected at least perceptions and maybe to some extent realities vis a vis the U.S. view of and approach to cooperation with the Gulf.

Let me just list a few. I was in Oman during the Arab Spring which I think was a watershed event. And as earlier speakers today have mentioned during the Arab Spring we did indicate that we were supportive of the kinds of changes that the people were seeking in those countries. Of course, it didn't, the Arab Spring itself didn't work out as the people there, I think, had hoped. But at least we wanted to show that we were supportive of people seeking those changes. The aftermath of the Arab Spring, I think, has been disappointing. And I think it has colored our thinking about the region and in particular prospects for the region to move in the direction that we had been encouraging them to do.

Others mentioned this morning the pivot to Asia. This occurred also while I was there. Again, I think that's a perceptual issue not a real issue. But nonetheless when the President announces that we are shifting, or reengaging or strengthening our focus on Asia other allies will look around and say, well, gee, that's less focus on us. I don't think that was the case. I don't think that was the intention. But nonetheless I think there's a perceptual element there.

And I think the third has been discussed at length today and that is the changed global energy market. So I think that has also led to a perception that as the U.S. gets closer to energy independence that there's less of a commitment to this energy producing region. Again, I don't think that's really the case but I do think that we have to deal with perception of people in that region.

So with those kind of elements at play I think we have seen a shift in attitudes and approaches between the US and the GCC countries and I look forward to discussion that with you during the Q and A.

[**Wossen**] Next is Doctor Abdullah AlShayji.

[**Dr. Abdullah AlShayji**] Thank you. [Greeting in Arabic]

Good afternoon, everybody. Your highness, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Once again it's my pleasure to be back for the fourth year in a row to participate in this important, in my opinion, conference that really sheds a light on salient and timely topics and panels, not to mention the outstanding speakers.

In the 24th Arab-US Policymakers Conference and the Model Arab League that John is undergoing it is very relevant for us to understand each other and to bridge the gap and tear down the walls of mistrust and confusion between our two people. Because of that I salute you Dr. John Duke Anthony for your effort and endeavor to give a positive spin and twist.

In a region that is really very misunderstood and much attacked and unfairly dealt with. My take today is a mix between academia and policy paper unfortunately I don't have time. I wrote a paper of about ten pages but I'm going to just highlight the important points in my opinion between the strategic relationship between the GCC countries and the United States. Of course, we don't have a monolithic GCC policy but at least we're trying and striving to have one. And the Saudi led operation, the Decisive Storm Operation is a point that we could all build upon and have it come to fruition.

The GCC-US relationship in my opinion is extremely strategic. This partnership needs to have a roadmap and to have a resetting. There is a need to reset the GCC-US relations because we are living in a tough neighborhood. There is instability. There is a lack of balance of power.

Toppling Saddam Hussein – now I'm not sticking to my paper. Toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003 created the most blunder the United States has committed and has escalated the imbalance of power in the region in favor of Iran. What we are harvesting today is the result of that blunder that has set the region into a collision course with interacting projects. You have the Iranian project, you have the Israeli project, and you have even the Turkish project and you don't have an Arab project.

What we have today is the beginning, the embryonic start of probably an Arab project led by the GCC countries that the Saudi led operation Decisive Storm could be the inkling and could be the beginning of some kind of Arab project that could be.. ..now there are even ambitious talks that this could be repeated in other places in the region but first let's finish it in Yemen.

I don't know but it seems every year I come to Washington our region and your country here seems to be in disarray and more chaotic and dysfunctional and allow me to be brutally honest here.

The Arab state system seems to be imploding. Chaos and instability is the norm in many countries. Failed and fragile states with disintegration of the states and societies in many Arab countries are pushing the region into more chaos and instability. There is a widespread perception in the region and throughout the Middle East is that the U.S. under President Obama is in retreat and this is a fact not imagination. And when push comes to shove there are doubts that the Americans will be there to shoulder their responsibility and help their allies.

Moreover the U.S. seems to be preoccupied by its domestic agenda evident by the chaos and dysfunctional partisan politics in Washington. Making many US allies wonder about the U.S. democracy and how it could project itself as the city by the hill to be emulated. Two years ago when I participated at the same conference here the US government just came out from an embarrassing shutdown and the bitter debate about sequestration and cutting down the defense budget.

This year things are more chaotic. The Speaker resigned and the front-runner also opted to step down. And there is more bipartisan argument in Washington. This reminds me of Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations in his book "Foreign Policy Begins At Home," where he argues that the biggest threat to the U.S. comes not from abroad but from within. What does that mean?

President Obama seems to believe that too, when he said to Tom Friedman that the GCC .. the threat to the GCC probably also comes from within not from outside. We disagree with that. Two years ago when I arrived in Washington there was no ISIS, or Faesh, or Daesh. Of course there was no war led by the US with 60 other nations to fight a non-state actor. This is an unprecedented event in history. Sixty countries in the world fighting a non-state actor that does not manufacture a bullet and does not have an air force. This is a first.

