

HOW THE WORLD TURNS: SAUDI ARABIA IN TRANSITION

By Dr. John Duke Anthony

Following is important background information. It has to do with numerous high-profile administrative changes made by Saudi Arabia Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in the past few weeks in the government of Saudi Arabia. Of special significance is the appointment of a new Ambassador to the United States, HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and a new Minister for Culture and Information, H.E. Dr. Awwad bin Saleh bin Abdullah Al-Awwad.

HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman was previously an adviser to the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Royal Court, and

the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C. He is also an accomplished F-15 pilot and was one of the first Saudi Arabian fighter pilots to conduct attacks on ISIS in Syria. H.E. Dr. Awwad Al-Awwad was most recently the Kingdom's envoy in Germany.

Note also the more than a dozen new ministerial-level appointments of governors and deputy governors of various among the Kingdom's 13 provinces. Note, too, the assignment of new director-generals to key agencies responsible for various aspects of the country's modernization and development.



Saudi Arabian princes and ministers designated to new posts with the King, Crown Prince, and Deputy Crown Prince.
Photo: Saudi Press Agency.

The declaration of such changes will naturally invite close examination and comment by specialists. This is to be predicted. What even the country's critics will be unable to deny, however, is that the shakeup in the upper echelons of the country's leaders gives the lie to those – and no doubt there are many – among the country's critics, adversaries, and enemies who tend to dismiss any announcement that contains positive information about and insight into the Kingdom as rubbish.

As ever, these include those that are prone to perceiving the nature and extent of any Saudi Arabian governmental commitment to economic or any other kind of reforms as insincere, deceptive, cosmetic, and/or sclerotic. These will almost certainly do the same in this case.

The latest changes illustrate not only the degree to which important components of the Kingdom's reforms are underway. They also demonstrate that among the reasons the reforms are being undertaken is an effort to enhance the country's image, reputation for, and the increasing reality of its public sector accountability.

To be sure, the transformation of no country, the U.S. included, is bereft of blemish. These latest announced changes, however, provide evidence of the seriousness with which the Kingdom's leaders are approaching implementation of the country's Vision 2030.

Anyone in doubt need only have been present, as this writer was, at an April 2017 event at the

Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C. Featured was a delegation, led by Minister of Commerce and Investment H.E. Dr. Majed bin Abdullah Al Qasabi, of prominent Saudi Arabian trade and investment-oriented leaders.

To be sure, the transformation of no country, the U.S. included, is bereft of blemish. These latest announced changes, however, provide evidence of the seriousness with which the Kingdom's leaders are approaching implementation of the country's Vision 2030.

In a session moderated by CSIS Senior Vice President, Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and Middle East Program Director Dr. Jon B. Alterman, H.E. Dr. Al Qasabi delivered prepared remarks in impeccable Americanized English. He did so without a single note or slip of paper to hand. At the conclusion of his remarks, he took questions that ranged from every perspective imaginable.

In the Minister's own indomitable way, he illustrated and explained in detail how the country is serious about change. In so doing, he acknowledged the numerous and multifaceted challenges the Kingdom is facing, and that lie ahead at once now and over the horizon.

H.E. Dr. Al Qasabi made no apology for admitting that some of the goals the Kingdom's national leadership has set are at once ambitious and uncertain of achievement. That said, the essence of his remarks seemed to be twofold.



H.E. Dr. Majed bin Abdullah Al Qasabi, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Commerce and Investment, speaking at a Center for Strategic & International Studies session in Washington, D.C., on "Vision 2030: One Year into Saudi Arabia's Economic Reforms" in April 2017.
Photo: Center for Strategic & International Studies.

In one regard, there was a sense that he was but echoing the proverb that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. In another, to his doubters and naysayers – many if not most of whom have never set foot in Saudi Arabia – he appeared to be underscoring something else.

Without his expressing so in as many words, the Minister also seemed to be saying that there is a need to adopt the lesson of not judging another until one has walked in their shoes.

at institutions in the United States have walked in the footsteps of Americans. In contrast, what he did not imply but what he might have asked was whether and how many Americans have walked in the shoes of Saudi Arabians.

At the end of the day, the Minister seemed also to be emphasizing that his and his colleagues' efforts are not being made for show. Nor is what the national leadership is attempting to achieve with regard to Vision 2030 being made for mere public consumption, either at home or abroad.

Rather, what the Minister made crystal clear is that what the country's policymakers and decision makers are seeking to accomplish beyond everything else ought not to be all that surprising. Indeed, it is for the purpose of making the imperfect world in which the country and its people live – and in which the world in which the Kingdom's friends, allies, strategic partners, and indeed all of us also dwell – a better place than it previously was.

The Minister seemed also to be emphasizing that his and his colleagues' efforts are not being made for show. Nor is what the national leadership is attempting to achieve with regard to Vision 2030 being made for mere public consumption, either at home or abroad.

Unstated by the Minister was that he and literally hundreds of thousands of Saudi Arabians who have received aspects of their higher education

Saudi Arabia Royal Orders Issued 22 April 2017:

HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman has been appointed Minister of State for Energy, Industry, and Mineral Resources.

H.E. Dr. Awwad bin Saleh Al-Awwad has been appointed Minister of Culture and Information.

