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Newsletter: Saudi Arabia in Focus (February 2017)

David J. Sadowski (Sawdow) [mailto:dsadowski@state.gov] - Director, Office of the Special Representative for Counterterrorism (SROCT) [mailto:dsadowski@state.gov] - Director, Office of the Special Representative for Counterterrorism (SROCT) [mailto:dsadowski@state.gov] - Director, Office of the Special Representative for Counterterrorism (SROCT) [mailto:dsadowski@state.gov]

Please to share with you the February edition of Saudi Arabia in Focus. As always, I welcome your feedback.

Art Friedman  
ASIS/OLP

Wegan Green 03117  
1700 17th St NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
Tel: 1 202 279 5000  
Fax: 1 202 279 9430  
www.dhs.gov

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# SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

FEBRUARY 2017

## SAUDI-U.S. RELATIONS

### King Salman Receives Phone Call from U.S. Secretary of State

On Feb. 10, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz received a phone call from U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

King Salman congratulated the secretary on his recent appointment, and Sec. Tillerson commended the leadership of Saudi Arabia in working for stability and peace both in the region and around the world, stressing that it is important for the United States and Saudi Arabia to work together. Toward this end, it is critical to strengthen the military relationship, economic ties and cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

### Foreign Minister Underscores Strength of Saudi-U.S. Partnership

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir said that the U.S.-Saudi partnership is certain to strengthen in the future.

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## COUNTERTERRORISM

### Saudi Crown Prince Honored by U.S. for Counterterrorism Efforts

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Naif, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, was honored with the Central Intelligence Agency's George Tenet Medal in recognition of his relentless counterterrorism efforts and commitment to international peace.

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## NOTABLE QUOTE

*"We are surrounded by areas of conflict, and we were the first [nation] affected by terrorism from various sources, but we are equipped to combat terror in any place and under any circumstances."*

*Crown Prince Mohammad bin Naif, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior  
Feb. 10, 2017*

SAUDI ARABIA  
**IN FOCUS**

SAUDI-U.S. RELATIONS

## Foreign Minister Underscores Strength of Saudi-U.S. Partnership

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir said that the U.S.-Saudi partnership is certain to strengthen in the future.

"The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have had a historic strategic partnership, if not alliance, since World War II; that relationship continues," said Minister Al-Jubeir, adding that the two countries have had extraordinarily strong people-to-people relations, which are also expected to continue in the years to come. "Our interests are aligned when it comes to the issues of the region," he stressed.

At a separate press conference in Riyadh on Jan. 24, Minister Al-Jubeir reiterated the importance of maintaining multi-faceted Saudi-U.S. cooperation, and

stated that Saudi Arabia looks forward to working closely with the new U.S. administration led by President Donald Trump.

"We are very, very optimistic about the Trump administration. And on working closely with it to deal with the many challenges, not only in our region, but in the world," he said.

In an address to the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 19, Minister Al-Jubeir said Saudi Arabia was optimistic about working with the U.S. administration. "We expect to see America engaged in the world. And we expect to see a realistic American foreign policy, and we look forward to working with this administration very, very closely," he stated.

COUNTERTERRORISM

## Saudi Crown Prince Honored by U.S. for Counterterrorism Efforts

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Naif, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, was honored with the Central Intelligence Agency's George Tenet Medal in recognition of his relentless counterterrorism efforts and commitment to international peace.

The medal was presented to Prince Mohammad by CIA Director Mike Pompeo at a reception following their meeting in Riyadh on Feb. 10.

Prince Mohammad stressed that the medal reflected the commitment, hard work and policies of the leaders of Saudi Arabia, led by King Salman and the Saudi security forces, and cooperation by the entire Saudi community.

The Crown Prince emphasized that the fight against terrorism is a shared international obligation requiring global cooperation efforts at all levels, including "in security, intellectually, in the media and militarily." He also emphasized that terrorism "has no identity and no religion," noting that groups that exploit groups as a pretext for violence and extremism have no legitimate relationship with the religion to which they seek to associate themselves.

In response to a question on Saudi-U.S. relations, Prince Mohammad said that attempts to drive a wedge between the two countries will fail. "Our relationship with the United States is historical and will continue to succeed," he said.



