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KINGS AND PRESIDENTS:
WHITHER THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SAUDI ARABIA?

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Featured Speaker:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. SLAVIN: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Barbara Slavin. I direct the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council, but I'm here in another capacity here today, as a moderator for what I know is going to be a really interesting event.

I've been lucky enough to know Bruce Riedel now for about two decades, and I think within everyone in this room I share a tremendous appreciation for his knowledge and expertise about the Middle East and South Asia. I think there are few people in the United States who have that depth and breadth of experience.

You can read his bio. I'm sure you know that he was senior director for the Middle East and South Asia for the Clinton administration. That was when I met him, but he served both the Obama administration and both Bush Presidents in senior positions. He's a veteran of 30 years of service with the CIA. He also served at the Pentagon and as an advisor at NATO.

And he's written five or six books now?

MR. RIEDEL: Six.

MS. SLAVIN: Six books, okay, on al-Qaeda, Pakistan, the Sino-India crisis of 1963 -- very interesting, in case you haven't read about it -- and now this marvelous new book on the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. And he's done it through looking at the relationships between Saudi kings and presidents over the past 70 years. It's full of charming details and anecdotes. I think my personal favorite is the description of the aquarium in King Abdullah's palace in Jeddah, which Bruce says looked like something out of "Dr. No." It had sharks in it. There are other sharks swimming around now perhaps that we will be discussing.

So I'm going to ask Bruce to come up and make a few remarks, then I'll ask him a few questions, and then we'll take your questions. I would like you to know that we are live

streaming this event on Facebook. For those who are watching on Facebook, I don't know what your -- I guess the hashtag would be #BrookingsFP if people want to Tweet about it. And I think we're in for a real treat.

So without further ado, Bruce Riedel. (Applause)

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you, Barbara, for that very generous opening, and thank you for coming today. Before I talk about some of the substance of the book and some of the substance of today's Saudi Arabia, I want to start with a shout-out.

Every book has more cooks than just the author who wrote it, and "Kings and Presidents" is no different. I want to shout out to my mate, Martin Indyk, whose idea this book was. He deserves a lot of credit for the idea of a book that looked at the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

This relationship is about to turn 75. The U.S.-Saudi relationship dates from 1943, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt invited the king of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz Al Saud, better known as Ibn Saud, to send a delegate to wartime Washington. The king sent two princes, Prince Faisal and Prince Khalid, who would both go on to be kings in their own right. They stayed at Blair House. They were dined, but not wined, in the White House. They met with the president in the Oval Office. They met with Congress.

They then traveled across the country from Washington to Texas, naturally, and California and then back to Princeton and the Northeast. All because Franklin Delano Roosevelt wanted to convince the Saudis of the strength and vitality of the United States of America and, in effect, have the sons come back and tell the daddy you can rely on the Americans after the war. They are going to be the most powerful people in the world.

It was a remarkable insight into FDR's concept of what the post-war era would be like. It's hard to imagine very many Americans in 1943 seeing ahead with the clarity that

Roosevelt did.

In those 75 years, this relationship has had some remarkable highs and some very, very deep lows. The highs included the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1989, the Oslo Peace Process to a certain extent was one of the highs. But it's had very deep lows, 9-11 being the one that people most remember. And it wasn't just about what happened in New York and Washington that day. 9-11 crystalized the growing problem between the United States and Saudi Arabia in 2001.

In the book I refer to these lows as "near death experiences" because this relationship has over the course of those 75 years come very close to rupturing completely on more than one occasion. The most famous occasion, of course, being the 1973 oil embargo. Saudi Arabia in supporting the oil embargo and leading the oil embargo in 1973 inflicted more economic damage on average Americans than any foreign power ever has before or since. It's not something we advertise when we talk about the relationship, but it's important.

For me, I've spent over 40 years as a professional Saudi watcher by one employer or another. For 90 percent of that time it was predictable, it was stable, frankly, it was boring. You knew exactly what was going to happen. You could state definitively Saudi policy will be X and you knew it would be X. In the last three years, that's not true anymore.

Saudi Arabia has become incredibly volatile and unpredictable. It is now filled with rumors like we have never seen before. The royal family has always been opaque. It has now become far more than opaque. Saudiology today, I would argue, is more difficult than Kremlinology at the height of the Cold War.

Today the relationship superficially is closer than ever. President Donald Trump made Saudi Arabia his first foreign port of call and the relationship during that visit was extraordinary. The Saudis flattered Mr. Trump in every way possible and he returned the

flattery. And since then he has given them, in effect, a blank check for their foreign policy and for their internal politics. He has completely endorsed the young crown prince, Muhammad bin Salman, in all of his endeavors, including the recent purge of the royal family.

But on closer examination the relationship today is, in fact, deeply troubled. If the executive branch has a very close relationship with Saudi Arabia, that's not true for the two other branches of our government. The judiciary of the United States is now putting Saudi Arabia on trial. Saudi Arabia is facing several court cases in New York under the Justice Against Supporters of Terrorism Act, JASTA, which was passed over Obama's veto, the only time one of his vetoes was passed over, by the Senate last year in a vote 98 to 0. The two senators who didn't vote against it, who abstained, were Tim Kaine and Bernie Sanders, who were both on the campaign trail and who both said they would have voted for it, as well. So, in other words, the Senate would have voted 100 to nothing to make Saudi Arabia held legally liable for its alleged involvement in the September 11th plot.

The fact that the Hill did that shows you something else. The legislative branch of our government is no longer that enthusiastic about this relationship. The last arms sales that went forward to the Hill passed with a margin of only two votes. And the administration hasn't sent another arms sales up to the Senate since then.

If the relationship is more troubled than it appears superficially, Saudi Arabia is definitely more troubled than it may appear superficially. Let me briefly look at three aspects of this.

First, the economy. King Salman ascended to the throne after oil prices had bottomed out. Saudi Arabia needs oil prices to be in the range of $80 to $85 a barrel in order to sustain its cradle-to-grave Social Security system for its people. Fifty dollars a barrel means they can't do that; it's unsustainable. In the three years since he ascended to the throne, one-

third of Saudi Arabia's reserves have already been spent. You don't need to have an MBA from the Wharton School to figure out what that means six years from now.

The good news for the Saudis is at least they recognize they have a problem. They should. Growth in the kingdom flat lined last year and they went into recession a few months ago. They understand that they need to do something about it. And King Salman and the crown prince have come up with a very ambitious, very thoughtful, and very innovative program: Saudi Vision 2030. There are some very innovative ideas in Saudi Vision 2030, not the least of which is allowing women to drive, which means that a half a million chauffeurs can be given the boot and sent home, assuming that women actually in the end do drive. That will help the Saudi economy considerably.

