

## **“Saudi-U.S. Relations: Forging a Friendship for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

***Speech to be delivered by H.E. Adel Al-Jubeir  
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*In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful*

Professor Mauceri, thank you. Thank you all. It's a pleasure to be here today.

I appreciate the invitation from the University of Northern Iowa's Saudi Student Club.

In reviewing today's agenda, I'm delighted to see so many great minds come together to discuss the variety of topics. I commend UNI and its Saudi Student Club for the hard work they have done to put together such a thorough program, and I also commend you for encouraging a thoughtful dialogue about our nation, its relationship with the U.S., and its role in the world. I believe that only through greater analysis and the exchange of ideas will we be able to build bridges of understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am fortunate to have spent much of my life in both Saudi Arabia and here in the United States. I attended college in Texas and graduate school in Washington, DC. My first posting as a Foreign Service Officer was at the Saudi Embassy in Washington. I have been a student of the Saudi-U.S. relationship for almost three decades. Today, I would like to share with you my views on this important relationship and where I believe it is headed.

To begin, I would like to back up a bit and take a broad view of relations between our countries. Understanding the context of the past is essential to understanding where we are today, and where we'll be tomorrow. Certainly, as Shakespeare once wrote, "What's past is prologue."

The relationship between our two great nations began on a commercial note – a people-to-people note. American prospectors came to Arabia in the early 1930s and discovered oil. American business set up shop in the Kingdom, and our two people began to know each other. What they found were kindred spirits: people who believe in God, who value family ties, who attach great importance to honesty, integrity and hospitality. This first contact led – a decade later – to the first formal meeting between the two nations' Heads-of-State.

As you well know, 62 years ago, in 1945, King Abdulaziz ibn Saud – the founder of the modern – the third -- Saudi state, met on the battleship USS Quincy with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the Great Bitter Lake in Egypt. It was the first time that King Abdulaziz had ventured outside his nation.

Before agreeing to the meeting, King Abdulaziz reportedly asked two questions: do the American people believe in God, and do they have colonies? When he was assured that Americans believe in God and had no colonies, his reaction was “then they must be good people; I will meet their leader.”

When the two great leaders finally met, they set the stage for the building of a special relationship that has endured – and prospered – for over six decades.

The formal relationship that began in 1945 – that extraordinary bilateral relationship – quickly moved from a government-to-government partnership to commercial ties to economic ties to energy ties – all deepening existing bonds and forging further friendships. Throughout subsequent decades, the two nations stood together to confront a series of challenges.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when radicalism threatened the Arab World, the two nations stood together to confront that challenge. In the 1970s, when the British withdrew from the Gulf, Saudi Arabia became one of the “twin pillars” of Gulf security. During that decade, we also supported efforts to confront the former Soviet Union by providing aid to anti-Communist movements in countries that were falling into the pro-Soviet sphere.

During the 1980s, our two nations supported the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. As we know, this led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and brought about the end of the Cold War. In 1990, within days of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia began hosting international forces, and our two countries assembled an international coalition to liberate Kuwait. We committed our treasure and our blood to this noble effort, which resulted in the liberation of Kuwait and the restoration of international legality.

During the 1990’s, our two nations were working together and exchanging information on terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda. And, although we were not in favor of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Saudi Arabia has made every effort to help the Iraqi people by sending financial and humanitarian assistance, and by trying to work towards national reconciliation in Iraq.

In reviewing this history, it is clear that we both have been committed to supporting each other. Even through the worst of times.

September 11, 2001 typified our ability to persist. That day, our nations faced a great challenge. The confusion and catastrophe of those events had the potential to tear apart our longstanding relationship. But it didn’t. We rose to the challenge. And our nations sought a new level of cooperation and coordination.

For a while, misunderstanding and confusion may have existed on the people-to-people level – and this, unfortunately, still lingers. But on a government-to-government level, our relationship has become stronger.

Today, if you look at the challenges we're facing – the war on terrorism, Iraq, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, and energy security – all of these issues require our cooperation. Saudi Arabia plays an active and essential role in each one, and we remain important partners.

This has made our relationship stronger, deeper, more transparent, more institutionalized. From this understanding, as we look forward to what the decades ahead hold, we can identify the pillars upon which the future of our bilateral relations will be based: peace and security; counterterrorism; energy; security cooperation; and trade and commerce.