Syria was bleeding then and it's much worse today. Add to that the worsening sectarian tension in the Middle East. Iran has become even more emboldened and advancing his hegemonic project to undermine the security of the region and especially the security of the GCC states where we are engaged in a Cold War mentality with Iran.

As I argue we have two Cold Wars going on at the same time in our region. GCC-Iran Cold War projecting itself in the non-state actors and Iran boasting that it controls four Arab capitals and a fifth on the way. And also a Cold War between the United States and the West on one hand and Russia and the new coalition that is forming under President Obama's watchful eyes between Russia, Iran and Iraq, Syria, Hizbollah, and Iran proxies. So now we have come to this.

We have argued from the very beginning that the nuclear deal with Iran would embolden Iran and would not calm it down to behave in a good neighborly manner and we have been proven right.

Since the nuclear deal was reached back in the middle of July the litmus test that Iran has been really carrying out mischief and shenanigans that is undermining the security of the GCC states and even the Arab World. Yemen cut off its relationship with Iran for its intervention. Bahrain recalled its ambassador and kicked out the Iranian charge d'affaires. This behavior by Iran has not been condemned by the United States and the argument has been that Iran is only interested in the nuclear deal and it will not discuss any other issue.

This is where we diverge with the United States. In the Camp David summit and the visit by Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State to our region we have argued about two points. We welcome the Iranian deal provided the deal will end Iranian nuclear program and will change Iranian behavior to practice good neighborly relationship. Now what we have is Iran is a threshold nuclear state and I am afraid President Obama's legacy will not be that he clinched an Iranian nuclear deal but he

probably set off a nuclear race in the region to get GCC countries and others in the region the same ceiling Iran has gotten in the deal. By that he is setting off a nuclear race for peaceful use. Is that what we want?

So there is no position from the United States and this is a point of contention between us and the United States. Regarding Syria, regarding Iraq, things are really worsening by the day. You have now Russia is involved. I think the Russian involvement is a game changer in the region. It has complicated any political solution to the Syrian crisis. You cannot now talk about two things. You cannot talk about departing Assad from the scene without getting approval of Moscow. It is very funny, Putin now has the upper hand in a region that has been the periphery of the United States interests and the West's.

Russians are back in the region after they departed in the '70s after Sadat kicked them out. I just want to finish. I don't know how much time I have. I have a lot to say unfortunately. The thing that really struck me on Sunday watching President Obama and his interview on "60 Minutes" giving his own definition on leadership, when the CBS correspondent was pushing Obama that Putin is undermining your leadership Obama was very belligerent and he argued that leadership was leading in climate change, and reaching the nuclear deal with Iran and leading a 60 nation coalition to fight against Daesh. Is this leadership? None of these issues have really materialized. After 14 months of bombing Daesh, Daesh still controls one half of Syria and one third of Iraq. In no way is it being degraded, maybe slowed down, let alone defeated.

I will move quickly. Just one minute until my conclusion. Two minutes, okay that's good.

The Russians told the Americans during the Cold War to "trust but verify" – as President Reagan when we were graduate students here, about the Russians, "trust but verify" – Iran has taught us it is hard to trust its word and reassurances. So far it has been more vitriolic and provocative.

The final point I would like to make is the conclusion and what is the, what could be done. I believe that the, there is really a need from both sides to level down and to reset the relationship for the benefit of both sides.

The argument here is that the United States has a lot of leverage, it's not using it. GCC countries are acting now more independently, evident by the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm. For the first time a country that is not the US is forming a large coalition of GCC countries and other Arab and Muslim countries, from Morocco to Pakistan to lead a fight in a very clear objective, as Prince Turki stated very eloquently.

There is mutual interest at stake. It has to be harvested. There has to be, in my opinion, a roadmap to reset the relationship. Hopefully when we meet here next year we have much better news to report on rather than the dim and gloomy and

very unstable region, because we stand to lose a lot, if we do not cooperate and understand each other. It has to be a two way street, and a win-win situation rather than the other way around.

Listen to the words of your allies because there is really now a depressing scene in our region, and unfortunately it could turn into a much worse scene if we do not get our act together, and act together to fend off and to really deal with this looming crisis in the region in a very forceful and meaningful way.

Thank you.

[Woosen] Thank you to all the speakers. Doctor Anthony gave a broad outline of what the GCC is and is not, just to summarize. Mr. Almaeena focused on the developments internally in Saudi Arabia. He noted that the GCC is not a monolith. Ambassador Schmierer focused, is Oman centric, focused on Oman some. And Doctor alShayji focused on the strategic relations between the US and the GCC. He wants to see a reset of the relationship.

Now we'll go to the questions and answers. We will try to answer a few of the questions that are at the table. We apologize in advance if we don't get to your question.

Dr. Anthony, first. How has the US influenced the creation and structure of the GCC? How can the US aid in resolving GCC conflicts should they arise?