There are other good ideas in it. But the core ideas to reduce public sector spending and to reduce subsidies have already been reversed. They tried reducing subsidies. They tried reducing salaries for public servants. It didn't work. There was a national outcry. They've reversed them and, in some cases, made them worse. So while Saudi Vision 2030 has a lot of good ideas, its practical implementation so far has been hesitant at best and a failure at worst.

Secondly is the question of their national security policy. And here the influence of the young crown prince is clearer than anywhere else. A foreign policy that had long been cautious and risk-averse and relied upon the checkbook, not upon diplomacy or military intervention, has turned around in the opposite direction. Saudi foreign policy has become adventurous, interventionist, if not reckless in the extreme.

The war in Yemen, which is Muhammad bin Salman's signature policy move, has turned into a quagmire. It was supposed to be Operation Decisive Storm. There's nothing decisive about it except the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world today.

Save the Children has recently estimated that if the blockade continues as it has been for the last couple of weeks since the missile was fired at Riyadh airport, 50,000 children could die in Yemen before the end of this year. Fifty thousand before the end of this year. If that doesn't happen, it still means a catastrophe, a manmade catastrophe, of enormous extent. Seven million Yemenis are on the verge of starvation, dependent entirely upon what the U.N. and other international programs can get them.

Saudi defense spending in Yemen is, of course, a well-kept secret. The lowest estimate that I found is $700 million a month. In a kingdom that doesn't have the money, that's an enormous expense of money. It's reflective of the fact that Saudi Arabia has one of the highest defense budgets in the world. In 2015, it had the third-largest defense budget in the world behind the United States and China. On a per capita basis it came to almost $7,000 per person. Even Americans don't spend $7,000 per person on the United States military. It's unsustainable, as well.

The blockade of Qatar announced six months ago has so far been a failure. Worse is coming in this area, much worse than we've seen so far. I think only the beginnings of what will be a very divisive conflict in the Gulf is in front of us. The GCC is to all intents and purposes dead today.

Lebanon may be next. The Lebanese I talk to fear that they are going to become roadkill in the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. All of these policies reflect the fact that Saudi Arabia under King Salman and his son has become much more risk-prone in dealing with Iran. It has broken relations with the Iranians. It has adopted a foreign policy that is much more sectarian than anything we have seen since the end of the second Saudi Kingdom in the late 19th century.

Which brings us lastly to internal politics. Muhammad bin Salman has moved

from defense minister to crown prince in 30 months. Or to be more accurate his father has moved him from defense minister to crown prince in 30 months. Muhammad bin Salman is obviously a very ambitious person and he's been very effective in moving forward. But in the Saudi system, if your father is the king, it really isn't that hard to do this, and he's proven it's not hard to do that. Two sitting crown princes have been removed from their position. Unprecedented in Saudi history.

The second one, Muhammad bin Nayef, was removed in a remarkable way: literally in the middle of the night and to a certain extent almost at gunpoint, and kept incommunicado ever since then. Muhammad bin Nayef was the closest thing Saudi Arabia had to a genuine hero in this century and he deserved it. He was one of the preeminent counterterrorists in the world today and was willing to take great personal risk, much more than his counterparts in most security services. He was smeared after being removed as a drug addict. The reason he might have been, if he is a drug addict, is because of the wounds he sustained in an al Qaeda assassination plot.

The removal of Muhammad bin Nayef has now been followed by the purge of the royal family and the establishment, an unprecedented event in Saudi politics, as well. Saudi politics in the past was, of course, an absolute monarchy, married to a theocracy, with the instruments of a police state. But there were rules and decorum about how royals treated other royals. You could be the worst governor in the history of the Saudi system and be removed, but you got a golden parachute. You were not humiliated in public. You were given the chance to move on to a new job with your dignity and honor and integrity kept intact.

Those rules are gone now. Saudi Arabia, some of my Saudi friends say, now looks more like a Mafioso state than it did the state that they lived up to then. If the "New York Times" article today about how the people purged are being extorted to turn over their own

finances to the crown prince is true, we're basically seeing a shakedown in the kingdom. All of which raises the question what happens after the king?

King Salman is in his early 80s. Based on his brothers, he could go on living for another 10 years or so. He suffers from pre-dementia, but it doesn't prohibit him or prevent him from carrying out his tasks. If he wishes to, he could stay in office for some time, but he may not. There are all kinds of rumors about abdication possibilities.

And I think when you put all of this together you also have to say there is a possibility, not a probability, but a possibility, of the perfect storm in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia coming soon. The combination of serious economic problems, of a foreign policy in defeat, and of a succession process which is trying to do something they've avoided doing for 75 years, which is passing not from a son of ibn Saud, but to a grandson of ibn Saud, these things could come together.

So watch this space. As I said at the beginning, Saudi Arabia is no longer boring. It's certainly exciting and it's certainly unpredictable. And thank you for coming today. (Applause)

MS. SLAVIN: Thanks, Bruce. That's a good opening. That's certainly a good opening and it whets our appetite for much more.

I think I'll start with something that's swirling around very much in the news now. One of the things that you write about that used to be sort of rock solid was that the House of Saud could never recognize the state of Israel without a real Palestinian peace plan, a real Palestinian state. Now we hear that there is some peace plan which is being cooked up between Jared Kushner and Muhammad bin Salman. Very few people have seen it, but there seems to be certainly among some who are supporters of Bibi Netanyahu and his government in Israel this idea that at long last Saudi Arabia will really be side-by-side with Israel against Iran,

against Hezbollah, and in return the Israelis will have to perhaps have some sort of cosmetic peace plan.

Is this something that could actually happen now? And is it a sustainable idea?

MR. RIEDEL: Let me start with a little bit of history before I jump in.

Saudi-Israeli covert cooperation is not new to the 21st century. In the 1960s, the Mossad and the Saudi intelligence agency cooperated together in supporting an insurgency in Yemen. Remember, we're now against an insurgency in Yemen, but in the 1960s they supported together, in coordination with each other, an insurgency in Yemen. The British played the critical role of the middleman, but the two intelligence services knew what the other one were doing. And the Israelis, for example, para-dropped equipment to the insurgents in Yemen, the royalists at the time, flying down the Red Sea with the full knowledge of the Royal Saudi Air Force. So covert cooperation is not new between Saudis and Israelis. King Faisal, probably the most pro-Palestinian Saudi king of our lifetimes, was willing to engage in it.

