

WEEK OF MARCH 11, 2002

**MYTHS AND MISINFORMATION:
SAUDI ARABIAN AND U.S. STATEMENTS IN CONTEXT**

MYTHS AND MISINFORMATION:

SAUDI ARABIAN AND U.S. STATEMENTS IN CONTEXT

By

John Duke Anthony

[Washington, D.C. - March 17, 2002] The arrival of U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney in Riyadh yesterday on a goodwill mission and for special consultations came at a unique moment in the two countries' relationship. The American media's rash of negative information and analysis related to Saudi Arabia, which began in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States continues unabated.

In contrast, given what is at stake in the United States' relationship with the Kingdom, the number of factually correct and insightful statements appearing these past few months in published reports about the country, and about the special ties between Riyadh and Washington, has been much less than one might imagine.

Many Americans and Saudi Arabians, together with others proud to count themselves as the allies and strategic partners of both, have been taken aback by the shrillness of the media's unrelenting attacks. They also find the nature and extent of the smear campaign unprecedented and mean-spirited.

Harming the Relationship

The anger and confusion of many Americans that stems from the fact that 15 of the 19 September 11 attackers came from one particular area of the Kingdom is natural and understandable. Even so, large numbers of American and Saudi Arabian analysts believe that such a concerted action to harm the relationship, coming as it has mainly from within the United States, has gone on for far too long and that its continuance serves the interests of neither country.

Fortunately for the overall relationship, and fortunately also for the broad commonality and complementarity of U.S. and Saudi Arabian strategic, economic, political, commercial, defense, and developmental objectives, the American media's broadsides have not unduly affected the relationship at the government-to-government level.

Notwithstanding the inaccurate and irresponsible statements emanating from various political pundits and some Members of Congress, as well as from classified information leaked by Pentagon sources that would suggest the contrary, the relationship between the two countries' executive branches, at its core, is sound.

The Media's Abdication of Responsibility and Accountability

However, the impact of the hostile commentary and false statements appearing in much of the media's op-ed pages, weekly journals, and television and radio talk shows has been and continues to be quite another matter.

In these arenas of public discourse, many publishers and editors responsible for elementary fact-checking, and for discounting the patent bias of authors on matters pertaining to a relationship as important as the one between these two countries, appear to have taken leave of their senses.

Certainly as far as honoring the ordinary norms of responsibility is concerned, these canons of media integrity appear in many instances to be conspicuous by their absence.

Many will emphasize the fact that the phenomenon of various segments among the U.S. media, political pundits, and Congressional leaders appearing to delight in expressing contentious viewpoints and inaccurate statements about the relationships between the United States and other nations is hardly new.

Others will point out that one can hardly claim that the ties between any two countries, and particularly two such as these with their out-sized roles in regional and world affairs, are bereft of blemish.

But neither of these two points is of concern here. Rather, the point at issue has another, quite different frame of reference. It is that any sustained depiction of reality in the multifaceted web of mutual benefits between these two global giants that is consistently inaccurate and negative, is likely, if left uncountered over time, to carry with it the potential for much damage.

The Issues

This is the context for GulfWire presenting a collection of recent and ongoing official U.S. and Saudi Arabian statements, together with other commentary and remarks by the two countries' top leaders, on most of the issues that have been and remain in the media's line of sight.

The purpose is to provide a source of information and reference that would not otherwise be readily available on what high-ranking American and Saudi Arabian leaders have and have not said on the topics in question.

The greatest number of false and misleading statements and analyses that continue to appear in the American media in this instance relate to the following:

- o the extent to which the Kingdom has or has not condemned terrorism;

- o the status of U.S.-Saudi Arabian investigations of the September 11 terrorist attacks;
- o the Saudi Arabian-U.S. relationship;
- o the allegation of Saudi funding for terrorism;
- o the identification and freezing of terrorism's financial assets;
- o the question of Saudi Arabian support for Osama bin Laden;
- o the Kingdom's education system and anti-Americanism; and
- o the question of stability in Saudi Arabia.

The documentation herein relates not only to an official institution from which commentary regarding these issues and questions has emanated but, also, the date of its publication. It also is linked to what is regarded by many as the most authoritative individual sources of American and Saudi Arabian responses to these and related issues. The material covers most of the frequently asked questions since September 11 and continuing through mid-January.

Regarding each of the topics under review, the Kingdom's position on the issue or question in dispute is presented first, followed by documentation of statements from one or more American officials in response.