[Anthony] The U.S. aided indirectly in the formation of the GCC. In the 1970s when I was a teacher at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and had Iranian diplomatic students and GCC diplomatic students, the U.S. was trying to have these six countries on the Western side of the Gulf work more closely with Iran. The U.S. was wedded to a strategic long-term partnership with Iran and thought that there would be the wisest thing if the Arab countries would do so.

There was distrust of Iran because of ethnic grounds, distrust on sectarian, religious grounds, distrust on what Iran's hidden agenda and open agenda to be the paramount hegemon in the Gulf. Those three things were obstacles to be overcome if that U.S. strategic objective was to succeed.

Why did the U.S. try to do this? Because of Vietnam really. On the way back from a visit to Southeast Asia, Nixon in Guam gave a speech in which he said, no more Vietnams. Henceforth we'll have a strategic relationship with countries in various regions whose interests are identical to ours, similar to ours, complementary to ours, similar to ours and we needn't shed another drop of blood or fire another bullet.

Iran said, we're your tool. We're your agent, etc. All we need is the money. No excuse me. All we need are the tools, we have the money and indeed we'll pay you in your currency not ours. We'll pay you in advance and you can draw down on that.

I remember being at a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in the mid 1970s when the Shah spoke like that and people were elbowing each other saying my gosh, Santa Claus has come early this particular year. So we were quite biased toward the Shah. And we had seen what Iran was doing to help Oman with some 30,000 Iranian troops that went to Oman. Three thousand at a time, 90-day rotations over a three-year period. It added up to 30,000. It was an impressive aspect.

People forget about that if they were ever aware of it. I had meetings with the Iranians and the Arabs and those suspicions were foremost. Sultan Qaboos came up and said I'll explore this. I'll invite them all and we'll try to see what might be possible. So all eight sent representatives to Muscat in the 1976 in the fall. So what happened then was that the six GCC countries were in effect told by Tehran and Baghdad to shut up.

Baghdad wanted to lead the region as an Arab nationalist country. It could see that Egypt was going to be marginalized if Camp David came to fruition. And Iran wanted to monopolize the region. And both of them out shouted each other and the GCC countries could not get a word in edgewise. And the conclusion was, my goodness, while this has failed we have learned a big lesson, we must never have either of those two vipers next to our breast or chest. So Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were assigned the task to try to find ways so that when the moment came the six monarchies could get together.

So yes, indeed, indirectly the United States did have a role. And the GCC from that point forward began to think geo-politically, we can do it, we can do it, we can do it. We're going to do it. We just need to figure out how to do it. Kuwait was the most free, liberal progressive and offered to host many of the meetings. And it was by no accident that Abdullah Bashara became the first Secretary General of the GCC. It was no accident that Kuwait had had more experience than any of the others in hosting Arab regional organizations. So yes, the U.S. did have a role.

[Wossen] Thank you Doctor Anthony. The next question is addressed to Doctor Almaena. The question is how do you evaluate the Gulf monarchies prospects for survival over the next 30 years.

[Almaena] I am not an astrologer. Anyway having said that I think it's important that one looks at the socio-economic structure of the Gulf states in the sense that, again, you know I'm against those people who speak against specialization because this is something totally anathema in this modern world.

I believe the Gulf States' survival in the next 30 years will depend on meritocracy, it will depend on good governance, it will depend on social-economic reforms, it will depend on the induction of the young people and the growing population within the frank. I personally believe the monarchy is the glue that holds the country together because in all the countries, there are six Gulf countries, as I said before they share

some values, some social mores and all but there has to be a central pivoting figure, not benevolent dictator, not somebody with an iron fist, but somebody who is caring, but also will help people.

We are also stakeholders. When people talk about Gulf monarchy and they talk about the GCC, they talk about the sheikhs and the kings but they forget about us, the people down there. They have their own aspiration. And even the younger people now are different from those fogeys of my age, you know they think we should be put aside. So in your own family you have people who want to have their say.

So I think it's important for authority for the government and all to understand there are new players out, there is a new game going on. It is important to look into what their aspirations are and what they want. If that is done I think it will be easy sailing but if it's not there will be turmoil.

[Wossen] Thank you. Ambassador Schmierer, explain in greater depth why Oman seems to be a GCC political and security outlier. And together with that since we are short of time, do you believe the lack of succession mechanism in Oman could alter the geo-political status quo in the post-Qaboos era.

[Schmierer] On the first question I think the attributes of Oman that I mentioned, in particular that it is an Abadi majority country, make it certainly somewhat different than the other members of the GCC. It's not as wealthy as some of its other members.

It also has a unique history. You may recall that Oman used to be regional empire in the Indian littoral. And as a result Omanis traditionally, historically and currently are very much outward looking, very tolerant, very moderate. The Omani population is the most ethnically mixed Arab population given its history. So all of those factors play into a country which is quite moderate and I think it's very welcoming. I think it's a very nice place to be as any of you who have been there would know.