Are they willing now to go beyond the realm of covert operation to an overt operation? I remain skeptical. I'll be frank, I'm skeptical, you said that very few people have seen the peace plan between Jared and others. I think included in that number is Jared. (Laughter) I don't think there is much of a peace plan here. I think there's talk about a peace plan. I think it's very useful cover for travel to the region to say you're talking about a peace plan.

Will the Saudis be prepared to overtly recognize Israel, send an embassy to Tel Aviv, presumably, not Jerusalem? I remain a skeptic. I think that there are deeply entrenched parts of the Saudi system, I think particularly the clerical establishment, which would find that very, very hard to stomach. But I'll repeat myself once again, we're in a whole new world. Anything could happen at this point, so I wouldn't say it's impossible, but I remain skeptical.

MS. SLAVIN: Well, that leads very naturally into the next question, which is that another thing that MBS is doing is talking about introducing or reintroducing a "moderate" Islam to the kingdom. He has stopped the religious police from roaming around and harassing people in the way that they used to do. Women are supposedly going to be allowed to drive next year, and so there is entertainment for young Saudis. I spoke to a woman the other day who had gone to a stadium for the first time in her life in Saudi Arabia and was really still excited about that ability.

So the question is, is it possible for the Saudis to somehow change the sort of Islam that's practiced inside and the sort of Islam that they have been propagating outside since King Faisal? Or is this also kind of smoke and mirrors? What do you think?

MR. RIEDEL: Parts of Saudi Vision 2030, which did not use the word at the time "moderate" Islam, certainly open up the door to social changes which are significantly different from the way Islam has been practiced in the country. You mentioned entertainment, women driving. I want to give the crown prince and the king credit for that, particularly the king. The king built the most Wahhabi city in the world, Riyadh, from scratch. When he became governor of Riyadh there was less than 200,000 people; now it has over 7 million people. But he did it to create the most Wahhabi city in the world. So the king is clearly willing to consider some options they haven't in the past.

Now, a cynic will say that because they're failing to deliver on the economic part, the hard part, they're going for the easy part, which is opening up some of these societal norms. But that's too cynical. These easy parts are not easy at all. There are powerful opposition to it.

And Saudi youth are not all Bernie Sanders supporters walking around in thobes. The top 10 Twitter accounts in Saudi Arabia all belong to very conservative, Islamic clerics not from the opposition, but from the mainstream Wahhabi clerical establishment.

But at the same time, parts of the old Wahhabi creed are now on fumes. I mean, this is the most sectarian Saudi government we have seen since ibn Saud, not just abroad, but at home. Parts of the eastern province have been in open rebellion now and are being plowed under, literally turned into concrete wastelands, as the Saudis try to eliminate Shia opposition, violent Shia opposition, which they blame on Iran, of course, but much of which is indigenous and has been there for a long time.

So it's a mix. There's parts of the Wahhabi creed which are now being pushed very, very hard and parts which are being -- and I think this reflects a young man who is feeling his way.

MS. SLAVIN: Yeah. You know, I mentioned that King Faisal, and this was good to remind myself, because I know that the Saudi foreign minister has been going around saying that Islamic fundamentalism, (inaudible) all the fault of Iran and the 1979 revolution. It was useful to recall that it was King Faisal that began the propagation of Wahhabi Islam, building mosques, sending clerics out throughout the Muslim world. Back in the '60s, the Muslim World League was created then, the Organization of Islamic Conference was created then.

So what happens out in the Muslim world with these kinds of purported changes in Saudi Arabia, the custodian of the two holy mosques? I mean, is this going to be accepted in the broader Muslim world? And could there be a backlash that would affect Saudi interests? That could be dangerous for Saudi Arabia in terms of generating increased support of al Qaeda or ISIS or other militant groups?

MR. RIEDEL: I'll give you a concrete example to work from. The largest mosque in the European Union is in Brussels. I describe it in the book. It's in the heart of the city on one of its biggest parks. I lived across the street from it for three and a half years. It has been a center of Saudi Wahhabi ideological training since it became a mosque in the 1970s.

Recently, the Belgian government for understandable reasons has been trying to persuade the Saudis to let the government of Belgium have some influence over what is preached in that mosque. And the Saudis are resisting it tooth and nail. They will not let that mosque be changed and it's become some of a cause célèbre in Belgium today. So there's a concrete example of where whatever the foreign minister may say, and whatever they may be talking about moderate Islam, it's not turning into action on the ground and it's being resisted.

The other thing I would say is King Abdullah in his time as king often talked about finding a more tolerant version of Islam. And he promoted interchurch dialogue, including inviting Shintos as well as, you know -- almost every religion was invited to events that the Saudis paid for. There were two notable things about these events. One, they never happened in Saudi Arabia. They always happened in Vienna or Barcelona or someplace like that. And two, Shias were hardly ever invited to these events.

So, let's see. Let's see whether there's really something to all of this. I think it's too early to say.

MS. SLAVIN: In terms of potential threats to Saudi Arabia, though, I mean, they managed to defeat al Qaeda a decade ago, but this kind of policy could clearly create, one would think, a lot of enemies within the state and outside. And you mentioned Muhammad bin Nayef, who was an extremely effective counterterrorism chief. Are you worried about the capability of the kingdom to continue in terms of counterterrorism with Muhammad bin Nayef under, in effect, house arrest? And I'm not sure who took his place, but --

MR. RIEDEL: I've very worried. The short answer is I'm very worried.

Muhammad bin Nayef brought to the Ministry of Interior, which is one of the largest bureaucracies in Saudi Arabia -- there are claims that as many as 1 million Saudis get a paycheck one way or another from the Ministry of Interior. That'd be 1 out of 20 people. I'm not

sure that's true, but it gives you a sense of how big this is. He was the dynamic force that made the MOI the successful counterterrorism element is was.

What I understand, in the few months since he's gone there's been a measurable drop in efficiency. The MOI was the stronghold of the Nayef wing of the family just as the Saudi Arabian National Guard was the stronghold of the Abdullah wing. With that wing gone, it's not just him, it's the system. His replacement has no experience in this business at all. There is a price to be made in removing people like this and the price will end up being in the practical world of fighting terrorists.

That said, al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Saudi Arabia are not -- they're a terrorist nuisance. They're not potential heirs in the bet that the Saudi royal family for some reason or another split apart.

MS. SLAVIN: I want to ask you a couple sort of broad questions about the relationship in general. It was essentially trading security for oil for all of these years. The United States doesn't need Saudi oil anymore, other countries obviously do and the United States obviously takes its role as a protector in the Persian Gulf very seriously.

