

Saudi Arabia in Focus

The monthly update from the Saudi Embassy in Brussels



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From the ambassador

Earlier in November, Riyadh has been the target of an outrageous and criminal missile attack orchestrated by the Iranian-controlled Houthi militia in Yemen. The prompt interception and destruction of the missile by the Saudi air force has avoided the worst to the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia's capital. The firm condemnation of this coward and hostile action against Saudi Arabia by many organisations and statesmen around the world reinforce our confidence in the fight against terror, notably when it is part of a state hegemonic attempt to destabilise our kingdom and the entire region.

Meanwhile Saudi Arabia has been pursuing the implementation of its wide ranging path of reforms under the ambitious Vision 2030 programme and expanded the opportunity of international cooperation, notably with European leaders and businesses as demonstrated by the compelling programme of exchange taking place in Riyadh and Brussels that I have been honoured to support.



Ambassador Abdulrahman S. Alahmed

Houthi's missile targeting Riyadh



Once again, last November 4, the Iranian-controlled Houthi militia in Yemen launched a ballistic missile targeting the city of Riyadh from within Yemen's territory. The missile was intercepted and dropped by the Saudi Air Defense forces, leading to scattered shrapnel in the populated areas but not causing any casualties or material damage. The missile, fully manufactured in Iran, was sent in spare parts to the Iranian militias in Yemen to be assembled in that country. A similar rocket was launched on Yanbu city in July last year.

The missile's capacity to cross this long stretch of land between Yemen's territories and the City of Riyadh, proves that it is a sophisticated one and surpasses the capabilities of the Iranian militias in Yemen, to manufacture or develop such a missile alone. Thus, it proves the participation of Iranian experts and Hezbollah, who contributed in

assembling and launching it from the Yemeni lands. It also confirms the Iranian intervention in Yemen, the support of the coup on the legitimacy and the targeting of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which constitutes a violation of the UN Security Council Resolution N.2216.

The launching of these advanced and far - reaching missiles from inside the Yemeni lands to Riyadh in an absurd and random way - targeting civilian and populated areas - is a violation of the International humanitarian law. It constitutes a threat to the security of Saudi Arabia and to the Regional and International security, undermining international efforts to restore peace and security in Yemen.

Given the offensive act led by Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will not stand idly and will retain the right to respond to Iran in the manner and timing it deems appropriate.



NEOM and the Future Investment Initiative: a vision for the future



Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman launched on October 24 NEOM, a \$500 billion investment project to set up the world's first independent special zone stretching over three countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. NEOM will be subject to the highest sustainability standards and the zone will power itself solely with alternative energy resources. The project focuses on nine key sectors: energy and water mobility, biotechnology, food, advanced manufacturing, media, entertainment, technological & digital sciences and the future of living (including housing, education, security).

NEOM project was launched at the first edition of the Future Investment Initiative (FII), a global investment conference organized under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman and sponsored by the Public Investment Fund (PIF). 3.500 international experts from the worlds of finance, technology and entrepreneurship participated to the event.

Several business representatives have expressed their intention to invest more in Saudi Arabia: Masayoshi Son, chairman of Japan's Softbank, announced that the bank would be making an investment in Saudi Electric as part of a push to develop green energy; Mohamed Alabbar, chairman of UAE Emaar Properties, declared that he was keen to help the Kingdom develop the \$500 billion NEOM project. Top British and American businessmen also discussed investment strategies during a session dedicated to "The world in 2030: Creating value for the next generation."

Saudi's PIF representatives also reminded during the event that they were looking for further international partnerships as part of their aim to become the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world. PIF managing director, Yasir Al-Rumayyan, took the floor at the opening session to announce a \$20 billion alliance with the US investment fund BlackRock for "conventional investment" like infrastructure and large-scale construction projects.



In support of a moderate Islam

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman unveiled at the Future Investment Initiative Conference his willingness to return to a more moderate form of Islam and asked for global support to transform the kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and lures investors.

"Honestly, we won't waste 30 years of our life combating extremist thoughts, we will destroy them now and immediately" Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"We are returning to what we were before — a country of moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world" announced the Crown prince during the FII. Mohammed Bin Salman was here as chief of the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF) to make the opening address in front of an audience of thousands of global investors. He added that Saudi Arabia was a modern nation and Islam a religion of moderation, explaining that what happened in the region during the last 30 years was not representative of the country: "After the Iranian revolution in 1979, people wanted to copy this model. We didn't know how to deal with it. And the problem spread all over the world. Now is the time to get rid of it."

This declaration, in line with ongoing economic and social reforms to modernize the country, has been welcomed by the international community. Karima Bennoune, the UN official for the promotion of traditional rights around the world, has praised the crown prince's reforms as "very welcomed steps" while highlighting that the biggest challenge will now be their implementation. The Crown Prince in his speech took also the opportunity to remind that more than 70% of the Kingdom's population is under the age of 30, with millions of young Saudis set to enter the workforce in the next decade.



Saudi Arabia stands by the side of the Rohingya muslims



A dedicated classroom for Rohingya refugees

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Work (KSRelief) has pledged to pay \$20 million to resolve Rohingya refugee crisis at an International Donor's Conference in Geneva last month. Dr. Yahya Al-Shammari, who represented KSRelief, reminded to the attendance the urgency of raising humanitarian aid for the Rohingya Muslims minority in Myanmar. More than 600,000 of them fled persecution over the past two months.

