

H.E. Adel A. Al-Jubeir, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States



National Council on US-Arab Relations



# “Arab-U.S. Relations: Going Where?”



## National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations Maps Past Policy Courses and Explores New Directions

by James A. Winship, Ph.D. For Diplomatic Connections

With the election of President Obama in 2008, followed by his policy speech focused on fresh beginnings for relations between the United States and the Islamic world given at Cairo University in June 2009, hopes were raised high that new directions in U.S. foreign policy would emerge. In the year that followed, however, disappointments seemed more frequent than successes: while Palestinian-Israeli peace talks were resumed, the emphasis often seemed more focused on process than on results; diplomatic initiatives toward Iran fell flat; the rhetoric of the “war on terrorism” was dropped but negative images of Islam and Muslims were reinforced in American domestic politics; political uncertainty in Iraq and Afghanistan seemed only to strengthen Iran’s hand in Southwest Asia.

Against that backdrop more than 1,000 people gathered for the 19th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference convened by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and chaired by its President and CEO, Dr. John Duke Anthony. More than fifty speakers contributed to the dialogue over two days of shared ideas, intense conversation, and extensive networking.

Individual speakers included current and former ambassadors from the United States and various Arab countries, key U.S. government officials, leading military officers, representatives of several non-governmental

organizations active in the Near East, as well as major business and financial interests engaged in trade between the United States and the Arab world. Panel discussions dealt with the changing situation in Iraq, the challenges posed by Iran’s regional diplomacy, questions of defense cooperation, education and employment as keys to dealing with the Arab world’s fast growing “youth bulge”, the Palestinian future, unfolding energy supply issues, and business and financial opportunities in the region.

A Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award for Peace, Justice, and Multi-Faith Cooperation in the Middle East was presented to Dr. Landrum Bolling, former President of Earlham College and of the Lilly Endowment and now Senior Advisor to Mercy Corps. Dr. Bolling was honored for his decades of effort to nurture personal relationships and diplomatic links between leaders of the United States and leaders of states as well as institutions involved in Middle East regional conflicts, with all their global implications. A second award for “Exemplary Cultural Achievement” was presented to the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies recognizing its role in “deepening the understanding of Arab-Islamic heritage, encouraging creative artistry, promoting intellectual inquiry, bridging cultural tradition and the study of contemporary issues affecting Saudi Arabia, the Arab and Islamic worlds, and enhancing dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among civilizations, nations, and peoples.”

Former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and long-time Foreign Service Officer, Chas. W. Freeman, Jr. keyed the conference by challenging his audience to focus on “Failed Interventions and What They Teach.” Though policies focused on homeland security and foreign



Above: Iran Panel: Dr. John Duke Anthony; Dr. John Iskander, Chair; Mr. Thomas Delare; Dr. Flynt Leverett; Dr. Kenneth Katzman; Dr. Trita Parsi; Dr. Thomas Mattair

Left: HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal Al Sa’ud

Opposite Page: Education and Employment Panel; Dr. Mody Alkhalaf (at podium); Admiral Harold Bernsen; Ms. Anne Joyce, Chair; Ms. Magali Rheault; Ms. Maggie Mitchell Salem; Mr. John Moran





Dr. John Duke Anthony, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Sa'ud, HRH Princess Sora Bint Saud Bin Saad Al Sa'ud, Rend Shakir Sumaida'ie, Patrick Mancino

would be a stable, broad-gauged government, not susceptible to an early vote of no confidence. Pointing to a particular bright spot of accomplishment, General John Allen [USMC], Deputy Commander of CENTCOM, highlighted the emerging security architecture among the sovereign states in CENTCOM's area of responsibility, built not on treaty commitments or binding agreements but established by nurturing enduring relationships and underpinned by increasing defense capacity and interoperability among partner states. "The United States," he reiterated, "will not leave the region."

H.E. Adel Al Jubeir, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States, reminded the audience that, "The Kingdom's objective is to seek security and stability for its people and for the region. Saudi Arabia is a status quo power. We have no ambitions beyond our borders. We would like to live in a safe, peaceful, and prosperous neighborhood. Our efforts have been geared to building bridges, not destroying bridges." He pointed particularly to the efforts Saudi Arabia and the United States have made to institutionalize their relations in such a way as "to build bridges directly between different agencies of our governments so that they can handle problems at a working level rather than have each problem grow and literally grow out of context." In separate remarks, Gen. James B. Smith, United States Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, noted that the style of U.S. diplomacy in Saudi Arabia had changed dramatically. No longer are U.S. diplomats limited to one-year, unaccompanied tours of duty in Saudi Arabia: "Families are back." No longer does American diplomacy take place "behind walls" for security



intervention may create the illusion of increased security in the short run, he suggested, "It is also a prescription for diminished international prestige and support amidst continuing worsening of our country's relations with Arabs and Muslims. It neither preserves our liberties nor advances our security."