H.E. Eng. Abdullah bin Ammar Al-Sawahlah has been appointed Minister of Communications and Information Technology.

H.E. Essam bin Saeed has been appointed acting Minister of Civil Affairs. A ministerial committee has been formed to investigate violations committed by the former minister **Khalid bin Abdullah Al-Araj**.

HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman has been appointed Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States.

H.E. Eng. Ibrahim Abdulrahman Al-Muamar has been appointed Governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority.

HRH Prince Fahad bin Turki bin Abdulaziz has been appointed Commander of Saudi Arabia's Ground Forces.

Gen. Maj. Ahmad Asseri has been appointed Deputy Chief of General Intelligence.

HRH Prince Abdulrahman bin Muhammed bin Ayaf Al Mugren has been appointed Secretary General of the Council of Ministers.

HRH Prince Saud bin Abdulmohsin has been appointed Special Adviser to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al-Faisal has been appointed Adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Dr. Nasser Al-Dawood has been appointed Adviser at the Royal Court.

HRH Prince Faisal bin Khalid bin Sultan has been appointed Governor of Northern Borders Province.

HRH Prince Hussam bin Saud bin Abdulaziz has been appointed Governor of Al Baha Province.

HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Saad has been appointed Governor of Hail Province.

HRH Prince Mansour bin Muqren has been appointed Governor of Asir Province.

HRH Prince Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Abdulrahman has been appointed Governor of Al-Dareya Province.

HRH Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Mohammed has been appointed Deputy Governor of Jazan Province.

HRH Prince Saud bin Khalid bin Faisal has been appointed Deputy Governor of Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah Province.

HRH Prince Ahmed bin Fahd bin Salman has been appointed Deputy Governor of the Eastern Province.

HRH Prince Mohammed bin Abdulrahman has been appointed Deputy Governor of Riyadh.

HRH Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Faisal bin Turki has been appointed Deputy Governor of Al-Qassim Province.

HRH Prince Abdullah bin Bandar has been appointed Deputy Governor of Makkah Province.

HRH Prince Turki bin Hazlool has been appointed Deputy Governor of Najran Province.

Dr. Abdulrahman bin Mohammed Al-Assami has been appointed Deputy Minister of Education.

H.E. Majed Abdullah Al-Bawardi has been appointed Deputy Minister of Commerce and Investment.

Eng. Tariq bin Abdulaziz Al-Faris has been appointed Deputy Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

Eng. Mansoor bin Hilal bin Marzooq Ala'nezi has been appointed Deputy Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture.

Eng. Saad bin Abdulaziz Alkhalb has been appointed Deputy Minister of Transport.

H.E. Mohammed Abdulmalik Al-Shaikh has been appointed Chairman of the Saudi Arabian Sports Authority.

Eng. Ali bin Abdulrahman Alhazmi has been appointed Governor of the General Organization for Water Desalination.

Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Alhakbani has been appointed Director General of Customs.

Ghassan Bin Ahmed Alsulaiman has been appointed Adviser at the Ministry of Investment.

Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulaziz bin Mohammad Ala'oohali has been appointed Director of King Faisal University.

There will also be the establishment of a center on behalf of the national security organization, to be linked to the Royal Court. **H.E. Mohammed bin Saleh Al-Ghofaili** has been appointed to the development and function of a National Security Adviser to the Royal Court.

Additional Information for Reference:

- “Can Saudi Arabia’s ‘Vision 2030’ Get the Kingdom Off the Oil-Economy Roller Coaster?” in *National Council Analyses & Assessments*, By Dr. Paul Sullivan, June 20, 2016, online at: <https://ncusar.org/aa/2016/06/can-vision-2030-get-kingdom-off-oil-economy-roller-coaster/>
- “Vision 2030: One Year into Saudi Arabia’s Economic Reforms” at *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, Remarks by H.E. Dr. Majed Al-Qasabi, April 20, 2017, online at: <https://www.csis.org/events/vision-2030-one-year-saudi-arabias-economic-reforms>
- “A young prince is reimagining Saudi Arabia. Can he make his vision come true?” in *The Washington Post*, By David Ignatius, April 20, 2017, online at: <http://wapo.st/2oS4ywd>
- “Saudi Arabia, a kingdom built on oil, plans a future beyond it” in *The Washington Post*, By Steven Mufson, April 21, 2017, online at: <http://wapo.st/2qda9LT>



Dr. John Duke Anthony is the Founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. On June 22, 2000, on the occasion of his first official state visit to the United States since succeeding his late father, H.M. King Muhammad VI of Morocco knighted Dr. Anthony. The Moroccan monarch and head of state bestowed upon Dr. Anthony the Medal of the Order of *Ouissam Alaouite*, Morocco’s highest award for excellence. Dr. Anthony is the only American to have been invited to attend each of the GCC’s Ministerial and Heads of State Summits since the GCC’s inception in 1981.

For more information access the National Council’s website: ncusar.org.

Originally published on the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations’ *Arabia, the Gulf, and the GCC* blog (ncusar.org/blog) on May 3, 2017.

Available online at: <https://ncusar.org/blog/2017/05/saudi-arabia-in-transition>