But looking forward, is that going to remain the case? If Saudi Arabia remains undemocratic, and although the crown prince is pushing a lot of reforms, he's certainly not broadening the political system in any way. If the world's dependence on oil continues to diminish, what's the trajectory of this relationship? And is it wise for the United States to put so many eggs in Riyadh's basket?

MR. RIEDEL: I make the case in the book that more near-death experiences are more likely than not, that there are at least three issues that are going to be troublesome for the relationship.

One is the continuation of the Palestinian question. The Palestinian question is

in remission right now. If another intifada begins or something, the Palestinian question can come back onto the front burner very, very, very quickly. And in that case, Saudi Arabia's long-term commitment to it will make for challenges in the relationship.

Secondly, there's the whole Wahhabi question, which we've talked about.

I think there's a third factor which is newer, and you were precisely getting to it, Barbara, which is Saudi Arabia is, in effect, the leader of the counterrevolution. If the Arab Spring was led on the street, the counterrevolution has been led by the royal palace in Saudi Arabia, and quite actively.

The first time we saw Saudi troops intervene in another country was Bahrain in 2011. And King Abdullah at that time gave President Obama the riot act. He said if you don't accept this, the relationship is over, forget it. And President Obama backed down. Both Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates write about it in their autobiographies.

The Trump administration has not made the promotion of democracy and human rights a centerpiece of its foreign policy. That's very out of character with American foreign policy under both Republicans and Democrats. Maybe it's the wave of the future. I'm skeptical.

And I think that as the counterrevolution tries to hold back change, the political wing of change in the Arab world, there are going to be more times when the United States and Saudi Arabia are going to find each other on opposite sides. Maybe not over what happens in the kingdom, but over what may be happening in other parts of the Arab world. We'll see.

So I think there are at least three reasons to believe that this relationship is going to be even rockier in the future than it has been up until now.

Now, you're right, we don't need Saudi oil. The Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians do. We have an interest in the stable energy market. So as part of a global world order we have an interest in all of that. But here again, the Trump administration has taken a very

different discourse than the United States has up until today and become more unpredictable.

There's also one other factor I can say from experience. Long past the point where alliances don't make sense anymore, the United States tends to hold on to them. And the Saudi relationship will be on autopilot for some period after it no longer really makes sense to be the first country for a President of the United States to go visit.

MS. SLAVIN: Given that my particular interests involve Iran as much as they do the other side of the Persian Gulf, I can't resist and ask you about both the current U.S. policy toward Iran and the Saudi policy toward Iran, which seem to be very, very similar these days. There was a time when the United States was trying to promote conflict resolution. We famously remember President Obama suggesting that the Saudis and the Iranians should share the Persian Gulf.

Now the Saudi policy has gone so far to other extreme that they seem to be quite willing to risk the stability of Lebanon in addition to all the other areas in the region in order to somehow retaliate against Iran and retaliate against Hezbollah.

I just would be curious for your reflections on these policies and whether there is any way they can be recalibrated in Washington. I mean, we sense some hesitancy on the part of the Pentagon, the State Department, but it does seem as though this is really not kings and presidents, but crown prince and president's son-in-law determining our policy in the region right now.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me deal with Saudi-Iran and then sons and sons-in-law. (Laughter)

Part of the reason Saudi foreign policy looks so different today is because in terms of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Iranians are cleaning the Saudi clock. They're winning everywhere and it's not even close in most places.

Look at Syria. The Saudis spent a fortune even by Saudi's standard on arming the Sunni revolutionaries. It's a case where they did support revolution, not because they like the idea of a democracy in Syria obviously, but because they wanted to support the Sunnis against the Alawites and their Iranian Shia friends in Hezbollah. They've lost. It's over. The Syrian civil war may go on for a long time, but the groups the Saudis supported have more or less faded off of the battlefield.

Iraq, with the tremendous assistance of the United States of America, and particularly President George W. Bush, we have now reversed 500 years of Sunni domination of Iraq and put the Shias in charge. Now, one of the more innovative policies Muhammad bin Salman pursued this year was to get back in the Iraq game, to send an ambassador to receive a prominent Shia in Saudi Arabia. And then the Kurds messed it all up and the Iranians are stronger now in Iraq than they were six months ago. And Saudi Arabia's effort to reach out hasn't had any real tangible benefits. I hope they're not ready to give up there, but in Syria and Iraq, in the competition between Riyadh and Tehran, there's not much competition left. The Saudis have lost and they know it. They're not stupid.

And Syria and Iraq are a lot more important for Saudi Arabia than Lebanon and I would argue even Yemen. So let's turn to Yemen.

Saudi Arabia is spending conservatively let's say $700 million a month. I have no idea how much money Iran and Hezbollah is spending, but I doubt it's $7 million a month. Iran is prepared to fight to the last Lebanese in Yemeni and Hezbollah is prepared to fight to the last Yemeni. In return for creating a quagmire that's expensive, Saudi Arabia has given Iran a way of sticking it to them in their soft underbelly.

And now, for very little expense, Iran has figured out a way to fire rockets at Riyadh, and, by the way, Abu Dhabi is next. And what are the Saudis going to do about it?

Well, this time they declared war on Lebanon. (Laughter) That made a lot of sense. They're not going to disarm the Hezbollah. The Lebanese Army is not going to disarm Hezbollah. Hariri is not going to disarm Hezbollah. And as long as Hezbollah is armed to the teeth, it will be the dominant political force in Lebanon.

It's hard to understand what the purpose of this little escapade with --

MS. SLAVIN: Hariri.

MR. RIEDEL: -- Hariri is all about. My Lebanese friends, who I admit don't know and some of them admit they don't know, too, all tell me it's a shakedown. Mr. Hariri's being shook down for his money. I don't know, that might be the case. It's a pretty vicious game if that's the game. And if any of you here are thinking about investing in the kingdom, I would urge you to get to the bottom of the facts about this. Because if it can happen to Mr. Hariri, it can certainly happen to an American company investing in Saudi Arabia.

MS. SLAVIN: Well, that leads to my last question before I open up, and that is so much of Vision 2030 depends on investment. It depends on Saudi investment. It depends on foreign investment. How, with all the chaos that is going on now in the kingdom, can any foreign company be expected to invest in Vision 2030?

MR. RIEDEL: Very good question.

MS. SLAVIN: And what happens to the Aramco IPO that we've heard so much about?

MR. RIEDEL: From my very unscientific sample of people who call me from oil companies and other people who do invest in Saudi Arabia, there's a palpable sense of despair since the so-called purge began that they don't know what's going to happen. They don't see the rule of law applying here. And Saudi apologists who say that we had to do it in this dramatic way because it was the only way to shake up the system, that doesn't make very many lawyers

feel very comfortable about telling their client, oh, yeah, don't worry, you can invest in Saudi Arabia. So I think it's self-defeating in that sense.

