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Thank you so much for inviting me to speak to the Defence and Security Forum. The objective of my speech today is to outline a Saudi perspective of how the Middle East and the Arab world are changing and not changing.

Please bear with me as I recount the following which some of you may have heard, before. In September, 2005, I had the pleasure of being officially introduced to then US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice to present to her a



copy of my ambassadorial credentials. I told her that our meeting reminded me of an occurrence that took place between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt during the Second World War. That year Churchill had come to the US to discuss America's increased involvement in World War II, and Roosevelt, to pay homage to Churchill's importance and the gravity of the trip, decided to put him up at the White House instead of Blair House. One



morning during his stay, Roosevelt rolled into Churchill's room and found him walking about fully naked, or "starkers" as you say. When Roosevelt quickly attempted a backwards retreat, Churchill stopped him and said, "Mr. President, the Prime Minister of England has nothing to hide from the President of the United States."

You can perhaps imagine the look on the face of Secretary of State Rice when I finished recounting this



anecdote. It was what one might call politely controlled trepidation. But I briskly allayed her fears by making clear that she need not fear my ever presenting myself “starkers” before her, but that this was simply the kind of relationship I wanted Saudi Arabia to have with our Western allies and partners. One based on that all-important concept in the arena of global terrorism and intelligence – nothing to hide.



Before I get into particulars, let me say that Saudi Arabia, with its stability and influence is positioned to play an important regional and international role. Working diligently to address many of its major international and domestic concerns, the Kingdom is a confident participant in world affairs and keeps an ever-vigilant eye toward its own internal safeguarding.

Why is the Kingdom confident? For a number of reasons. Saudi Arabia is the

cradle of Islam, a religion that has today an estimated 1.2 billion adherents. Saudi Arabia represents over 20% of the combined GDP of the Middle East–North Africa (MENA) region (and an estimated quarter of the Arab World’s GDP according to the latest IMF numbers) making it the economic engine of the region and an effective partner and member of the G20. The Saudi stock market represents over 50% of the entire stock market capitalization of the



MENA region and the listed Saudi companies make up 5 of the top 10 companies in the region with the top two slots being the Saudi conglomerates, Aramco and Sabic. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), the Kingdom's central bank, is the world's third largest holder of foreign exchange reserves managing just about \$850 billion and holdings of 500 billion dollars are in private hands. Last but not least, Saudi Aramco, the Kingdom's



national oil company, is the world's largest producer and exporter of petroleum and has by far the world's largest sustained production capacity infrastructure at about 12.5 million barrels-per-day and also has the world's largest spare capacity currently estimated at about 2.5 million barrels-per-day or about 70% of global unused capacity.

Along with these impressive numbers, our nation is a peninsula, not



an island. A look at our neighbors reveals significant challenges that fall under the rubric of my first over-riding theme - change and no change. The unchanging factors are history and geography. Whatever occurred yesterday is unchangeable today and forever. The geographic location of Saudi Arabia is equally unchanging. Our neighbors are permanently situated by our side. We have to deal with them as they have to deal with us.



On the side of change, our overall goal vis-a-vis other nations is to strengthen our allies in the region and beyond and to assist in whatever way we can to help our neighbors maintain stability. Saudi Arabia firmly believes that peace in the region, and a conclusion to various longstanding, conflict-resolution efforts must be a primary objective of the next decade. This peace will only be achieved through cooperation that is built on



trust, dialogue and engagement. This is why Saudi Arabia will continue to take the lead in negotiating between and with conflicting parties and nations. Furthermore, the Kingdom firmly believes that the next decade's most vital security issue is progress. There must be economic, political, and social progress for the people and of the governments of the Middle East so that peace, not conflict, is clearly seen as the gateway to prosperity.



The first issue, without preference to any prioritizing, is Iran. Since the Iranian revolution, the leadership, there, has assumed a pugilist's stance towards the world community, and we assume an embracing stance. While, Saudi Arabia has the world's greatest petroleum reserves, Iran has the second. Saudi Arabia is Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the birthplace of Islam, and as such it is the eminent leader of the wider Muslim

world. Iran portrays itself as the leader of not just the minority Shiite world, but of all Muslim revolutionaries interested in standing up to the West.