The conference, organised by three agencies of the European Union, the United Nations and Kuwait to raise funds for Rohingyas, was the occasion for Al-Shammari to talk about the humanitarian and development initiatives undertaken by Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom has indeed provided around \$66 million of humanitarian assistance over the last 10 years and dispatched 100 tons of emergency relief aid to the Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. It also received more than 300,000 Rohingya Muslims over the past 40 years, making it the second country hosting Rohingyas after Bangladesh. KSRelief team visited Rohingya's camp a few weeks before, in cooperation with the Bangladeshi government and the International Organization for Migration, to assess the basic humanitarian needs of the refugees. Moreover, the King Abdullah Foundation has launched an initiative to support the education of more than 76,000 Rohingya refugee children. The goal of this program, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDB), is to ensure universal access to education in refugee camps and settlements. The budget is estimated at \$11.5 million and the Foundation's contribution to this initiative is more than \$7.2 million for at least five years.

The 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), including Saudi Arabia, called several times on the international community to take immediate action to halt the atrocities against the Muslim minority and give them their rights without discrimination. The world's largest Muslim body is urging Myanmar to allow in UN monitors so they can investigate what it alleges is systematic brutality against the Rohingya ethnic minority.

KSRelief expands humanitarian aid in Yemen

The Arab coalition has decided to restrict temporarily border access to some of Yemen land, sea and airports after the Saudi Arabia's air defence forces intercepted a ballistic missile from Yemen in northeaster Riyadh. The objective is to prevent Iran to supply Houthi militias and their allies with missiles and military equipment. "This is a flagrant aggression targeting neighbouring countries and global and regional security and peace" declared the Saudi Cabinet after the attack.

However, the coalition outlined that, despite the temporary closure, they will ensure the entry and exit of humanitarian personnel and protect the work of aid organizations.

Moreover, KSRelief is currently discussing the expansion of assistance in Yemen. In a meeting, held at the beginning of the month in Riyadh, KSRelief General Supervisor Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabiah gathered with more than 300 ministers to decide how to strengthen both the humanitarian response in Yemen and the partnership between the Center and other international organizations working in the country. The meeting particularly focused on finding solutions to overcome the obstacles and difficulties in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all Yemeni provinces.

In the meantime, KSRelief clinics continue to provide medical treatment to Yemeni refugees in Obock camp, Djibouti. Between May 1 and September 30 of 2017, around 595 patients per month received treatment at the camp's clinics.



KSRelief distributed 9,000 food baskets to families in the governorate of Al-Shamayteen in Taiz governorate





After the historic lifting of a female driving ban in September, the General Sports Authority, the Kingdom's governing body for sports, announced on October 30 that Saudi women will be allowed to enter some sports stadiums from next year onwards. The venues of King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh, King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah, and Prince Mohammed Bin Fahd Stadium in Dammam would soon begin preparations to "accommodate families".

This new measure is part of the Vision2030 Plan that notably wants to further promote entertainment. Saudi authorities simultaneously announced that Princess Rima bent Bandar ben Sultan would be the first women to preside over a sports federation for both men and women in Saudi Arabia. She will take over the omni-sports federation that has the task to promote sports within the Saudi society.

Preparation for women driving under way



Following amendments in the traffic law and the adoption of regulatory rulings, the next phase of preparations will soon begin in Saudi Arabia to allow women to drive before June 2018. Indeed, after one month of deliberation, the tripartite committee, that gathers officials of the ministries of interior, finance and labour and social development, is close to issue its recommendations on the modalities on granting driving licenses to women.

The next phase will notably include the creation of women-run car maintenance centres as well as the establishment of new driving institutes. The ban on driving should also lead to new work opportunities for women with the possibility of becoming mechanics, driver or driving instructors.

The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation will for instance organize courses for maintenance and repair of cars. A national transportation company has also begun training for women drivers and will offer more than 150 openings as soon as the Ministry of Transport and the Traffic Department put the new traffic regulations in place.

They said...

"I am not sure the world has understood the importance of what is happening in Saudi Arabia. This is like a tsunami"

**Former French President
Nicolas Sarkozy at the
Future Investment Initiative**

In Brief

European Parliament mission to Saudi Arabia

Members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and of the delegation for Relations with the Arab Peninsula are just back from a trip to Saudi Arabia where they discussed regional cooperation with Saudi officials, at a time when the country is undertaking ambitious economic and social transformations.

During its three days' trip, the delegation met with the Shura Council, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Labour, deputy Minister of Justice, the Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Society and the MISK Foundation.

The discussions covered issues such as freedom of expression and religion, fight against radicalisation as well as the situation of women in the country. The members of the EP delegation all welcomed "the constructive and open dialogue" and called for further cooperation with Saudi authorities. They added, in a statement released after the mission, that "it is all the more important that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's vision of Saudi Arabia as a country of moderate Islam be effectively implemented in line with universal standards".

Cooperation with the European Union

Michele Cervone Durso, EU ambassador to Saudi Arabia, along with members from the European delegation to the gulf countries, met with HE Al Qassabi, Saudi Minister for commerce and investment on November 13. On this occasion, they announced the launch of a Working group on Saudi Vision 2030.

It will contribute to a stronger relationship and cooperation on trade and investment between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the European Union.