If the real cynics, and the New York Times published it today, are right, then the crown prince and the king have already gone beyond looking for outside financial. They're just going to steal the money of the 200 people or so who are now enjoying the life of leisure in the Ritz. I don't know whether that's true. I think that would be a very dangerous policy for Saudi Arabia to pursue.

MS. SLAVIN: But in fairness, a lot of that money was in a sense stolen from the people of Saudi Arabia over the years by princes and others just simply taking what they wanted from oil revenues, right?

MR. RIEDEL: True. And who exactly doesn't fall into that category in the royal family? (Laughter) I've never bought a half-billion-dollar yacht on the spur of the moment, but I don't think that comes out of your government stipend when you're able to do that. And I'm not singling out anyone here, but the policies are likely to be counterproductive.

And the IPO, which is a good idea, which is a very good idea, is fraught with all kinds of problems, not the least of which is JASTA. If you open the IPO on the New York Stock Exchange, watch the rush of lawyers who are going to immediately ask for a judge to have that held until the outcome of the 9-11 trials is produced.

And I'll just say one last thing about the 9-11 trials. Don't expect that these trials are going to absolve Saudi Arabia. I'm not saying Saudi Arabia was involved in the plot, we can talk about that if you want, but don't expect the U.S. litigation process to absolve the kingdom of any responsibility for 9-11. I'd be very, very surprised if the American judiciary come up with that conclusion.

MS. SLAVIN: Okay. We have a great audience and I know many of you, so if

you would like to ask a question, put your hand up and wait for a microphone. And the gentleman right here from Cyprus. Say your name, ask a question.

MR. NICOLAIDES: Thank you. Andreas Nicolaides from the Embassy of Cyprus. Thank you, Bruce and Barbara, for a very interesting discussion.

And Bruce, you alluded in your opening remarks about the more problematic actions regarding the Qatari-Saudi rift. Would you be more specific?

MS. SLAVIN: In what sense? Just more about the rift with Qatar?

MR. NICOLAIDES: Yeah, in the sense of how do you predict those moves will --

MS. SLAVIN: Yeah, the Qatari foreign minister was in town, some of us saw him. And, I mean, it seems that Qatar is holding up fairly well against the pressure, but, I mean, the Saudis seem really determined to squeeze Qatar as much as possible. Is it going to work?

MR. RIEDEL: Let me just say one word about how that crisis began because it was little noticed in the United States. The first opening shot in this crisis was an open letter published in the Saudi media in Arabic only from the surviving sons of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. That is to say the founder of Wahhabism. They don't call it Wahhabism in the kingdom for obvious reasons.

All of the surviving sons -- of course, the daughters were not asked to sign; we assume that did not reflect dissonance -- signed a letter addressed to an emir of an unnamed Gulf country. And it said in the letter that your country is violating the principles of Islam. You are in violation of everything that we hold sacred and it is disrespectful of you to name as the largest mosque in your capital city the Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab mosque.

Now, it doesn't take very long to find out what city hosts the Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab mosque. It's Doha. In effect, the opening salvo of this crisis was the Wahhabi clerical establishment of Saudi Arabia announcing that the emir is not just pursuing the wrong

policies, but has become, in effect, an infidel and a blasphemer, and that he is being excommunicated from the family of the Al Sheikh. This underscores, again, the closeness of the relationship between the Al Saud and Al Sheikh.

Politicians can walk back demands. It's really hard for clerics to say, oh, sorry, you're okay after all. We excommunicated you, but you're welcome back into the church. That's part of what I mean.

The second part of what I mean is the future World Cup, I think, is now going to become the next big issue in this fight. The symbol of Qatar hosting the world's premier sporting event -- aside from the Super Bowl, of course -- but hosting the premier world sporting event is something that is very, very hard for its rivals to accept. And I think you will see in the weeks and months ahead a concerted effort through the machinations of FIFA to try to undermine that and take it away, which would have serious economic costs for Qatar in terms of the investment that it's already made. So I think this can get really ugly.

MS. SLAVIN: But you don't think Qatar is going to fold.

MR. RIEDEL: No, I think the remarkable thing about what we've seen here is that Qatari nationalism, which was a force that I never knew existed before, never existed anytime I ever --

MS. SLAVIN: All 200,000 of them.

MR. RIEDEL: Right, I never saw any manifestation of Qatari nationalism in my many travels to the U.S. Islamic World Forum. It's now burning brightly in Qatar. And what the Saudi-Emirati-Bahraini-Egyptian alliance has done is rally Qataris behind the Qatari royal family. The Saudis have tried to put forward dissonant elements of the family with very little signs of success.

MS. SLAVIN: Let me take a couple more here. Let's see, all the way in the

back. Let me take the two in the back, the hand all the way in the back there and then there was another hand next to him.

MR. POWELL: Hi, I'm Bill Powell. I'm the chief Washington correspondent for Newsweek.

A question about bin Salman and the move to remove Nayef. You're painting him out to be either stupid or naïve or both. Presumably, he understands quite well, albeit being as young as he is, that Nayef was very effective in that job. Has he now just put, in effect, a flunky in that job? I mean, as serious as that, is that what we're to believe or what's the next step? What's actually going on in that job? Because certainly if that's what he's done, Pompeo and Mattis much be freaking out.

MS. SLAVIN: And there was another hand. Yes. Say your name, ask a question.

MR. MacLAURY: Hi, Adam MacLaury, student.

My revolves around -- well, Ken Pollack writes a book, "Unthinkable," which came out in 2013, before the Iran deal was passed by President Obama. And to be -- in a nutshell, one of the things Mr. Pollock mentions is that Iranian nuclear ambitions, for lack of a better phrase, are beneficial to the United States and the West because of the heavily restrictive sanctions imposed on Iran because of it. Now that this deal has been passed and some sanctions have been lifted by the international community, Iran seems, as both of you have kind of mentioned, to be kind of growing in terms of their confidence, if you will, in terms of counteracting the Saudis, which are the only -- I mean, it's Saudi and Iran. You have Sunni and then you have the Shia state, which --

MS. SLAVIN: And your question?

MR. MacLAURY: Okay, so my question is what is this going to mean, this

volatility, as you've said, this uncertainty in the Saudi kingdom? What does this mean in terms of the region's stability at large in terms of Iran versus Saudi? I mean, if the kingdom folds, will Iran step into the fray? Thank you.