So I think there are a number of aspects of Oman that make it unique and make it a potentially helpful country for everybody, because I think they can be helpful to the other Arab countries, specifically their GCC partners in trying to sort of deconflict some of the tensions in the region whether it's with Iraq, whether it's with Iran, with Iraq, or otherwise. They certainly have been a good partner for us and the West in terms of our interests in the region. Their strategic location is of course extremely valuable to us and to the West and to the region. The fact that Oman is stable and provides the kind security support for stability support in the region I think has been very, very important.

The other part, in terms of succession. I'm very bullish on Oman because I think what His Majesty has done is develop institutions that will ensure continuity, that will ensure the Omani people continue to receive good government and kind of the

support of government so the ministries and other leaders are all, and the ministers have been selected for their merits and are really, uniformly, really strong.

So I think the succession issue is obviously one that people speculate about and are concerned about. I'm less so, because I think whatever occurs, I think the institutions that were created will continue to support the country and ensure its stability.

[**Wossen**] Thank you. For Dr. Al-Shayji. Outstanding synthesis, somebody says, of the problem. What does the U.S. now need to do? And together with that let me ask another question here. Harsh US critiques on GCC human rights impacting US-GCC relations. How should one assess China as an attractive partner for the long term given their policy of non-interference?

[**Al-Shayji**] Thank you for the questions. What could the US do? It could do a lot. First of all stop its contradictory approach to the region. The United States says it is fighting Daesh, and soliciting the help and cooperation of Iran to fight Daesh, ISIS, in Iraq. And if you read the fourth secret letter that was sent from President Obama to al-Moshed the Iranian supreme leader, back in October 2014, he urged him to reach a nuclear deal and then he said, according to the Wall Street Journal, we could cooperate in fighting extremism and terrorism, i.e. Daesh.

So how could the United States that President Obama's State Department on its annual report on "Patterns of International Terrorism" for the last three decades label Iran as the number one country sponsor of terrorism in the world. How could he ask Iran to help in fighting ISIS, or ISIL, or IS, or Daesh that was created because of the environment and the blunders by the United States by ostracizing the Sunnis and allowing al-Malaki to do it, without even push him or nudge him even, to stop his sectarian policy and keeping Assad in his place, ostracizing and killing the Sunnis.

So Daesh was the answer. So how can you ask the wolf to protect the chicken coop. This is exactly what Obama is doing. And that really sends chills up our spine.

According to one of the officials I talked to at the GCC. One of the reasons the GCC joined the fight against Daesh in August 2014 was that Iran should not be onboard. And now Obama is telling Iran, let's do it. The other contradiction is that the United States is fighting Daesh in Iraq and allowing Qasem Suleyimani. You know who is Qasem Suleyimani? The most dangerous and the most powerful man in the Middle East and he is on the United States list of international terrorists. And they see him in Iraq and they do nothing about him. With his Revolutionary Guard that is labeled, Quds Brigade is labeled as a terrorist organization.

Allowing the Houthis, another contradiction, I could go on and on and on about the contradictions. Stop the contradictions that the United States is making. The United States argues that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula which is headquartered in Yemen is the most dangerous branch of Al Qaeda in the world. So what did the

United States do? Packed up and left. So who is protecting the United States Embassy in Sanaa? The Houthis and Saleh, protecting it. They left al Anad airbase that they used to carry out from it in the south of Yemen the special ops against Al Qaeda in the southern part of Yemen.

The United States, last point, the United States argued that Bashar Al Assad had to go. Fine. His days are numbered. Fine. He lost. Legitimacy has no future. No role in Syria's future. What is the United States willing to do. To translate that from rhetoric to a working plan. Is the United States willing to have a no-fly zone as the Turks and the GCC countries have been arguing. Even some of the Republicans and some of the Democrats candidates arguing for a no-fly zone and a safe zone, in order to have all these refugees..

It is very easy to stop the largest refugee crisis in the world since World War II. Take off Assad. If you don't want to do that create no fly zone, no drive zone, safe zone, so all these refugees instead of going to Turkey and Europe and test the value of the West and the hypocrisy sometimes, let them stay in Syria. It's very simple. But the United States is so timid and is not wanting to do it because it doesn't want to upset the status quo and to have.. ..who will be.. ..so the argument here is so sarcastic. If we take out Assad what is the alternative.

How come you didn't say that when you took out Saddam Hussein and al Qadaffi. Nobody asked what is the alternative. Now it is much harder. The more you wait and the more you procrastinate and the more you have inaction the harder it is, it will be to deal with this quagmire that is Syria. It is sucking the whole region into an abyss, instability and quagmire due to the inaction of this administration, and the international community and the Arab community.

[Wossen] In the interest of time again, I will ask Doctor Anthony, I've already given him the questions and he should address how would the creation of a GCC standing army affect its ability to respond to regional conflicts. And some of the other questions are bundled up. Doctor Anthony.

[Anthony] I'll try to answer the last one last. We were all asked to try to come up with a policy recommendation so that policymakers might think, hmmm, is that a good one or not. Can we do it? Is it feasible? How much would it cost? What would be the implications if we wait? Why do we need to do that? Why will be able to do it? Where will be if we don't it? Or even sometimes whether it needs to be done? If it's not broken don't fix it.