I. ON SAUDI ARABIAN COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

THE KINGDOM'S POSITION ...

Saudi Arabia's position is that it is fully cooperating with the United States and the international coalition against terrorism. Numerous Saudi Arabian leaders, including virtually all of the country's top officials, say that the Kingdom is engaged in and assigns the highest priority to such cooperation because the country and its people have been victims of terrorism. The country's leadership typically adds that it does so because its Islamic faith and culture rejects terrorism in all its forms.

The Kingdom's senior officials point out that the United States President, the Secretary of state, the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Council Advisor, and the Secretary of the Treasury have all publicly and unequivocally stated that Saudi Arabia has been very cooperative in the fight against terrorism, and that it has done everything it was asked to do.

...AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS' STATEMENTS

"We've had a very constructive dialogue with Saudi Arabia on a wide range of issues, including this terrorist financing effort, and as you are aware, we're very satisfied with the level of Saudi cooperation."

Source: Philip Reeker, Deputy Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, December 7, 2001

* * *

"The Saudis have been very responsive to our ...requests."

Source: Paul H. O'Neill, Secretary of the Treasury, November 7, 2001.

* * *

"... [H]e [President Bush] is very pleased with the Kingdom's contribution to the [war] efforts... Press articles citing differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia are simply incorrect."

Source: Unnamed White House Spokesman, by David Ignatius, "Fretting over the Saudis," Washington Post, November 4, 2001.

* * *

"We have a very good relationship with the Saudis. We will continue to work with them in as cooperative a fashion as possible as we go forward."

Source: Victoria Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, January 18, 2002.

* * *

"Secretary Rumsfeld... was very pleased and appreciative of the agreement on the part of the Saudis to provide assistance."

Source: Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, U.S. Department of Defense, October 4, 2001.

* * *

"We have gotten very, very good cooperation in the military area... There is a joint operations center up and running. There is a whole lot of cooperation going on."

Source: Unnamed Senior U.S. Department of State Official, as quoted by Nicholas Kralev in "Saudi Arabia Cuts Ties with Taliban," in the Washington Times, September 26, 2001.

* * *

"[W]e've had very good cooperation with the Saudi government [and] excellent cooperation in the military area."

Source: Richard Boucher, Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, September 24, 2001.

* * *

"The Saudis have been responsive on all of the things that we have asked them to do."

Source: Colin Powell, Secretary of State, October 3, 2001

* * *

"As far as the Saudi Arabians go, ...they've been nothing but cooperative."

Source: President George W. Bush, September 24, 2001

* * *

II. ON SAUDI ARABIAN SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST TERRORISM

THE KINGDOM'S POSITION ...

Crown Prince Abdullah recently described Saudi Arabian-United States' ties as "excellent." Cooperation and support remains very high at all levels, particularly in military, diplomatic, and economic affairs. The Kingdom does, however, continue to have concerns with regard to American policy towards the Middle East, and it continues to urge the United States to become more involved in efforts to bring peace to the region.

In some of his more recent statements on this subject, the Crown Prince expressed a belief in being honest and sincere with one's friends. To this end, he indicated that the Kingdom strongly believes that America's disengagement from the peace process is harmful to its credibility and dangerous for the region.

The Crown Prince has repeatedly pointed out that the Kingdom has been a loyal friend and ally of the United States for over six decades. He and all the country's top leaders have emphasized that the two countries have very strong ties, and, from their side, they intend to keep it this way and, in so doing, remain committed to the fight against terrorism.

...AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF AMERICAN OFFICIAL POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS

"The Saudis have been good hosts and our troops have been good guests. I know that Secretary Rumsfeld is constantly looking at the footprint of what forces we have out there, but in my conversations with the Saudi leaders, just about four or five days ago with Prince Saud, I've had no suggestions that they were about to ask us to leave."

Source: Colin Powell, Secretary of State, on ABC TV's "This Week," January 20, 2002

* * *

"We expressed a great appreciation for the cooperation we have enjoyed for many years, and we expect to enjoy good cooperation and very good relations well into the indefinite future."

Source: Lincoln Bloomfield, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, Statement to the Associated Press, January 20, 2002.

* * *

"The President believes the current arrangements are working and working well. [He] thanked Saudi Arabia for their friendship, cooperation, and help, and emphasized the mutual goal of bringing peace to the Middle East."