MS. SLAVIN: Good questions.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me start with the first question. I would characterize the young crown prince as, A, ruthless. That's clear. And if you talk to people who have known him since his pre-defense minister time, he was known in the system as a ruthless individual.

He's also obviously a man with a great deal of ambition. If you want the epitome of a young man in a hurry, this is the young man in a hurry. He's also anxious, I think, because he's moved faster than he needed to. There was no particular reason why Muhammad bin Nayef needed to go this summer. If the king's health is that close to collapse, I would have understood, but there's no evidence to back that up.

The king, who is often portrayed in the international media as a non-entity in this whole thing, he's not a non-entity. He's still king. He travels, he meets, he's talking to the president of the United States on the phone tomorrow. Maybe other people are giving him his talking points, but guess what, that's happening in the Oval Office, too. (Laughter) Neither of them may read the talking points, but both are getting assistance.

He's anxious because I think he understands that by breaking so many norms, he has made a lot of enemies, a lot of enemies who are today terrorized, scared to death that they could be next, but enemies who will wait and see what goes on. Many people I talked to, Saudis and others in the region, predict that he'll do fine as long as his father is there to protect him. But when his father goes, his heir cover is going and his legitimacy is gone. And it could be the night of the long knives.

Now, in Saudi Arabia there's no process for that to happen. Only one king in the

modern era has been removed from power and that was King Saud. He was removed after 10 years of quarrel over his ineffective leadership and he was actually removed after the National Guard had surrounded the royal palace with tanks, with the barrels pointed at them, and the Al Sheikh family collectively had agreed that he had to go. So that's not a very easy reclamation process that Saudi Arabia has. We'll be on uncharted waters here.

If the king lasts for 10 years and the crown prince matures in office and learns some lessons, it could all turn out fine. If oil prices go to $100 a barrel, it'll be much easier for that to happen. We'll see. A lot depends on the timing of the king.

Regarding Saudi volatility and its impact on the region, one of the reasons why American presidents have liked Saudi Arabia as a partner, even if they didn't quite hit the beat with their counterpart -- I don't think Barack Obama ever really, you know, fit into the Saudi world system; never felt comfortable and they knew he didn't feel comfortable -- but Saudi Arabia was an island of stability. Barbara's going to remind me now someone else was called that once before.

MS. SLAVIN: Yes, the shah. Yeah.

MR. RIEDEL: When that island starts to break up and become unpredictable and volatile, it has ripple effects throughout the region, and we're seeing those ripple effects today. People aren't sure what to expect. The old predictability is gone, the old stability, the old certitude about things.

Your first question, people would not have asked the question is Saudi Arabia going to recognize Israel in the King Abdullah era. They wouldn't have asked it, I doubt, a year ago. But the very fact that it's there shows that there is now a new volatility. And whether we like it or not, American presidents don't like volatility in the Middle East. We say we'd like to see democracy, but the truth is we want stability.

We were the biggest share owner in the police states that ran the Middle East for so many years. That was to our benefit and our advantage. And the curious thing about the Obama administration was you can see the struggle, Tammy knows it better than anyone else, that went on in the administration over do we go with our head or do we go with our heart? That struggle doesn't exist apparently in the Trump administration so far. (Laughter)

MS. SLAVIN: The gentleman here and Jamal Khashoggi. We'll take those two together.

MR. WINTERS: Steve Winters, independent consultant.

In the early '90s, there was a large number of clerics, I'll just use the word clerics, who were dismissed in Saudi Arabia over the controversy over stationing of so-called infidel forces in the country. And I've heard some indications that there's another wave of dismissals going on now. And if there is, or if you could tell us about that, wouldn't that be an indication that they are serious about trying to bring in a more moderate approach to Islam?

MS. SLAVIN: And let's get the question, also, from Jamal.

MR. KHASHOGGI: Jamal Khashoggi, I'm a Saudi Arabian journalist in exile, self-exiled here.

MR. RIEDEL: Welcome.

MS. SLAVIN: Welcome.

MR. KHASHOGGI: My question is about which is Islam and that Muhammad bin Salman in your reading will impress? How can a revivalist country that is based as an Islamic state, that enjoys -- any king of Saudi Arabia, this is the most important power the king of Saudi Arabia has. It is not the security. It's not the National Guard. It is that divine mid-century concept of (inaudible) that we the Saudi people must obey as a religious duty, not only a political duty. And probably he is the only now leader other than maybe the pope who enjoys

that.

So how can he develop some form of a catalyst Islam in an Islamic state as Saudi Arabia based on a revivalist form of Islam? This is my question.

But I have a brief comment about King Faisal being the one who introduced or encouraged Wahhabism. Not is it not that. Saudi Arabia has seen many Islams since its founding. King Faisal, in fact, never used even the term Salafism or described himself as Wahhabi. He introduced a broad-based Islam and he used the Muslim Brotherhood, scholars, and ideas to tame down Wahhabi ideas, and he succeeded in that.

But later on, after 1979, some form of radical Islam that is local came to Saudi Arabia. After 1989, after the -- or 1990, '92, after the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia started cracking down on the Muslim Brotherhood and now it is totally against the Brotherhood. But King Faisal at his time, he is the one who probably introduced more modernity in Islam using the Muslim Brotherhood and taming down radical Wahhabism. Thank you.

MS. SLAVIN: And as you know, of course, he got rid of slavery and allowed women to go to school, so yeah.

MR. RIEDEL: Right. Two very good questions. Let me begin by saying that if trying to figure out what's going on in the house of Al Saud is hard for an outsider, trying to figure out what's going on in the house of Al Sheikh is much, much more difficult.

They don't give interviews. Muhammad bin Salman, bless him, gives interviews, you know. That's not normal. Muhammad bin Nayef didn't give interviews when he was crown prince and Muqrin never gave interviews. So in that sense there is a little more information to work from.

Regarding the first question, arrests of clerics, my understanding is the clerics who have been arrested since this summer fall into the category of the usual suspects. That is,

these people have been in and out of jail since 1990, 1991. They are not the mainstream clerical establishment. They're the critics of the mainstream clerical establishment.

Remember, in 1990, the mainstream clerical establishment gave the blessing to King Fahd to invite the Americans and the other foreigners into the kingdom. I don't think they did that with a lot of enthusiasm, but they gave a very important blessing to that.

Jamal rightly reminds us that this is a lot more complicated than the simple picture of extreme hardliners and Bernie Sanders liberal progressives. This is not how the clerical establishment works and it's not how the Saudis work.