In addition to these differences, Saudi Arabia has two other concerns about Iran. First, it is in our interest that the Iranian leadership does not develop a nuclear weapon, for their doing so will make nuclear arms proliferation, in the Middle East, the norm. I have suggested that the Gulf Cooperation Council



members should carefully weigh all options, including acquiring a nuclear deterrent, if the Iranian leadership succeed in building one. This is why, through various initiatives, we are sending messages to them that it is their right, as it is any nation's right, and as we ourselves are doing, to develop a civilian nuclear program, but that trying to parlay that program into nuclear weapons is a dead end, and that wiser choices will result in wider riches.



A Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction is the best means to get Iran and Israel to give up nuclear weapons. Such a Zone must be accompanied by a rewards regime that provides economic and technical support for countries that join; plus a nuclear security umbrella guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council. It should include a sanctions regime that puts economic and political sanctions on countries that don't join;



plus military sanctions against those countries that try to develop weapons of mass destruction, also guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council.

Sanctions, alone, are not deterring the Iranian leadership from reaching their goal. I also heartily agree with those in the international community who possess the blessed wisdom to know that unilateral military strikes would be catastrophic. Alas, with



Netanyahu observing Mr. Obama's conduct in Syria, he may opt for a unilateral strike; in spite of the dire consequences. The Iranian leadership will welcome such a strike and may provoke it.

The other concern we need to address in the coming decade is the Iranian leadership's meddling and destabilizing efforts in the countries with Shia majorities, Iraq and Bahrain, as well as those countries with



significant minority Shia communities, such as Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen and it still occupies the three Emirati islands in the Gulf and refuses to talk about them. This must end. Saudi Arabia will oppose any and all of Iran's actions in other countries because it is Saudi Arabia's position that Iran has no right to meddle in other nations' internal affairs, especially Arab states. Indeed, Iran takes this position as well – it is very sensitive about other countries

meddling in its affairs. The Kingdom expects Iran to practice what it preaches.

One cannot discuss Iran without also mentioning Iraq. Iraq has a great history as a pivotal member of the Arab community. It has been, and it can still be, an important force in the Arab world. It is a founding member of the Arab League, the United Nations, and OPEC, possessing vast natural resource wealth, and may someday be a major



player in the energy markets. It sits at the heart of the Middle East and has a capable and diverse population. But much of its potential is being crushed by Iranian interference. Be it preferable to us or not, it is a new fact in the region that an Iraq that once waged a horridly bloody war against Iran has now become a significant arena of growing Iranian influence, thanks to the aftermath of the US invasion. There are people and groups in Iraq that are, as



much as they deny it, completely beholden to Iran, and that is not only unacceptable, but it is bad for the future of an ethnically and religiously diverse country. It is our goal that Iraq remains an active participant of the Arab world and throws off these destructive foreign influences.

This is the main reason we continue to maintain the same distance from all Iraqi factions. However, let me point out that, because we still have serious,



deep-seated reservations about the formation of the current Iraqi government, we are the only country not to have sent a resident ambassador to Iraq. What is the cause of these reservations? Let me give you one example. In the weeks preceding the formation of the current Iraqi government, there was a certain Iranian general who was in Baghdad negotiating on behalf of the current Iraqi Prime Minister with the Shia and



Kurdish groups, seeking their support for the new mandate. These are the kinds of actions that are not missed by Saudi Arabia; we cannot agree with them, and we will do everything in our power to make them end. In short, it is the Kingdom's full intention to continue to work with the people of Iraq to assure that their country becomes a stable, positive, and independent member of the Arab world.

I will now briefly address the current



situation with one of Saudi Arabia's closest neighbours, Yemen. For the Kingdom, and, indeed, the rest of the world, an increasingly unstable Yemen represents a very real security threat due to the potential for terror cells to take root there. This rough, rugged southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula, with a population of over 20 million, has been an arena for Al Qaeda operations since Osama bin Laden established training camps there in the

1990's, and according to intelligence sources, Al Qaeda's influence is disquieting in the country. This is largely due to the fact that the Yemeni central government's authority in the mountainous areas outside the capital and other cities is not up to par. Extremists have reportedly made deals with local tribal leaders for supplies and protection, creating a sanctuary not unlike Pakistan's Tribal Areas.