My policy recommendation is for establishment of a US-GCC liaison office in the nation's capital. There is not one. I would argue there needs to be one. The reason for it is obvious. We have the four defense cooperation agreements. We don't have one with Saudi Arabia. But what we do have with Saudi Arabia, de facto is greater than all the other agreements combined. So let's not confuse form with function there.

With Oman I already mentioned the access to facilities agreement. We had the summit in this past May between the President and the GCC leaders. There's been no such American presidential summit ever with the six heads of state of any sub-regional entity that I'm aware of in the world. So the efforts to build on this relationship to project on it, the multi-faceted diversity of the relationships, of the interests, of the needs, of the concerns, of the goals, necessitate that we have an office in the same time-zone. Of course the GCC is in Riyadh.

Of course the US Embassy is just a five minute drive away, maybe a three minute drive when there's no traffic. But that's insufficient. There needs to be one in both places. Here. Just as there's one in the EU. So that's my policy recommendation.

Point two. Abdullah is quite correct about Iran. And the list is very long about grounds for mistrust and suspicion. If you don't have trust what can you do between two people there. Trust is everything. Is it not, in terms of sensitive issues at least in terms of going forward sharing sensitive information and taking risks which leaders are enjoined to do.

Now perceive it this way if you are empathetic. When the talks began the GCC representatives asked the United States, can't we be in these meetings, if not as direct participants then as listening participants, as auditors at least, because we have interests. Look if Russia was going to have a strategic relationship with Canada or Mexico or China with Canada or Mexico and the United States was going to be excluded from these meetings, my gosh, we would go through the roof. We would have an outrage. And legitimately so.

But when the GCC asked this of us and we asked Tehran if that would be alright and Tehran said we would prefer not. Our response was a resounding, OK. This seemed to be naïve, dangerous, reckless and irresponsible there. The analogy would be that if Iran is our adversary on our terrorist list, that Iran would say that we control the capitals of Pennsylvania, of Ohio and of Florida and Texas and we're going to have another one in Colorado there. I mean just imagine. This is the reverse of it there. Look how Americans go Ape-blank blank blank expletive deleted. When people even talk about Sharia possibly influencing the constitutions of some of our states there.

As to the question put to Khaled Almaeena his remark was spot on there. It has relevance to when the GCC was founded. Iraq wanted to be a member. Yemen wanted to be a member. So did Jordan, etc. You read the GCC's charter careful, it talks about common history, common language, common culture, common needs, common concerns, common interests, etc. and similarity in forms of government.

Now Iraq's government came to power, both of them, all of them since '58 by overthrowing precisely the kind of government structures and political systems as the six GCC countries. The same thing in Yemen. You say well Jordan's a monarchy but Jordan's not a Gulf country. You'd have to change the charter profoundly and

Jordan is a neighbor of Israel and there are many in Israel that want Jordan to be the State of Palestine. The GCC countries have no strategic or other interests in being drawn into that. So this is another additional reason why those three countries who have wanted to be members are not members.

[Wossen] Thank you.

[Al-Shayji] May I comment on the liaison office.

[Anthony] Sure.

[Al-Shayji] What you stated, John, is very good. This is my idea four years ago. I suggested it to some GCC officials in Kuwait and in Riyadh and even to some ambassadors here. Why don't we in the GCC, because we have so much in common and we have interests in the United States, why don't we have the liaison office as we do in the EU. We have a delegation there. It happens to be a Kuwaiti lady, Amal al-Hamod, which heads the GCC bureau in Brussels. She is doing a great job.

Why don't we have it in the United States. And guess what is the answer. The State Department won't give them diplomatic immunity so they have to act from within GCC embassies for those who are liaising with the US Congress and the State Department. If there will be a liaison office it won't be a separate entity under the GCC flag and umbrella. So let's talk to the State Department and the White House, if they are really interested upgrading and moving the relationship forward at the strategic level and Camp David was a good start in my opinion. According to the Camp David Summit it is to be done on an annual basis in other GCC capitals.

[Wossen] Thank you Dr. Al-Shayji.

[Al-Shayji] I am for it. By all means. But the problem is here in the United States. There is interest in the GCC countries but the Americans are not giving the diplomatic immunity. I have something about Iran.

[Wossen] Thank you Dr. Al-Shayji for that clarification.

The next question is for Dr. Almaeena. How have you been able to cope with the Saudi censorship on news and still done a good job at journalism with Arab News and Saudi Gazette? Together with that let me ask what's been asked here. How can the religious Saudi establishment reform and moderate. And together with that somebody is asking a question about the educational system – transforming the educational system from rote learning and memorization to critical thinking and innovation.