The first Saudi kingdom begun in 1774 believed the entire outside world, including the vast bulk of the Islamic world, were infidels and should be at war with them. That meant in practice going to war with the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was the defender of Islam in the world.

By the time we get to ibn Saud, that version of Wahhabism or whatever you want to call it -- I'll just use Wahhabism as a shorthand; it's not very accurate, but it's the shorthand we use -- had already transfigured itself. And ibn Saud by the very fact of sending his sons to Washington was changing the notion of how Saudi Arabia would perform.

King Faisal is often given the opprobrium of being the one who spread a fanatical Islam, largely because he's the first Saudi king who had enough money to do something about building mosques. Up until Faisal, Saudi Arabia couldn't build mosques in the rest of the world. It didn't have enough money. It could barely build mosques at home. If King Saud had stayed on the throne there probably would have been a revolution in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, which is why Faisal agreed that he had to modernize his country.

I think one of the most interesting kings and presidents interactions is the interaction between King Faisal and John F. Kennedy in October 1962. The Egyptians and

Soviets have just engineered a coup in Yemen. They are sending troops to support the revolutionary government. Then Crown Prince Faisal is in New York for the UNGA and requests an immediate meeting with John F. Kennedy. He comes to Washington. John F. Kennedy has a formal meeting with him and then he takes them up to the family quarters of the White House, just a small group of them.

And Kennedy says to the crown prince, your country is about to go under. You are going to lose. The revolutionary forces Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Baath Party represent are going to sweep you under, just like they have in Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen. You need to change.

And the future king, the then crown prince, says you're right. You're right. We do need to change. And I go back to the kingdom, I'm going to get rid of my brother and I'm going to change the way that the kingdom works.

And one of the manifestations of that is he abolishes slavery. Now, cynics out there will say, hey, it's 1962, you still have slavery. But it was a fact that Saudi Arabia still had slavery. It was a measure of the distances that the king had to go.

And he did other things. As Barbara mentioned, he encouraged women to go to school. Unheard of beforehand. And he paid the ultimate price. Exactly why he was assassinated is a mystery that died with his assassin, but I think it's safe to say that part of it was because he had rocked the boat of Saudi societal norms.

It's probably apparent by now that instead of castigating King Faisal, I actually think of the kings that I write about he is by far the most interesting and probably the most important in making the modern Saudi kingdom what it is today.

MS. SLAVIN: They also had two very important sons, certainly Saud Al Faisal, Turki Al Faisal, who made major contributions. And Khalid.

Okay. There and there.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Dmitri. Thank you very much, very interesting.

I just have two quick questions. The first one, could you talk about Saudi Arabia's relationship with Russia. And, if possible, it's view on the United Nations? I know that's a very general question, but thank you.

MS. SLAVIN: And then there was a question here, this gentleman here. Oh, I'm sorry, yes, you had your hand up a long time, so let's go to you first.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Nathan. And I had a question about MbZ, the crown prince in UAE, and his impact on MbS. I start to see a lot of similarities between the countries and UAE has done, to me, some amazing things and I think that Saudi Arabia would like to emulate that on a larger scale.

MS. SLAVIN: Okay.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me start with Russia. Since the end of the Cold War, Saudi Arabia has flirted with Russia on and off again. With the exploration of Marxist atheism, the Saudis have looked to see if they can develop a relationship with the Russians. And so far it really just hasn't panned out.

There have been numerous high-level visits, high-level meetings. There has been talk of Saudi purchase of Russian military items, but it has never happened. And I'm, frankly, skeptical that the latest reporting about an air defense system being sold will ever turn out to be much of a reality.

The Russians, like American defense companies selling to Saudi Arabia, ought to make damn sure there's money in the bank for paying for whatever they're asking for because you could end up holding the wrong end of the stick in this relationship.

The one area where there has been cooperation is in oil and keeping more or

less to the oil production limits, and I think that will continue. That's an overlapping economic interest that is in the interest of both of them.

The United Nations, one of the few times that Saudi Arabia was completely unpredictable under King Abdullah was when it finally secured a seat as a temporary member of the U.N. Security Council. It was a remarkable day when -- the Saudis had been seeking this seat for years and lobbying for it. The morning press in Saudi Arabia hailed, "Saudi Arabia gets seated U.N. Security Council. Great diplomatic triumph for Riyadh."

Then sometime in the course of the morning, King Abdullah decided he didn't really want it and the evening press hailed, "King rejects Security Council. Great triumph for Saudi diplomacy." (Laughter) Even by the standards of the American media that was whiplash. (Laughter) That was really hard to figure out.

The Saudis understand the importance of the U.N. And one measure of that is how quickly they went to the U.N. Security Council to get a resolution, which they interpret as justifying the war in Yemen, which is totally unbalanced. It is a reflection of Saudi demands, not a reasonable way of moving forward. But by getting it, they have now made sure that the international system operates on the basis of that U.N. Security Council resolution.

One member of the Security Council abstained on that vote, Russia. And the Russians said they were abstaining because the resolution was totally unbalanced and would produce a sterile method of moving forward. And the Russians in that case have been proven right.

MS. SLAVIN: And MbZ.

MR. RIEDEL: MbZ. There are several relationships between Muhammad bin Salman and outsiders that I am not privy to. There are two that I'd really like to know about. One is with Jared Kushner and the other was Mohammed bin Zayed. So I can't tell you what's

going on there.

They are too similar in many respects. They recognize that change is vital in their countries. I would have thought that given his age and experience the crown prince of Abu Dhabi would be a somewhat more careful person at this point in life, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

So you're absolutely right. For Newsweek and the New York Times and others in the audience, this is a hot story. Go out and find the facts and I will avidly read your story and then repeat it. (Laughter) But right now, I don't have any facts to go with the story.

MS. SLAVIN: All the way in the back and then this -- well, actually, there are two all the way in the back, there and there.

MR. HOSSLER: Good afternoon, Ty Hossler. My question has to do with the conflict in Yemen.

Very quickly, how much leverage does the United States have and do you think we're using it effectively? And what should we be doing right now to end the tragedy? Thank you.

MS. SLAVIN: And then the gentleman all the way in the back.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Hanny. My question is, so basically, if you look at a comparison between what the youth in Saudi Arabia are talking about and what the experts are talking about, you see a huge difference. Who's got their finger on the pulse?

I mean, the majority of the population in Saudi Arabia are actually in support of what's happening, and you could see it either on social media or you also see it in different journalists coming into Saudi Arabia. Who has got the finger on the pulse properly?

MS. SLAVIN: Let me piggyback on that. I mean, we're members of the blob. We are card-carrying members of the blob, let's face it.