What are our plans for the coming



decade vis-a-vis this volatile situation?

We have, in essence, a tri-partite approach. The Kingdom has had a decades long program of economic and financial support for the Yemeni people. It is now on hold until the country settles down. We are strengthening our borders to prevent Yemeni refugees and Al Qaeda terrorists from crossing into our country while also increasing our counter-intelligence efforts to attempt to pinpoint and destroy Al Qaeda



operatives in Yemen. Our work with the world community to eliminate the terrorist threat continues.

Let us now turn to the Kingdom's approach to the volatile and important nations of Lebanon and Syria. Due to the raging civil war next door in Syria, Lebanon is very much on the brink of its own civil war, as Hizbollah continues to push its agenda regardless of law and order. With the collapse of the Mikati government, we see to what extremes



Hizbollah is willing to go, literally risking the very foundations of the nation, to prevent the Assad regime from being overthrown and stopping any scrutiny of an international tribunal whose only goal is bringing fair justice upon those who perpetrated the series of horrible assassinations. Hizbollah's reckless interference in Syria is further destabilizing Lebanon; witness the recent car bombs in the Hizbollah neighborhood and in Tripoli. Saudi



Arabia believes that law and order must prevail in Lebanon and supports all efforts to neutralize Hizbollah's intervention in Syria and bring their leaders to justice for the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The Kingdom is providing financial aid to Lebanon. This is a serious effort to rebuild a stronger, more stable Lebanon, and an attempt to roll back the influence of Iran's leadership. We



have for years pushed for the disarming of Tehran-backed Hizbollah and supported the government with nearly \$1 billion in financial support and credit for weapons purchases for the Lebanese Army, and we will continue to do so in the coming decade.

In Syria, the past two and a half years have proven absolutely disastrous. Gut-wrenching images of unspeakable, indiscriminate violence against civilians in Syria have shocked



the world. By the latest United Nations estimates, over 100,000 Syrians, including many children, have lost their lives as a result of the Assad regime's criminal behavior. There are, now, two million Syrian refugees in bordering countries and more than four million displaced persons inside Syria. Whether through the murder of peaceful protesters, the shelling of residential quarters, the execution of soldiers who refuse to open fire on their countrymen,



or the use of chemical weapons, a picture has emerged of a regime systematically defying even the most basic international moral and legal standards. Unless the world is content to see these massacres continue, the Syrian regime, along with its instruments of oppression, must be decisively removed from power. The shameful way that the world community accepts the impunity of the butcher of Syria is a blot on the conscience of the

world. The dithering of leadership in the West and the callous, cynical, and cavalier attitude in supporting Bashar by Russia and China are a stigma that they will bear forever. The Iranian leadership's support for Assad, from the beginning, is a criminal act and they should be tried in the International Criminal Court. The current charade of international control over Bashar's chemical arsenal would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious, and



designed not only to give Obama an opportunity to back down, but also to help Assad to butcher his people. If you believe that Kerry's remarks, giving Russia the chance to make their play, was off-hand.....then you will believe anything.

Egypt holds a special place in Saudi security interests. It is the largest Arab country with close and historically deep and significant ties to the Kingdom. King Abdullah held the closest of



relations with President Mubarak for over thirty years. Abandoning him or any close ally during a revolutionary uprising was not and will never be a policy option for the Kingdom, which must uphold and defend its values. However, once President Mubarak resigned and the Egyptian people expressed their will, King Abdullah not only recognized the new reality, but he also extended the hand of friendship and four billion dollars in financial aid



to the new leadership. But this new leadership, entirely beholden to the Muslim Brotherhood, proved unable, incapable and incompetent to govern a country such as Egypt. After barely a year in power, the majority of the Egyptian people withdrew support from them and demanded a referendum on the viability of the President's legitimacy. When he refused, they turned to the streets in the largest ever human demonstrations, anywhere.



