

SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

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FOREIGN POLICY

Saudi Ambassador discusses various policy issues in interviews

In appearances this past week on CNN's Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer (Feb. 5) and PBS' Charlie Rose (Feb. 13), Saudi Ambassador Prince Turki Al-Faisal discussed policy issues including terror financing, offensive Danish cartoons, Israel-Palestine and Saudi-US relations.

Prince Turki said on PBS that Saudi-US relations "have never been better" on the official level since then-Crown Prince Abdullah met with President Bush last April in Crawford, Texas, and that efforts to improve relations with the American people and Congress remain ongoing.

The ambassador also praised President Bush's conviction for democracy. "What we would ask from our American friends is that they would allow us a chance to develop our own system of government, call it a democracy or call it whatever it is," Prince Turki said on PBS. "We have our own traditions and our own history and our own practices that we would like to move forward with."

Commenting on President Bush's remark in the State of the Union address on the need to end America's "addiction to oil", Prince Turki said that the statement caught him by surprise, and that he followed it up immediately by contacting National Security Council Adviser Hadley. He noted the consistency and stability of Saudi Arabia as a supplier of oil to the whole world.

On the issue of terrorist financing, Prince Turki said that the transfer of money from Saudis through assets in the Kingdom to charities abroad has been completely eliminated for a year now. "Saudi Arabia has implemented the cutoff. No single penny leaves Saudi Arabia today through any group or organization for any charitable or other activity at all," he told Blitzer.

Concerning Hamas' recent victory in the Palestinian elections, Prince Turki reiterated Saudi support for a two-state solution and said that Hamas will have to go along once it assumes authority. He said on PBS that King Abdullah has called upon Hamas to take into consideration that the Palestinians have agreed to international covenants that have as their outcome a two-state solution.

Prince Turki also condemned the Danish cartoons that have sparked riots across the Muslim world as "offensive," and appealed for an end to the violence. In addition, Prince Turki and Lord Carey of Clifton, who co-chair the Council of One Hundred Leaders (C-100) West-Islamic World Dialogue of the World Economic

Forum, issued a statement Feb. 6 condemning the cartoons as deplorable and calling for initiatives to overcome interfaith tensions.

ECONOMY

Jeddah Economic Forum focuses on economic growth, cultural diversity

The seventh annual Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF) took place Feb. 11-13. Nearly 2,700 international businessmen and women participating in the forum, whose theme was "Seeding Potentials for Economic Growth: Honoring Identity and Celebrating Common Grounds." Thirty-five sessions were addressed by 91 speakers, including Irish President Mary McAleese, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and former Vice President Al Gore.

The JEF was established in 2000 at the initiative of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce & Industry. International leaders from the private and public sectors meet annually to discuss trends, propose solutions to challenges, and enhance cooperation.

MEDICINE

Saudi flying hospital showcased at medical conference

A prototype of a flying hospital designed and made in Saudi Arabia was featured at the Third Annual Conference of Medical Services of Military Services Feb. 7. The two-bed hospital is fully equipped and includes an intensive care unit. It weighs about four tons, and can be assembled quickly and transported anywhere in the world as needed. It can also transport patients between any of the Kingdom's hospitals within two hours. The hospital, scheduled for launch on a C-130 plane at the end of February, is the first of eight which the Kingdom hopes to have functional by the end of 2006.

SAUDI ARABIA-US

Interior Ministry issues statement for Saudis seeking US visas

The Ministry of Interior has issued a statement Feb. 13 for Saudis seeking entry visas to the US urging them to familiarize themselves with US immigration rules in order to prevent a delay in obtaining student visas. The Ministry also warned that failure to obey immigration rules could lead to a delay in admission, denial of visa or possible deportation from the US.

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