[Almaeena] The first one. How would you find.. do your job as editor of both the papers. I think over the years things changed. When I took over I remember the first major incident was in 1990 after 8 years in the news and somebody asked,

“Describe your job as an editor in Saudi Arabia.” This was in 1990 when there were about a half a million American troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia. And I said it’s like a man trying to dance the lambada without shaking his hips. So that was at that time.

But over that period there have been great changes in the media and I think in the year 2005 with King Abdullah’s ascension to the throne.. also the people change and you have technology come in. So there was no guy coming and sitting from the censor board, there never was. So you had new playing fields, new technology and it helped a lot.

By and large I think personally I am satisfied with the progress of the media. Remember we are a very private society so what you have here as news will not make it, not because they don’t want to put it, but because they think it is demeaning to expose someone or talk about somebody.

Reform? The religious establishment. First of all, I’d like to say that the word religious establishment, or ulema.. is because in Islam there is no clergy [Arabic phrase] There’s absolutely not. These are self appointed people unfortunately over the past few years, a couple of hundred years, Muslim rulers brought these people so like in the old days they would give edicts in their favor, like when Henry the VI wanted to have a second wife and he changed. This is exactly what happened in the Muslim world in the sense that these are self appointed clergy paid for by the government. Of course they were stuck and there was metamorphosis and they increased in numbers.

Reform? I think the best thing to do is for the government to take them head on. You know there is only one Gary Cooper in town. You can’t have two sheriffs. They have to really come and put them in their place. Because in this modern age and this society you cannot have somebody come and give them edicts or tell them what to do. It’s a modern society. I am a Muslim. I know what my rights and duties are. I know how to behave so I don’t need somebody sitting and screaming in the pulpit and finger pointing at me to do this or that.

So I think the governments have to realize in the Arab world and in the Gulf States and put them in their place.

As far as educational system is concerned I think the inclusion of private investors in education has helped a lot, because the new colleges and universities teach English and IT and all. And the selection process is very rigid. It is sort of difficult to get in. So, I am optimistic in that sense. Also, as far as Saudi Arabia is concerned and some of the other GCC where they have sent over 120,000 to 140,000 students to the United States, this also has helped because it makes people exchange cultures and learn. So on that I’m more optimistic on reforms for the religious establishment.

[Wossen] Thank you.

Ambassador Schmierer. The question. How did Oman's recent choice not to participate in Saudi Arabia-led airstrikes in Yemen affect the GCC's efficacy? Another question. Should the GCC react to the increasing Syrian refugee problem?

[Schmierer] In terms of Oman and involvement in the coalition in Yemen it's not unusual. This has been kind of the pattern in the past. They really don't prefer to get involved in military activities. As I mentioned they have this policy of peaceful coexistence. So they will look for ways to make other kinds of contributions.

They make a lot of economic contributions to Yemen. They've done a lot in terms of diplomacy vis a vis Yemen and potentially they could play a role in the current conflict as I mentioned earlier because of their potential for having some ability to engage with Iran and try to help the parties come to some kind of a resolution.

So I think their input will be a much more valuable in those areas and I think by staying out of the military side of it that potentially strengthens their ability to contribute in other areas. And they might be the only country that can play that kind of unique role.

In terms of Syria again I think they would like to, I mean I don't think they want to get involved, don't get me wrong. But to the extent that their influence might play a role I think they could also potentially help the parties, help the conflict and those involved in the conflict come to some kind of political solution as you know has been discussed at some length today.

The U.S. still considers the most promising prospect of outcome to be a political transition, a political solution. There's no obvious way that's going to happen in the short term. But I think if one is looking at ways to get to that, a potential involvement of a country like Oman, which might again be able to help the parties look at ways that they might look to a political transition.

I mean I told Omani friends you should offer Bashir al Assad asylum in your country. And so, I don't if something as practical as that might play a role. Again, using their good will and their potential ability to talk to both sides they might be able to play a role in defusing that from a political standpoint.

[Wossen] There is a question for the entire panel but I think this subject will be discussed in more detail tomorrow, but let me just throw out the question. How does industry engage the GCC as an entity? How does the GCC procure capabilities and services as an entity? If you care to answer, that's fine. If not, I think this is the subject of much of tomorrow.

[Anthony] So far it does not procure as an entity but people would like to see it do so. It's nice to have one customer rather than six separate ones for administrative, bureaucratic, functional, operational, logistical, maintenance reasons. Once only to

my knowledge did the GCC procure collectively and this was in the beginning when they worked on a procurement of Pakistani rice in order to buy and bulk order for the price to be less given that they were buying in bulk for the six.

But I'm not aware of any other collective purchase. Maybe Abdullah is.

[**Wossen**] I'll just move on and ask Dr. Al-Shayji a question.

How should the U.S. support cooperation between the GCC and other Arab nations in the Yemen conflict? Also, if you care provide additional information on what Ambassador Schmierer has said on Oman.

[**Al-Shayji**] Regarding Yemen, it is my opinion the Operation Decisive Storm has been an eye-opener and a game changer. And for the first time it has shown the GCC countries as had been our arguing for the last four or five years has been the de facto leader of the Arab order. If you look at the traditional large dominant Arab states in al Mashreq, al Mashreq al Arabi. Traditionally they had been Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. These four countries are the anchor of the Mashreq in the Arab world.