These millions asked the armed forces to restore legitimacy and dignity and they did. They transferred power to a newly appointed temporary civilian government to save the Egyptian state from disaster. King Abdullah was the first leader to congratulate the Egyptian leadership and has led the regional push to support this action. Saudi Arabia unconditionally authorized \$5 billion dollars in grants, loans, and deposits to Egypt's emerging

government, which stands in stark comparison to the conditional loans that the US and Europe have promised and keep threatening to freeze.

Now to Bahrain. This nation is geographically and historically the closest to Saudi Arabia. Right after the 1979 revolution in Iran, Khomeini began trying to export his revolution to all Muslim countries. This resulted in eruptions of violence not only in Muslim countries but also among Shia

communities in other countries, including among Saudi Arabia's own small Shia population. Those who claim that the recent disturbances were not instigated by Iran forget that Khomeini's creation, Hizbollah in Bahrain, still exists and that Iranian propaganda broadcasts beamed at Bahrain have never ceased. Iranian officials frequently issued statements that Bahrain is a province of Iran. When King Hamad delegated his Crown Prince

to negotiate with the protesters on their demands, the Kingdom publicly endorsed the negotiations and still does. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has extended a ten-year economic package of \$10 billion dollars, mostly from the Kingdom. The deployment of Saudi-supported GCC troops at the request of a member country of the GCC to protect its strategic infrastructure like the oil refinery, the airport, the seaport, and



economic installations is a duty that the Kingdom will always fulfill. No GCC personnel have been engaged in any action against protesters. King Hamad has continued to call for negotiations and the Kingdom continues to support that call. But let's be clear, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will never accept that Iran take power in Bahrain. This is a fantasy if anyone, including in the West, believes that such an eventuality can happen on Saudi Arabia's watch.



Of course, a full analysis of the Kingdom's situation vis-a-vis the region cannot be considered complete without discussing, what is perhaps the most important issue, and that is the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. As we have recently seen, Israel's unwillingness to cease its unlawful colonization and continual refusal to grant the Palestinians their own homeland is the core reason that this conflict continues. There is no lack of proposals for peace,



many of them completely rational, fair, and viable. Indeed, the only viable one today remains The Arab Peace Initiative, originally outlined by King Abdullah in 2002. It was even recently used as the basis for President Obama's call on Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders and the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestine bordering Israel, Jordan, and Egypt.

The Kingdom continues to urge Israel to take the necessary steps

toward peace and justice. It also continues to support the Palestinian Authority in its attempts to build lasting institutions for its people, and it remains, counter to recent accusations, the world's largest contributor to the Palestinian Authority. Pledges, ranging into the billions of dollars, have been made to support the Palestinian Authority and the Kingdom has delivered hundreds of millions of dollars in the past few years for



rebuilding and developing Palestine – money that is being spent on schools, roads and security. Funding, engagement, and a call for a two–state solution remain the centre pieces of the Saudi position in the coming decade. The Kerry effort to bring an accord during the next nine months, while laudable, is still a shot in the dark. If Obama dithers on what is needed to convince Netanyahu to reach an accord, as he is doing on Syria, there will not be

one.

And on the all-important issue of statehood, King Abdullah has called upon the world community to support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As such Saudi Arabia stands behind those UN member nations who wish to make an official UN declaration recognizing the state of Palestine and believes with them that Palestinian statehood is not a matter of if, but when.



Let me conclude by reaffirming that Saudi Arabia has a vital responsibility and role that goes beyond the Arab world. We are critical to the well-being of the global economy. We see our work in that area as part of our overall role in the broader Islamic world, and we view the next decade as a further realization of that. We hope to increase our peaceful foreign engagements with nations in the name of improving our common humanitarian situations, and



also to foster a sense of Islam as a religion of collaboration and progress. Through the King Abdallah Center for Cultural and Religious Dialogue, now establish in Vienna, Saudi Arabia extends the hand of friendship to all peoples of the world. But we also need to work harder to ensure a tangible effect and to make sure that it brings peace and prosperity to all.