Source: Ari Fleischer, White House Press Secretary, January 18, 2002

* * *

"... Saudi Arabia has been a moderate Arab regime that has been friendly with the United States ...[W]e have been able to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in a way that has assisted us, for example in conducting the war against Iraq, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. And we do have some forces that are there now that enable us to fly aircraft and contribute to peace and stability in the region."

Source: Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, on C-SPAN's "Washington Journal"

* * *

"The Saudis are cooperating quietly. ...The bilateral relationship has long been based on give-and-take."

Source: Brent Scowcroft, Chairman, Foreign Intelligence Board, Bush Administration, and former National Security Adviser in the Administration of President George Herbert Walker Bush, as quoted in Karen deYoung, "Saudis Seethe Over Media Reports on Anti-Terror Effort," Washington Post, November 6, 2001.

* * *

GulfWire comment: Gulf Wire's publisher was present at the Gulf Cooperation Council's 21st Heads of State Summit in Oman on December 30, 2001. On that occasion, each of the six GCC member-states' heads of delegation could hardly have been clearer in their condemnation of terrorism.

The host, Sultan Qaboos, the Ruler of Oman, opened the summit with a statement that could not have been more forceful regarding the subject. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah's remarks were just as strong: "It is the duty of all Muslims," he said, "to unequivocally condemn all terrorist acts clearly and without any vagueness and to condemn all who support them." The UAE's Shaikh Maktum, Bahrain's Shaikh Hamad, Qatar's Shaikh Hamad, and Kuwait's Shaikh Sabah all voiced nearly identical sentiments.

A nuanced difference between Saudi Arabia's and the U.S. government's condemnation of terrorism is as follows. Whereas Riyadh has condemned the phenomenon of terrorism without any reservations, it has also sought to call attention to the need to prevent the seeds of terrorism from taking root,

and the necessity to address effectively the source of issues that sustain terrorism.

In contrast, the number of U.S. pronouncements implying, let alone explicitly recognizing, any linkage whatsoever between cause and effect as regards acts of terrorism in the region have been exceptionally few in number. Indeed, taken at their face value, one could be forgiven for concluding that the statements of more than a few U.S. officials would have the world, and certainly the American people, believe that there is no need to need to reassess, let alone repair, the substantive content of any U.S. policies towards Arabs, Middle Easterners, or Muslims. This is because, in the eyes of these officials, there is nothing wrong with the policies.

One Congressional leader, in remarks made to GulfWire's publisher, whom the leader called to consult after the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, could have hardly been clearer on this point. "At most," he said, "we are going to put all our energies and efforts into finding a way to get our message across better. We are not going to deal with the substance of the policy. That's just [no reverse pun intended] reality - it's not going to happen, not in a thousand years. We're looking for technical ways to fix the format."

III. ON ALLEGED SAUDI FUNDING FOR TERRORISM

...THE KINGDOM'S POSITION

Crown Prince Abdullah has stated unequivocally, "No honorable person would accept terrorism." Countless Saudi Arabian officials have spoken for the record in stating that the Kingdom does not support or contribute to terrorism, adding that it never has, and never will.

A common refrain by one official after another is that, "terrorism is against our religion and culture, and we have been victims of it for the past four decades." Officials have also been increasingly at pains to point out that all financial transactions are monitored to ensure that no money goes to "evildoers."

The U.S. Treasury Secretary, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, and other key U.S. officials have publicly said that Saudi Arabia has frozen assets and cooperated fully in this matter.

...AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF AMERICAN POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS

"The Secretary [of State] indicated way back on November 7th that Saudi Arabia has been prominent among the countries acting against the accounts of terrorist organizations, and like so many other countries taking action in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1333,"

Source: Philip Reecker, Deputy Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, State Department News Briefing, December 3, 2001

* * *

"Saudi Arabia has been prominent among the countries acting against the accounts of terrorist organizations ... and I am delighted that Saudi Arabia ... has just ratified [the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism]."

Source: Colin Powell, Secretary of State, November 7, 2001

* * *

"Al-Qaeda is directed first and foremost at the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy ...You can be [damn] sure that any Al-Qaeda operative is on the Saudi wanted list and that any senior operative is high on that list."

Source: Chas W. Freeman, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, as quoted in Peter Stone, "The Saudi Problem," National Journal, October 6, 2001.