But what is the story now with Egypt. It is preoccupied with its domestic strife, instability, economic issues; Iraq is in shambles; Syria has ceased to be a state. So that leaves the burden on the GCC countries. And the largest of the GCC countries with about 80% of everything, is Saudi Arabia.

And finally Saudi Arabia decided with other GCC countries, junior partners of Saudi Arabia, to stand up and say enough is enough. We're not going to turn the other cheek, we're not going to be dependent on the United States and the West forever, we're going to do things on our own, to defend our national interest, and to deal a major blow to the arc that Iran is bragging out and boasting about of occupying four Arab states through their proxies and they have the audacity even for the advisor of President Rouhani to state clearly that Iran has now become an imperial power and its capital is Baghdad.

And through all of this with all of the Iranian shenanigans and mischief I haven't heard a word of condemnation from the White House or State Department. And this is really irking the GCC countries and people. For the level that I received a couple of days ago a message on my What's App. I was shocked. I don't know if it's real or not, that the United States after the Russians got involved in Syria. That the United States has pulled out its only aircraft carrier from the Gulf and has pulled out its Patriot missiles from the borders, the Turkey-Syria borders. I don't know if that's true. If somebody in the military could shed light on this I'd really appreciate that.

Somebody asked me what do you make of that? Is the United States surrendering more to the Russians. Is this true? If this is true this is really unbelievable. So Yemen is really a testing ground for the GCC countries. We decided to stop the Iranian

project in its tracks. Part of that is restoring the legitimate government of Abdul Mansour Hadi who was democratically elected in Yemen the other part is to hit the Iran project in its head. So now Iran is really resorting to mischief in other places. But this is something that is really, if it will succeed hopefully in Yemen it could lend itself to send messages to Iran and its proxies that we are not going to sit idle and wait idle and wait for others to come to our rescue. We re going to do the job on our own.

[Wossen] An important question for Dr. Anthony. How are the ties between the United States and Israel impacted the relationship between the US and the GCC?

[Anthony] The ties between the United States and Israel have impacted the relationship between the United States and the GCC a lot.

And they have had an impact on what the GCC could be, might be, would like to be but has not yet been able to be in part because of the Israeli component in the overall calculus.

And I'll say what others are perhaps not willing to say. In the first GCC year, 1981, it was founded in Abu Dhabi in May but they agreed to have a second summit in November of that year, because at the end of that summit, Sultan Qaboos said, look we can talk about economic cooperation, integration, harmonization, etc. for years here and of course we could benefit from that but it will all amount to nothing if we do not build a wall of protection and defense around all that we have achieved since we have become independent. We have to link the two. We have to be able to pay for the defense. Therefore we have to link our economies in a cooperative way to the extent that is possible without violating sovereignty or vested interest in status quo in our countries.

But we have to do what we can so Saudi Arabia and Oman worked on this to the extent that they could. Both of them were in agreement on this. But in November I remember being at that summit and the Israelis came in through Saudi Arabian airspace and they flew over Tabuk at the sound barrier while the summit was being held, cracked there and made everybody jolt etcetera because of the noise that it made. And then the Israeli planes dropped their empty fuel tanks on the runway in Tabuk in essence to say, you guys can talk about defense all you want but we're the big boys and girls in the neighborhood and we're the dominant ones. And you better think twice before you think that you can have a separate independent defense posture of any relevance there.

Beyond there, there have been the Israeli lobby's influence with Congress to prohibit or make it very difficult for some of the GCC countries to purchase American advanced armaments. It was almost as though in order to get some of the F-15 planes Saudi Arabia would have to agree not to turn left there when they took off from the airfields there, because that would be the direction of Israel. These kind of humiliating aspects were linked to them.

There's also, thirdly, Israel was the responsible partner for Saudi Arabia purchasing the Tornado because the Saudi Arabians wanted something from the United States even though the United States had strings on it. The British did not. The British Tornado was far more lethal than anything the US was willing to sell to Saudi Arabia, but the Israeli lobby insured that would not come to pass. We lost 70 million dollars from that particular contract alone that would have come to American companies.

And lastly with regard to the two Intifadas, both the first one in December of 1987 and the second one end of September 2000. What these did in the media broadcasting into the homes of all the GCC countries that the United States was doing absolutely nothing to lessen, to call for abatement for the way the Israelis were treating the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. It was nothing then compared to what happened the year before last in Gaza.

So, yes, this has poisoned the well, poisoned the reservoir of what had been goodwill toward the United States. America had no enemies in the region prior to the establishment of Israel, let's be frank about that. American had no Arab adversaries either. Indeed America had no critics either. But since then because of the US blind support, perceived blind support for Israel, this has harmed the trust relationship here. And the United States use of the veto in the UN Security Council, being the Olympic Champions in the use of the veto, an abortion of the democratic process within the world's highest political body. Let's be frank about this. This has hardly been a sterling example of practicing what one preaches and meaning what one says and saying what one means.