## Security Forces Dismantle Four Daesh Cells

In a successful counterinsurgency operation, the Ministry of Interior announced on Feb. 16 that four Daesh (ISIS) cells were dismantled and 18 terrorists were arrested.

According to Ministry Spokesperson Maj. Gen. Mansour Al-Turki, 15 of those arrested were Saudi nationals, two were from Yemen and one was from Sudan. All arrested were involved with varying aspects of Daesh operations, including the provision

of financial and logistical support, offering shelter, and assisting with recruitment, training and the development of explosive devices for known operatives who have launched attacks in Saudi Arabia.

Gen. Al-Turki stated that the operation underscored Saudi Arabia's forceful and decisive counterterrorism efforts and the ministry's commitment to bringing to justice any individual involved in extremist activity.

## Saudi Security Reports on Successful 2016 Counterterrorism Efforts

In January, Saudi security officials released data from 2016 on its efforts to combat terrorism in the country.

Saudi forces conducted eight operations that "foiled serious terrorist attacks." The outcomes of the operations included the protection of one million Muslims at the Prophet's Mosque, 60,000 spectators at the al-Jawhara Stadium in Jeddah and 400 civilians at al-Seef Restaurant and Café in Tarot,

The year also witnessed 190 arrests of Daesh-affiliated terrorists and the tactical prevention of a total of seven suicide attacks targeting mosques in the Eastern province.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia faced 34 domestic attacks from a number of extremist groups.

## REGIONAL SECURITY

## Safeguarding Civilians in Yemen Remains Foremost Priority

The Saudi-led Arab Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen issued a statement on Feb. 13 restating its commitment to protecting civilians in Yemen and underscoring steps the alliance has taken to avoid casualties in the war zone.

Among the steps taken, the Coalition has launched an independent assessment team, fostered active partnerships with relief organizations and focused on safeguarding the country's urban centers to protect civilians and uphold international law.

The Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT),

established by the Coalition, is made up of military members, weapons experts and legal specialists. The group, which operates independently, reviews reports of Coalition activities that have led to civilian casualties and offers recommendations to improve operations to avoid future incidents.

Additionally, the Coalition has adopted the policy to issue repeated warning to Houthi militias and Ali Abdullah Saleh forces to evacuate cities prior to a Coalition air strike. The Coalition has also heightened its emphasis on safeguarding critical infrastructure and, as a result, civilian lives in Yemen's urban centers.

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## IN FOCUS

The Coalition takes a collaborative approach by actively working alongside United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross to

minimize the possibility of harm to civilians, medical personnel, journalists and relief organizations.

### UNSG: Saudi a 'Pillar of Stability' in Region

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that Saudi Arabia was a "pillar of stability in the region" at a press conference in Riyadh, where he spoke alongside Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir.

"Saudi's stability is a model for the pursuit of growth and change," Guterres said, also stressing that "cooperation between the United Nations and Saudi Arabia

is key in the fight against terrorism."

Minister Al-Jubeir and Secretary General Guterres reported that they had critical and constructive discussions on possible political solutions for Yemen and Libya. Guterres expressed appreciation for the hospitality he received in Saudi Arabia and the substantive dialogue that resulted from the meetings.

## VISION 2030

### World Economic Forum Panel on Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan commanded the attention of the World Economic Forum in January during a panel on the ongoing reforms and transformation of the country's economy and society.

The session was hosted by Managing Director of the World Economic Forum Philipp Rosler and featured Saudi Arabia's ministers of energy, finance and commerce along with the BlackRock CEO Laurence D. Fink and Dow Chemical's CEO, Andrew N. Liveris.

Saudi Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Al-Falih characterized investment and privatization as key to the vision in moving the country forward.

"Two key parts toward that are our young population, who are ready to turn into a workforce to be

reckoned with, along with encouraging our women and investing in them as they increasingly join the workforce," he said.

Finance Minister Al-Jadaan said Saudi Arabia is committed to becoming more accountable and transparent as it moves to diversify and privatize many of its sectors, stating that there are "orders from our leadership to hold each ministry to its goals and cutting down on bureaucracy."

Mr. Liveris drew on his 15 years of visiting the country. "I can confirm that Saudi Arabia has full transparency, as much as compared with our experience in the United States. This is especially apparent when we have multi-billion dollar dealings with the country," he stated.



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