* * *

IV.ON SAUDI ARABIA'S FREEZING OF ASSETS

...THE KINGDOM'S POSITION

Saudi Arabia has been at the forefront of international efforts in fighting terrorism and in the increasingly global attempts to combat money-laundering activities. Recently, the Kingdom joined Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors from the G-20 countries in order to develop an aggressive action plan directed at the routing out and freezing of terrorist assets worldwide.

The President of the United States and the Department of State have said repeatedly that Saudi Arabia's cooperation on the financial front has been excellent and that there is nothing that the U.S. has asked for that it has not gotten from Saudi Arabia.

...AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF AMERICAN POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS

"...We understand that the Saudi Central bank has issued instructions to banks in Saudi Arabia to look for and freeze accounts listed by the U.N. Security Council Sanctions Committee, and we remain very pleased with the cooperation and work we have had together with the Saudis on this matter."

Source: Philip Reeker, Deputy Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, State Department News Briefing, December 3, 2001

* * *

"Saudi Arabia has been prominent among the countries acting against the accounts of terrorist organizations. Like many countries, they are taking actions in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1333, which calls on all UN members to freeze accounts listed by the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee that are linked to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization, or to the Taliban."

Source: Richard Boucher, Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, State Department Press Conference, November 27, 2001.

* * *

"Saudi Arabia has been helpful across the board in areas dealing with financing [and] the President is very pleased with the cooperation of the Saudi government."

Source: Ari Fleischer, White House Press Secretary, White House Press Briefing, November 19, 2001.

GulfWire comment: One of the inevitable but unfortunate byproducts resulting from the freezing of various charitable accounts has been the mirror image of the saying, "Be careful that you do not throw the baby out with the bath water." That is, in several instances, the act of freezing entire charities' funds in the course of plugging the holes here and there through which moneys did find their way to terrorist groups has not been without severe unintentional damage. The victims: countless innocents and people who live in exceptionally dire circumstances requiring humanitarian assistance.

It so happens that the conduits through which varying amounts of charitable contributions were being siphoned surreptitiously to "evildoers" are the same conduits through which badly needed life-sustaining assistance, until the freezing of funds in such charities, was reaching the most destitute of the poor and downtrodden, including no end of widows, orphans, and several handicapped children in such places as Bosnia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Chechnya, Palestine, and Lebanon.

An Arab colleague of this writer, who is friend of one of the increasing number of Muslim philanthropists affected by the freezing of charitable accounts put it this way. "My charitable friend is devastated by what has happened. It is true that some of the funds he directed to charitable purposes ended up where they was not supposed to go, but, overall, it was determined that the amount in question was but a tiny fraction of the funds that now stand frozen, for how long, no one knows.

"I know for a fact that he has for years been helping some 80 people who have no other form of support but his generosity upon which to live. One of the people on his staff was a Palestinian, who it turns out, when my friend and our government looked into the matter, was discovered to have channeled some of money raised by the charity to people associated with Hamas.

"But he was the only one to have done so, and although the amounts were not large, indeed they were not noticed for a very long time, the charity's entire account has been frozen until further notice. Leave aside the question that, in his mind, and many others, Hamas is not just all about fighting and weapons. It engages in a lot of social welfare projects that benefit widows and children who have lost their fathers and increasing numbers of others that have been maimed for life.

"As a result of the entire charity's funds being frozen, now no one is being helped. And my friend's story is not unique. Others, too, are finding out what you Americans say about 'a single bad apple spoils the entire barrel'.

I find my philanthropist friend and others asking, 'Where is the freezing of funds among Catholic charities in the United States?' We have been reading for decades that a substantial portion of the money spent to sustain the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has its origins in these American charities.' Where is there a comparable American, British, or Irish crackdown on these groups'?"

A more telling example was brought home to this writer today. A friend from a GCC country related the story of a young woman, 17 years old, studying in the United States on a scholarship provided by her country's head of state. The woman, an outstanding student from a family of exceptionally limited means, happens to have a last name that is vaguely similar to the name of a charity whose funds were frozen as a result of U.S. Treasury decisions four months ago.

The family has nothing whatsoever to do with the charity whose funds have been frozen and, indeed, lives in a different country from the home base of the charity. No matter. A bureaucrat felt her last name was too close to the name of the banned charity, and all moneys sent to her in her name have been frozen indefinitely. She has no money, nor does her family, for her basic rent, food, or other basic living expenses.

