

Conference Highlights Arab Break With Bush-Cheney Madness

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The annual conference of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) took place in Washington Oct. 30-31, and provided a forum for an unusually blunt discussion about the absolute failure of the Bush Administration's Middle East policy. Over 300 people attended the event at the Reagan Building, including a prominent Saudi government delegation, made up of three members of the Majlis ash-Shura (National Consultative Council), Saudi Arabia's quasi-parliament; the new Saudi Ambassador in Washington, HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal; and a number of important Saudi business leaders.

Four former U.S. ambassadors to Saudi Arabia were among the speakers, including Chas Freeman, who concluded the two-day event with a speech that thoroughly skewered the Bush-Cheney Administration for creating a global catastrophe that may doom civilization. The other former ambassadors—Robert Jordan, Walter Cutler, and Wyche Fowler (formerly a U.S. Democratic Senator from Georgia)—all lambasted the Bush Administration for sabotaging a 50-year U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia and all the other countries of the Persian Gulf, and systematically denounced the Administration for going collectively psychotic after 9/11.

Indicative of the collapsing state of affairs between the United States and Saudi Arabia were the presentations by Ambassador Turki al-Faisal and Dr. Nahed Taher, the first Saudi woman to head an Arab bank. Prince Turki abandoned his prepared remarks to deliver an impromptu speech about how Saudi Arabia is not going to accept U.S. demands to

“democratize” on a Washington timetable and to Western specifications. *EIR* was informed by sources at the event that the Ambassador was furious that the U.S. media had totally ignored the fact that Saudi Arabia had recently created a Consultative Council to oversee the Royal succession, a potentially major step towards a constitutional monarchy. He “politely” lectured the Bush Administration against pushing the Saudis on “democracy,” and warned bluntly that the Bush Administration's Iraq policy had created grave regional instability. The United States, he emphasized in response to a keynote session question, came into Iraq “uninvited,” but had better not leave the same way: Consult with the Iraqis and Iraq's neighbors, particularly the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), before taking yet another unilateral and disastrously miscalculated step, he demanded.

The Ambassador was equally blunt that the United States needed to take the lead and implement the Road Map for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine crisis. After decades of negotiations, from Madrid, to Oslo, to Beirut, there is no detail left to be settled, he said. All that is needed is for the United States to take the lead and implement the agreement that has already been thoroughly worked out. The Ambassador stressed that the 2002 initiative by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, which was unanimously endorsed by the Arab League, sets the regional framework for a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and the entire Arab world.

Dr. Taher, speaking on a panel on the prospects for reform in Saudi Arabia, simply stated that there was no good reason for Saudi Arabia to continue to maintain the currency peg to the U.S. dollar, given that a lion's share of future Saudi oil sales would be going to countries such as China and India, and given that the dollar is plunging against most major world currencies. Such a direct threat of Saudi Arabia abandoning its historic support for the dollar sent shock-waves through the audience, particularly given that the Saudis had chosen to deliver this message through a soft-spoken woman.

The second day of the conference featured a series of presentations by American experts, including Anthony Cordesman, Kenneth Katzman, and Chas Freeman, who all assailed the Bush policy disasters in the harshest of terms, and warned about the danger of more wars and a future of asymmetric warfare against the United States and Israel on a global scale.



HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal, the new Saudi Ambassador in Washington, warned that the Bush Administration's policies had created grave regional instability.

A New Gulf of Tonkin Incident?

Among the speakers on the second day was Dr. Joseph Moynihan, a United Arab Emirates-based regional vice president of Northrop Grumman, who warned that the countries of the GCC are preparing for a U.S. war against Iran. He cited the now ongoing Persian Gulf maneuvers of the United States and eight other countries under the so-called Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) as an immediate danger. Unlike previous Gulf maneuvers, this latest maneuver is “purposeful,” “targetted,” and no longer about “intercepting” ships carrying smuggled material. When asked by a member of

the audience if the United States had military plans to attack Iran, Moynihan pointed again to the exercises that had been made public the previous week by the State Department, saying that while he could only speculate on the answer, the exercises are “very operational,” and are geared to a “U.S. post-election” timeframe. They are designed to “send a message to Iran,” he said.

Moynihan and other speakers candidly voiced fears that the United States could stage a “Gulf of Tonkin” incident in the immediate days ahead, under the cover of the PSI maneuvers, and then launch unprovoked attacks on Iran.

Chas W. Freeman, Jr.

The Gulf Cooperation Council and The Management of Policy Consequences

Remarks to the 15th Annual U.S.-Arab Policymakers Conference by former Undersecretary of Defense and former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Chas W. Freeman, Jr., USFS (ret.), on Oct. 31, 2006, in Washington, D.C. Subheads have been added.

It is an honor once again to make the concluding remarks at the annual U.S.-Arab Policymakers Conference. I do so, of course, as an individual and as an American concerned with the implications of events in the Gulf region, not on behalf of any organization or group with which I am affiliated. Speaking only for oneself enables one to call it like it is. I shall.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) began in a time of crisis 25 years ago. Since then the GCC has passed through many stressful strategic environments. It was, after all, formed to cope with the challenges that caused Americans first to declare the Gulf a region of vital interest to the United States—the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. The GCC was also, of course, created to provide a means of dealing with the sudden rise in U.S. interest and military activity in the Gulf in the wake of these events, the oil boom, and the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel.

The GCC functioned as a coherent alliance during the U.S.-led war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation that followed the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Its members separately provided essential staging areas and support bases for the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq a dozen years later. Some have since deepened their reliance on the United States, while others have hedged their previous dependency.

Now the GCC member states may be facing their greatest challenge: the changes brought about by the progressive collapse of American policies in the region, including U.S. efforts to transform Iraq, to block Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, and to achieve security for Israel by persuading it to respect the right of Palestinians to democratic self-determination in a secure homeland.

The U.S. military have developed the useful concept of “consequence management.” The idea is to set aside for later study the questions of why and how widespread devastation followed the use of weapons of mass destruction or a large-scale natural disaster, and instead to acknowledge the damage while focusing on actions to mitigate it and prevent it from worsening. It is time to apply consequence management to the mounting wreckage of our policies in the Middle East.

Only true believers in the neo-conservative dream can now fail to recognize that it has wrought a deepening nightmare in Iraq. The shattered Iraqi state has been succeeded (outside Kurdish areas) by near-universal resistance to the foreign occupation that supplanted it. The aggravation of secular and ethnic divisions by ill-conceived constitutional bargaining and elections has created a new political culture in Iraq in which theocratic feudalism, militia-building, and terrorist violence are the principal modes of self-expression.

The attempt to cure the resulting anarchy by building a strong army and police force for the Iraqi central government misses the point. The Baghdad government is itself a key participant in all of the pathologies of contemporary Iraq. In practice, it is more a vengeful tyranny of the majority in a temporary marriage of convenience with Kurdish separatists