[Wossen] Thank you Dr. Anthony. We're down to one or two more questions.

Ambassador Schmierer, how can the US facilitate cooperation between the GCC in terms of their funding of rebel groups in Syria, some of which have different objectives and enemies?

[Schmierer] Obviously that has been a challenge because first of all it has been difficult to find viable moderate opposition groups. And so we've done our best to try to support that element, but that obviously has not panned very well. Obviously we continue to be concerned for any support for what we consider to be extremist groups. And obviously ISIS is the worst of all, Nusra and others, who we think also represent extremist ideologies and we would not want to see supported.

But I think what we've seen, we have to admit, our Arab friends have for practical, pragmatic reasons looked to groups that we don't want to support, to support because they are the only viable alternative. And so, I think we're going to both have to agree to live with that. We would not be supporting those groups but I don't think we would be taking direct efforts to prevent others from supporting them.

[Wossen] Thank you. Mr. Almaeena, quickly. How if at all, given the fact that Qatar backs Libya [dawn] while Saudi Arabia and the UAE support the international recognized [group] government can the GCC Secretariat and/or one or more GCC countries coordinate GCC action in Libya to help settle the political-security situations in that country?

[Almaeena] Well, the problem is that inter-Arab relations are based on personal relations in the sense that if one Arab leader is friendly to the other then it's all hunky-dory, but if any mishap occurs between the two than the countries are at logger-heads. It happened so many times between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. There was no sustained policy. There was no consistency vis a vis.. from both sides. That was one.

In terms of the GCC. Even the GCC is at loggerheads with itself. I remember when we had the problem between Qatar and the UAE and Saudi Arabia. These three, you could see the media, there was a frenzy as if this was Iran. Unless we resolve and solve our own problems, to have a strategy, think tanks, and look at the larger interests of the GCC and the Arab countries and come out openly, the Secretary General of the GCC will just be a messenger boy going from place to place not getting an answer.

[Wossen] If any of the panelists have a burning thing to say this is the time. After which we'll close.

[Anthony] A last comment.

[Al-Shayji] Thank you very much. I enjoyed the panel. I enjoyed the questions and I hope the audience enjoyed the discussions here. I would just like to underscore the need for the relationship between the two strategic partners to develop into a real partnership, beyond rhetoric, beyond the blunders, beyond the misunderstanding each other. We have a lot in common. We could benefit a lot if we work together, if we understand each other better. And what John Duke is doing is a great job, and I salute him once again. Really, I am happy to be back again and again to help in bridging this gap because it's important for us to be on the same page, not to have divergent views especially in a region that is on fire. We need more firemen and less trouble in that region.

And by the way, I congratulate everybody and for the beginning.. this is the first day of Hijri.

[Wossen] Any comments on this side.

[Almaeena] Just a footnote for what Dr. Shayji said about the withdrawal of the aircraft carrier from Bahrain and the missiles. I think it was more for budgetary reasons than anything else.

[Wossen] Ambassador Schmierer.

[Schmierer] One thing, I was struck and I would second Khaled's comment about the monarchies. I certainly hope we will continue to see the monarchies in the Gulf 40 and 50 years from now because they do provide the stability. They are all evolving and so the important point is their evolution not their abolition. So as we have seen the kinds of progress that has been made, I look Oman they have elected officials, they have a Majlis, they have a cabinet with officials who have been elected by the people. So they are all evolving and I think that is an important element of stability while the people do gain a greater voice through their evolution. So I would agree with you completely that those represent strong institutions that I would certainly like to see continue.

[Wossen] Dr. Anthony, final word and then we'll close.

[Anthony] Three unrelated comments here. The last one on the fact that Prince Turki made a clarion call for the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. No one has mentioned that on March 31st, 2002, all 22 Arab countries agreed to not only re-recognize Israel but to establish normal relationships with Israel. And this was crafted in such a way as to meet every single obstacle or issue that Israel had raised all these years for not having reached out and having a peace agreement with the Palestinians. It's been 13 years and the GCC countries and all the other 16 Arab League countries have been waiting for a "yes" answer. The Israelis response has been that this is not really a serious offer for a peace agreement even though they have offered us everything we ever asked for.

And this ought to be just the beginning of a conversation and we ought to break this down and negotiate each thing, water first, then borders, then refugees, then sovereignty and whether the Palestinians can have an Army, if they can ever have a submarine, if they can ever have a submarine, or if they can have relations with Syria, or any other, heaven forbid Iran, an Iranian embassy next door, etcetera. And so each one of these would take about five years to negotiate. That's five pieces there and so that would be a quarter century just to negotiate these. So the polite diplomatic word would be that response has the initials of "B" and "S" and this does not stand for boy scouts or blonde sisters, okay. So there's that aspect of it.

[Wossen] Please join me in thanking this absolutely worthy panel.

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