

DIPLOMACY OF ENGAGEMENT



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Nine months into the new administration of American President Barack Obama, Arab-U.S. relations are impacted by global economic recession, challenged by fragile electoral outcomes and persistent extremist movements, and confronted with growing threats to regional security. Acknowledging the critical importance of these issues yet also recognizing dramatic new opportunities for development and cooperation, an international audience of nearly 1,000 Arab and

American diplomats, political, military, business, professional, media, and academic leaders gathered at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center for the 18th Annual Arab-U.S. Policy-makers Conference organized by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. Chaired by the National Council's President and CEO, Dr. John Duke Anthony and the Chairman of its Board of Directors, Rear

Admiral Harold J. Bernsen (USN, Ret.), the two-day conference focused on the theme, "Fresh Visions, Old Realities, New Possibilities: The Impact of Leadership Change on Arab-U.S. Relations."

This year's conference set records at every level – the largest registration and attendance ever, the largest media contingent ever, representing not only print and broadcast media but internet publications and the blogosphere as well, all supported by a record number of conference sponsors. Always intended to build bridg-

es between Arab states, the Islamic world, and the United States, this year's conference visibly bridged the generations as well. Current and former policymakers exchanged their experiences and insights; American, European, and Arab scholars exchanged their findings with Arab and American diplomats and business people; Arab journalists offered their assessments of President Obama's initial outreach efforts to the Arab world and the Arab world's hopeful but skeptical response; and, all of these shared their thoughts with the current generation of students, who will be the next generation of Arab-U.S. policymakers.

Traditionally focused on promoting dialogues among policymakers, this year's conference also included recognition of the role that the arts and humanities play in enhancing cultural encounter, probing the human element in decision making, and expressing the emotional content of human experience. Long time



H.E. Adel A. Al-Jubeir, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States and The Hon. James B. Smith, Ambassador of the United States to Saudi Arabia share their views on the current state of relations between their two countries.

White House correspondent, Helen Thomas, was honored with a "Lifetime Achievement Award for Pioneering Excellence in Journalism." The award citation to Ms. Thomas read, "For excellence in political reporting, for courage in posing perceptive and challenging questions, for demanding accountability from those in power, for persistence in the pursuit of truth, and for bringing great distinction to



The World Children's Choir brought smiles to everyone's face with their international songs.



The Ambassadors' Roundtable brought together the present Ambassadors with several former American Ambassadors to Saudi Arabia. L-R: Dr. John Duke Anthony, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; Peter Robertson, Moderator and Co-Chairman of the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council; H.E. Adel A. Al-Jubeir, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States; Hon. James B. Smith, Ambassador of the United States to Saudi Arabia; former Ambassadors Walter Cutler, Charles Freeman, James Oberwetter, and Robert Jordan

her Arab American heritage." In addition, the World Children's Choir, from northern Virginia and directed by Sondra Harnes, performed at the Thursday conference luncheon singing a selection of worldwide songs, one of which had been translated into Arabic. Throughout the conference there was also a showing of the paintings of Ahmad Al Karkhi, an Iraqi artist now living in the Washington, D.C. area with refugee status.

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, opened the conference by discussing the Obama administration's emphasis on "principled and sustained engagement based on the principles of mutual interest and mutual respect." Applied to the real world of diplomacy, he observed, these abstractions have served to "diminish the notion that the United States is innately hostile to certain peoples, to certain states, and to certain leaders.



Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State

In a very real sense," he suggested, "we can remove a lot of the excuses that countries have used to evade the substance and the sincerity of the grievances and concerns expressed by the United States." He then proceeded to give the audience a status report on key issues in U.S.-Arab Relations covering Iran, Palestinian-Israeli

peace negotiations, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and continuing concerns about the Hizbollah movement. One of the highlights of the conference was an Ambassadors' Roundtable featuring Ambassador Adel A. Al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States and Ambassador James B. Smith, newly confirmed U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and moderated by Mr. Peter Robertson, Co-Chairman of the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council. Adding perspective to the discussion were four former United States Ambassadors to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Walter Cutler, Charles W. Freeman, Jr., James Oberwetter, and Robert Jordan. Ambassador Al-Jubeir observed that, "When you look at the challenges we face involving piracy or terrorism, financial crisis, energy situations,

and trade and investment, I believe that the interests of our two countries at this moment are aligned as they have never been before." Ambassador Smith reinforced these ideas, "This is a much more nuanced, complicated and I would argue more important relationship than it has ever been in the past." He continued, "I see my biggest challenge over the next two years is figuring out how to develop friendships without fences, relationships without barriers. Even if you can't change the physical dynamic [of security concerns] we have got to get out and represent the American people to the people of Saudi Arabia."

Congressman Keith Ellison (DFL-MN), the first Muslim elected to the United States Congress and the first African-American elected to the U.S.