- For peace and security in the Middle East, our nations' cooperation is instrumental in a variety of fronts. The Middle East peace process is clearly the prime example. Saudi Arabia is committed to working for a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Arab world. King Abdullah – then Crown Prince – introduced a peace initiative at the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002 that offered Israel peace and normal relations with all Arab countries in exchange for its withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and a just settlement to the refugee problem. The plan was adopted unanimously by all Arab countries and became the Arab Peace Initiative. During the Riyadh Summit in the spring of this year, the Arab World re-affirmed this initiative, which has become one of the principles for settling this long-standing and tragic conflict.

The tragic situation in Iraq also requires our coordination. There are other relevant geopolitical areas – including Darfur and Somalia. In these places, King Abdullah has made a concerted effort to bring parties to the table in the name of peace.

- With regard to counterterrorism, I doubt that any two nations in the world are working more closely to combat this threat. Together, we have formed joint task forces to enhance cooperation between us, which have become a model for how nations should work to defeat the scourge of terrorism.
- As for military cooperation, Saudi Arabia remains one of the strongest American allies in the Middle East. The arms package currently moving through Congress will serve to reinforce cooperation between us.
- As for energy, the Kingdom has long been a force for stability in the energy markets. As the world's largest exporter and the world's largest importer of crude oil, the two of us have a natural relationship. Given the strength of demand right now, the Kingdom continues to invest in capacity-building to ensure adequate supplies.

And looking to the future, we hope to strengthen the Consumer/Producer Dialogue, which was established by the International Energy Forum in Riyadh to foster greater understanding and cooperation between producers and consumers.

- With regard to trade, the Saudi economy represents a world of opportunity, and the U.S. continues to be the largest investor in our country. The Saudi market is one of the largest markets for American products. The Kingdom has taken steps to promote growth and foreign participation in our economy. We have been a member of the World Trade Organization since 2005. We have liberalized our trade policies and opened our markets.

These pillars form our foundation. They define our interaction and provide us with concrete reasons why our ties remain strong.

Today, Saudi-U.S. relations are vastly improved from where they were six years ago. We both have a new outlook now, and we have a common basis to move forward.

But our work is not done. There is still a ways to go. There is still a need to restore our relations on the most basic level.

In the U.S., attitudes toward Saudi Arabia have gradually improved since 9-11 – which is a positive development. But there still exists a great deal of misunderstanding about the culture, traditions and way of life in Saudi Arabia.

A similar situation exists in Saudi Arabia.

This gap in understanding on both sides presents a challenge that we must overcome, because it leaves room for misunderstanding and confusion.

We can close this gap by building stronger institutions that bind our relationship. Already, we have taken steps in this direction. One of things that we have done is to put in place stronger links between our two governments and an institutional framework to better manage the many complex issues we have on our common agenda. The clearest example of how this is taking shape is the Saudi-U.S. Strategic Dialogue.

This mechanism is intended to institutionalize relations between our countries. The Strategic Dialogue is progressing through regular meetings between the Saudi Foreign Minister and the U.S. Secretary of State. The establishment of six Working Groups from both governments to work constructively and comprehensively, on a continuous basis, on a range of issues of importance to both countries is an important means to deal with issues in a practical manner.

But while government-to-government cooperation is necessary, it needs to be supported on the most basic level – through people-to-people contact.

Saudi-U.S. relations started on a very personal note – with King Abdulaziz and President Roosevelt. Indeed, President Roosevelt once said: “If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships...the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world, at peace.”

Throughout the years, the interaction between our people has been the underpinning of the entire relationship. So we must take new steps to encourage this.

For Saudi Arabia's part, King Abdullah has expanded a scholarship program to send our students to college abroad. Today, of the more than 25,000 students sent for study abroad, more than 15,000 are studying in the U.S. – up from less than 3,000 only four years ago. These young men and women are not only receiving a world-class education, they are forming the next generation of friendships and bonds between Saudis and Americans. And while they don't carry any official titles today, they are the true Ambassadors of Saudi Arabia in the U.S.

When they leave the U.S., they will return to Saudi Arabia with knowledge of America and friendships that will last a lifetime – future business partnerships, political and social ties. I know, because this is my experience. It is also the experience of my Saudi brothers and sisters.

The Nobel Laureate Pearl Buck said: "One faces the future with one's past." Today, when I look at the many young Saudis in the audience, I am looking at the future. And I am optimistic, because I am confident that the future of Saudi/U.S. relations starts here in Cedar Falls, Iowa. It starts in Manhattan Kansas, and in Denton, Texas. It starts in more than 100 colleges and universities across the United States where Saudi students attend school. It is through them that our nations can – and will – build on our strong legacy and forge an even stronger relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Thank you very much, and may God's peace and blessings be upon you.