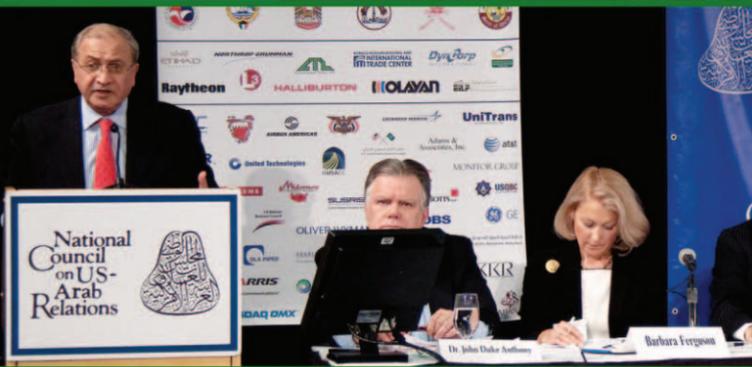
H.R.H. Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al Sa'ud, former Ambassador to the United States and a member of the Saudi Arabian royal family, candidly observed that while Saudi Arabia and the United States agree on many things – world peace, removing the curse of nuclear weapons, eradicating poverty and disease,

the importance of providing justice for all, there are some times when the two countries disagree on method, style, language, and perception. Even as Saudi Arabia has persuaded the League of Arab States and the more broadly based Organization of the Islamic Community to accept Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's Peace Initiative, the United States has been largely ineffective in persuading Israel to take concrete steps toward any final agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Saudi Arabia, "while working to overcome the psychological and political difficulties of having fingers

pointed at it from everywhere," Prince Turki insisted, "has opposed the rationalization of extremism and sought to guide religious discourse to a middle way."

Challenging pessimism about United States policies in the Arab world, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, noted that although the U.S. involvement in Iraq encountered serious problems in the early years, it had succeeded in opening the door to a more participatory political process and in nurturing a truly national government that, though delayed for months in its formation,

Photos Left to Right: Ambassador Chas. W. Freeman, Jr.; Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Admiral Harold Bernsen; Mr. Francisco Sanchez, Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade and Head of the International Trade Administration; Crowd at evening reception sponsored by the Iraqi Embassy at their Consulate offices.; General John Allen [USMC], Deputy Commander United States Central Command; Energy Panel: Randa Fahmy Hudome (Chair), Mr. Jay Pryor, Dr. Herman Franssen, Ms. Rayola Dougher.; Ambassador Sameh Shoukry of Egypt and Ambassador Maen Areikat, Representative of the PLO Mission in Washington, D.C. offered their views on the situation in Palestine.; U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, General James B. Smith, offers reflections on his first year as Ambassador in Riyadh.



reasons; instead, American diplomats are traveling the length and breadth of the Kingdom.

Such are the challenging and controversial views that comprise a policymaker's conference. But there was still more. There were book sales, an Arab souq - full of the sights, smells, and purchases of the marketplace, and there was endless, spirited conversation. An evening reception at the Iraqi consulate was entertained by the upbeat message of global citizenship sung and danced by the international voices of "Up with People." And the power of soft diplomacy aimed at teaching the world's young people the lessons of literacy, cultural learning, tolerance, and humane values was demonstrated by the presence of Sesame Street Workshop and its diplomatic star, Grover – of Muppets fame. As a luncheon speaker, Grover noted that literacy is important "because every book we read we learn something new." The same can be said of these policymakers conferences: they challenge what we think is true and teach us something new. ■



Top to Bottom:  
 HRH Prince Turk Al Faisal meets Muppet character – Grover  
 Prince Abdulaziz and Princess Sora meet the representative of Muppet Diplomacy, Grover  
 "Business and Finance" panel – Dr. Hani Findakly (podium); Dr. John Duke Anthony; Ms. Barbara Ferguson, Chair; Ambassador Ford Fraker; Mr. Brad Bourland; Ambassador Shaun Donnelly; Dr. Lama Suleiman.  
 Naval Academy Midshipmen attending evening reception hosted by the Embassy of Iraq at the consulate offices  
 Mr. Joseph Stanik and students from New Era Academy, Baltimore, MD. attend the evening reception hosted by the Embassy of Iraq at its Consulate offices. (L-R) Jazmine Johnson, Jennifer Bryan, Francisco Vazquez-Romero, Jennifer Anderson