V. ON SAUDI ARABIAN SUPPORT FOR OSAMA BIN LADEN

THE KINGDOM'S POSITION ...,

[The following is a close paraphrasing of statements from many different sources]. "Osama bin Laden is a dissenter who has taken the side of evil. His citizenship was revoked in the early 1990s on account of his irresponsible acts. As a nation, we are horrified by his actions, and we reject what he and his followers stand for. They are deviants and criminals whose actions we strongly reject. People must understand that we are also victims of Osama bin Laden's terrorist acts."

...AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF AN AMERICAN POSITION,

"Osama bin Laden ... will not rest until every Arab leader who is even moderately pro-American is displaced and killed, including the entire Saudi royal family ...We must stand by our friends in the Middle East and show that we cannot be controlled by terrorists."

Source: Representative Brad Sherman (Democrat-California); Statement in the Congressional Record, H5922, September 21, 2001.

* * *

AS WELL AS A SAUDI ARABIAN POSITION,

"As a human community, we must be vigilant and careful to oppose these pernicious and shameless evils, which are not justified by any sane logic, nor by the religion of Islam."

Source: Shaikh Salih Al-Luhaydan, Chairman, Supreme Judicial Council

* * *

AND THE POSITION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE [THE 57 ISLAMIC COUNTRIES' LARGEST INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION].

"The cruel acts are rejected by all human principles and religions; moreover, islam rejects the killing of innocent people."

Source: H.E. Dr. Abdalwahid Belkaziz, Secretary General, Organization of the Islamic Conference, Statement of September 14, 2001

* * *

VI. ON THE SAUDI ARABIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND ANTI-AMERICANISM

THE KINGDOM'S POSITION ...

One Saudi Arabian official after another has stated that the Kingdom's educational system does not teach anti-American doctrines and hatred of the West. "Over the past sixty years, tens of thousands of Americans have lived in Saudi Arabia among the country's citizenry. There has not been one hate crime against any of them.

"Islam teaches peace, amicability, and tolerance, not violence and hatred. As Saudi Arabians and Muslims, we wish to establish friendly relations that serve mutual interests in all spheres.

"The involvement of the Kingdom's citizens in the September 11 acts of terrorism was shocking to almost all Saudi Arabians. It is important to understand that these individuals were deviants and criminals. They do not represent the people of Saudi Arabia or Islam any more than [The late Rev.] Jim Jones or Branch Davidians represent America or Christianity."

...AND DOCUMENTATION OF SAUDI ARABIAN POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS

"Any attack on innocent people is unlawful and contrary to Shar'iah [Islamic law]. Muslims must safeguard the lives, honor, and property of non-Muslims, who are under their protection and with whom they have concluded peace agreements. Attacking them contradicts Shar'iah."

Source: Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdallah Al-Subail, Imam of the Grand Mosque of Makkah and Member of the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars, December 4, 2001

* * *

"The recent developments in the United States constitute a form of injustice that is not tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts."

Source: Shaikh 'Abdalaziz Ahl Al-Shaikh, Chairman, Council of Senior Islamic Scholars

* * *

GulfWire comment:

GulfWire's publisher was in Saudi Arabia on several different occasions for extended periods in 2000-2001. The Al-Aqsa Intifada raged the entire time. The Kingdom's television networks, along with those of other Arab countries, British Broadcasting Corporation, and the French, German, Italian, and other channels all regularly conveyed a fuller, far more accurate, and overall quite different account of the Palestinian Uprising than the American media, a fact which Americans from all walks of life who reside and work in the Kingdom readily acknowledged.

This point has not been lost among many in the region who have grown accustomed to many Americans railing against the lack of an Arab "free press." It also begged the question, with regard to international coverage of the Intifada, then as now, as to whose press - America's or the rest of the world's -- was freest, or, conversely, least free.

In the aftermath of September 11, the same question of basic freedoms of American versus Arab media expression on this particular issue, which remains one of profound and pervasive importance to millions of people from one end of the region to another, resurfaced and returned to the limelight. It came back into play in reaction to official United States pressure on regional Arab media networks to "tone down" their reporting of the horrors visited upon their fellow Arabs resisting an illegal foreign military occupation.

In reaction to the almost daily depictions of carnage inflicted by American manufactured weaponry upon a people lawfully resisting the Israeli occupation, and the depiction of the occupier's suffering as well, the manner in which people at the time processed and dealt with their pain and sense of helplessness differed from one to another.