Congressman Keith Ellison (DFL-MN)

House of Representatives from Minnesota, offered a viewpoint from the Congress, where he serves on the Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and on the House Committee on Finance. Building on these committee assignments and acknowledging that Americans and Arabs have "to build our body of knowledge about each other on the micro-level and the global-level in order to understand each other better," Representative Ellison noted that, "business is an excellent way to do that. You and I both know that politics can be combustible, but business is something you can come to a meeting of the minds on. When you do a business deal what you're saying is this thing helps me, and it helps you, and we wouldn't do a deal unless those two



Luncheon speakers included H.E. Ambassador Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin Mutib Rumaihi, Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow-Up Affairs, State of Qatar; Admiral William J. Fallon (USN-Ret.) former Commander, U.S. Central Command, now with the Center for Naval Analysis; and Moderator, Rear Admiral Harold J. Bernsen (USN, Ret.), Chairman of the Board of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

things were true. And, so, there is a point of agreement, a point of coming together, that we should start with but absolutely not end with.”

Conference panel discussions included a wide range of expert views designed to illuminate areas of disagreement as well as large areas of shared interest and allowed for the audience to pose questions that touched on some of the most sensitive and conflicted areas of Arab-U.S. relations. Individual panels dealt with the political geography of the region, including: “Iran and Regional Security,” “Israel and Palestine,” “Iraq’s Return to Sovereignty,” as well as “Syria and Lebanon.” Still other panels dealt with topical issues such as: “Energy Dynamics for Producers and Consumers,” “Defense Cooperation and Enhancing Regional Security,” “Development and Education,” and “The Obama Administration: Reactions from the Arab Media.”

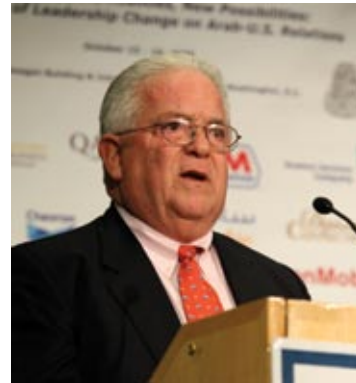
The 18th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference concluded with an overall assessment of U.S.-Arab relations offered by Ambassador Charles W. (“Chas”) Freeman, Chairman of the Board of Projects International, Inc. and a former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Though President Obama “clearly signaled that he recognizes the imperative of solving the Israel-Palestine conflict

and repairing American relations with Arabs and Muslims, if the United States is to enjoy peace and tranquility at home,”

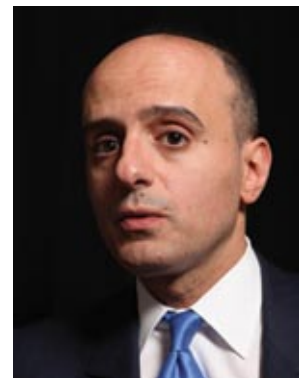
Freeman observed, “his administration has made only minimal changes to longstanding American policies that are conspicuous failures.” “Time,” Freeman said, “is running out on the prospects for peaceful engagement between Israel, the Palestinians, other Arabs, and non-Arab Muslims. No peace is conceivable without the full use of American moral and economic leverage to bring Israel to the negotiating table.” “Peace with the Palestinians,” he concluded, “would enable Israel for the first time to be accepted as a legitimate part of the Middle East. It would end the conflict in the Holy Land. It is the key to deradicalization of the Arab and Muslim worlds and to ending their violent backlash against the West. It is the prerequisite for the restoration of peace within the realm of Islam.”

The full two-day program and list of conference speakers as well as transcripts, video, and audio recordings of the proceedings are available on the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations website www.ncusar.org

Photos courtesy of Janel Norton and fotobriceno



The Hon. Charles W. “Chas” Freeman, Chairman of the Board, Projects International Inc.; former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia



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



H.E. Dr. Abdulrahman H. Al-Saeed, Advisor to the Royal Court of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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



Dr. Mody Al-Khalaf, Director of Cultural and Social Affairs, Saudi Cultural and Educational Mission, Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C.



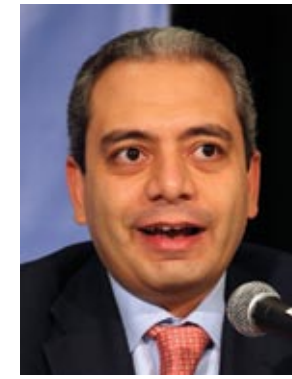
Congressman Keith Ellison (DFL-MN)



Admiral William J. Fallon (USN-Ret.), Center for Naval Analysis and former Commander, U.S. Central Command



Harriet Fulbright, President, J. William and Harriet Fulbright Center



Ibrahim Helal, Deputy Managing Editor, Al Jazeera Satellite Television, English Service



General Joseph Hoar (USMC, Ret.), former Commander U.S. Central Command



Richard Millies, Vice President International Strategy and Business Development, BAE Systems



Hisham Melhem, Washington Bureau Chief, Al-Arabiya



H.E. Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, Ambassador of Bahrain to the United States



Rear Admiral Harold J. Bernsen (USN-Ret.), Chairman of the Board, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations



Nadia Bilbassy-Charters, Chief Correspondent, Middle East Broadcasting Center



Dr. Juan Cole, Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History, University of Michigan



Craig Crawford, writer and blogger on CQPolitics.com and co-Author with Helen Thomas of Listen Up, Mr. President



Dr. James A. Winship, Vice President - Programs, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations



Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt (USA-Ret.), former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs



Amr Ahmed Ramadan, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt



H.E. Samir Shakir Mahmood Sumaida'ie, Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to the United States