But there is no doubt that U.S. actions in the form of vetoing UN resolutions designed to protect innocent civilians from being harmed, and U.S. inaction in response to the use to which the occupier put its American-made weaponry in an effort to crush the rebellion, had its own very negative and far-reaching effects. Not least, the actions and inaction combined to produce anger and anti-Israeli and anti-American feelings in many Arabs and Muslims, among them teachers and students alike, and not just in Saudi Arabia but all over the world, and on a scale not witnessed in quite some time.

As one parent active in teacher-student affairs in a school at which one of their children study said to this writer, "It is easy to make the case that the mounting animosity towards the United States among ordinary people in this region is the result first and foremost of U.S. policies towards the Palestinian Question, followed by its policies towards Iraq that have had the effect of strengthening the Iraqi regime while doing nothing to endear the Iraqi people, especially those that live in the central region and in the south, to the United States government.

"It is far more difficult to argue successfully, if at all, that the root of such feelings derives from either the curricula or method of teaching in either our or any of our neighbors' educational systems. We would be the

first to acknowledge that our educational systems are badly in need of reform. But the reasons are related to the fact that they are presently ill-suited to prepare our youth for gainful employment or challenging jobs in an increasingly market-oriented economy. The need for reform has next to nothing to do with how people view Americans and the United States. The need for reforms on that front is the responsibility of Americans and the United States.

"It is understandable that many in the United States would want to deny any linkage, direct or indirect, between what the U.S. has done and not done on issues related to the Palestine Question, which is a matter of great moral, emotional, and religious importance not only to millions in this region, but to hundreds of millions of other people worldwide.

"But for the American leadership to do so in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary - ask any U.S. official here, and they will acknowledge that they have lost the 'information campaign' in this part of the world -- is the height of self-deception."

Of interest in this regard are the views that Saudi Arabians who specialize in the government and politics of the United States have about an important aspect of the American system of education.

They point out, for example, that in a country of 280 million people, the number of American specialists on the GCC countries outside the governmental sectors of defense, diplomacy, and intelligence is hardly more than a dozen.

Rounding them to the nearest even number, there are no American full-time academic, empirical specialists on Iraq, barely two each on Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, perhaps four on Oman, and, if one is generous in one's estimation, fewer than five with regard to Saudi Arabia.

That this has been the output of the American education system to date is more than information of interest. The impact has important national security and related implications for American interests in one of the world's most vital sub-region.

That the effect is to impair American capabilities in the one region of the world to which the United States has mobilized and deployed more of its armed forces and expended more of its treasury than other single place on the planet twice in the past decade and a half is, in the minds of many, an appalling statistic.

VII. ON STABILITY IN SAUDI ARABIA

THE KINGDOM'S POSITION ...

The Saudi government has been in existence for almost three hundred years, [i.e., roughly forty years longer than the U.S. government]. It is part and parcel of its culture, environment, and habitat. [Paraphrasing Saudi Arabian officials and prominent private sector leaders appearing on talk shows and on panels and off-camera interviews at the recent annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in New York:] "Are we perfect? Of course not,

but then who is? Do we strive to be better? Of course we do. We are normal people trying to lead normal lives, just like you."

"Over the past six decades, many have predicted our demise: at times we have been accused of being 'too backwards, at times too religious, at times too wealthy, at times too poor'. Sometimes we are said to have 'too few' people, at other times 'too many'. The only constant in all of this is that these predictions have all been proven wrong, and that, despite the naysayers and the doomsdayers, the Kingdom has continued to develop, prosper, and become a stronger nation.

"The goal of the Saudi government is to take care of its people, and to create an environment in which they can lead productive, useful lives. Our achievements speak for themselves: over the past thirty years alone, we have invested \$1.2 trillion to transform our country from a sandbox into a modern, viable nation. We have succeeded while others have predicted our demise. Have we made mistakes along the way? Of course we have, but we have learned from them."

* * *

Note: Subsequent GulfWire reports will carry the documentation on these and related topics forward through the Crown Prince's proposal that Arab countries normalize relations with Israel in exchange for full Israel withdrawal from Palestinian and Syrian territories occupied since the June 1967 war - territories that UN Secretary General Kofi Anan, in an unusually strong statement issued last week, acknowledged to be illegal; the current high-profile visit to the Kingdom and other Middle Eastern countries by U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney; and the forthcoming Arab Heads of State Summit scheduled for the end of this month in Beirut.

* * *

Dr. John Duke Anthony is President and CEO, National Council on U.S. Arab-Relations; Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee; and Publisher of GulfWire. All three are Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.