MR. RIEDEL: Swamp I think is how we refer to it.

MS. SLAVIN: No, the blob, the foreign policy establishment. And I hear this all the time, you know, MbS is very popular in Saudi Arabia, everybody loves what he's doing. And also, how much of this reflects the fact that the people that we know in Saudi Arabia, many of them, and have known for many years have been pushed aside? And is there kind of sort of a personal feeling of anger at the fact that this upstart has now pushed aside all these characters that we were so familiar with for so many years?

MR. RIEDEL: I think it's a very, very hard question to answer because there is no monolithic Saudi view. It appears to be a monolithic view because if you ask Saudis on camera do you support the crown prince, what do you think they're going to say, you know? This is a police state. If you Tweet that you don't like it, you're not going to end up in the Ritz Carlton. You'll be in some place very different than that. So it's very hard to say.

I think what we can say with some confidence is that Muhammad bin Salman recognizes that his natural constituency is people his age and younger, and he has sought very assiduously to appeal to them. And a lot of these social changes are things that people in that age group very much want to see, we think.

For example, Saudi women driving. There's been a lot of articles that I've seen where Saudi men say I'm all for it except for my sister. (Laughter) We'll see. We'll see.

It's a good question. I'm just -- I don't know how to gauge Saudi public opinion. And at the end of the day, this is an absolute monarchy. Public opinion doesn't matter that much. It just doesn't matter that much. So important to keep an eye on, important to try to measure, but I'm not sure how we're going to get there.

And as Barbara alluded to earlier, whatever else there is in Saudi Vision 2030, there's no opening the door to an open political system. The kingdom has gone about as far as

I think it's going to go on that front with these municipal elections, which is significant. But I don't see them opening up the national political dialogue anytime in the future.

Not Muhammad bin Nayef, but his father, Prince Nayef, famously said, "I do not aspire to be king of Saudi Arabia to be the Queen Elizabeth of the kingdom." And I don't think there's a single Saudi prince who would disagree with that argument. They're not looking for a constitutional monarchy.

Yemen. I don't know about you, but I thought that *60 Minutes* program was pretty hard to watch. And if you watch the BBC the last couple of weeks, it's been horrifying. What's happening in Yemen today is the world's worst humanitarian calamity and it's a manmade calamity.

Now, all parties to this dispute, the Houthis, the Saudis, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who's no saint, have helped to create this problem. But it's the blockade that has turned this problem from a political issue and a way into a war in which famine and disease is now a weapon. Famine and disease is now a weapon and one side is using it. I think the Houthis probably are using it in Taiz, as well, but if you look at the big picture, one side is using it.

What is the United States doing about it? Well, let's be fair here, it was the Obama administration who probably had the best shot at stopping this when the war was in its infancy, even before it began. If the president had communicated clearly and unequivocally we would not support this, maybe we wouldn't have this problem now. That's not to criticize Obama It's to state it would have been much easier to end this war in its infancy than it is 30 months, years later.

Is the Trump administration troubled by this? I think there are parts of the Trump administration that are troubled by it. There are certainly a lot of people on the Hill who are now prepared to think about taking action. Whether they will take action remains to be seen. The

willingness of our Congress to do anything is a question mark these days. But despite one of the largest lobbying efforts in the history of this city, Saudi Arabia has lost support on the Hill, and Yemen I think is the single biggest reason for that.

What could the United States do? (Snaps fingers.) It could stop it like that, right now. All we have to do is tell the Royal Saudi Air Force there will be no spare parts tomorrow. There will be no munitions. There will be no logistics. The same for the other air forces in the coalition. We have enormous leverage here.

Now, we are very reluctant, for obvious reasons, a lot of reasons -- some obvious, some not so obvious -- to use that kind of leverage. It would be a near-death experience for the U.S.-Saudi relationship if we did it, it doesn't have to be done, as I just suggested. It can done in a much different way.

And I would go one step further. Our Saudi partner is now stuck in quagmire with no end in sight. That's expensive. That is materially benefiting its archenemy and our hostile rival, the Iranians. They need our help to get out of this mess. They badly need our help to get out of this mess. And they need a way to get out of this mess that preserves their honor, and that's going to be hard to do.

Because we and the United Kingdom, because we are the principal arms suppliers for Saudi Arabia, we have a distinct responsibility here. When you look at those pictures of Yemeni children starving to death, you're financing it. You have to be held accountable for what's going on there.

This is not happening without the support of the United States of America. This is not happening solely because of developments on the other side of the world. The United States is part of this. We ought to be responsible. We ought to help our Saudi friends find a way to get out of the quagmire that they're in today.

MS. SLAVIN: We have time, I think, for -- okay, we'll take all of those hands and that will be it. Everybody ask a very quick question and Bruce can pick and choose which ones he wants to answer. So there were four hands, go for it.

MR. ROGAN: Hi, I'm Charlie Rogan. I was just wondering if you see parallels between the rise of the new Wahhabi movement, as some have called it, in the late 1970s, obviously with the seizure of the Grand Mosque, as a result of modernization after the oil embargo and what's happening today? And, you know, is there a tight parallel to any potential, possible forecast in the same vein?

MS. SLAVIN: Okay, next.

MR. LIEBERMAN: Dan Lieberman. Yeah, as part of reviving the economy, Saudi Arabia has good possibilities of tourism. I was wondering will they open their doors to tourism? And the second part of that, will there ever be a Disney World in Saudi Arabia? (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

MR. TUAH: Benjamin Tuah. You referred to the Saudi intervention in Yemen in the '60s, and together with Israel collaborating. The common threat there seems to me that both Israel and Saudi Arabia had common interests at stake then as they do now: then against Egypt and today vis-à-vis Iran. And interestingly, the Saudis came in on the side of the Shias, if I'm correct, which suggests to me that what is involved is less sectarianism than state interests.

Given the constraints on Saudi action and the dangers, could these apparently reckless moves be simply opening positions for an eventual big negotiation? Because in addition to needed U.S. help, they need Iranian help if they want stability. Thank you.

MS. SLAVIN: Interesting question. And there was one other hand. Yes, the gentleman right there.

MR. EMBRY: Thanks. I'm Will Embry. Bruce, could you speculate on the future of the growing enmity between the Shia and the Sunni confessions?

MS. SLAVIN: Small questions.

MR. RIEDEL: I'm not sure, you're asking me to remember four questions at once, which is stretching my memory banks pretty far. I'll start with the last.

We have not seen the sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni burn as fiercely in my lifetime as we are seeing it today. We are in waters that are very, very dangerous. When there is no place for conversation, you will tear apart societies.

A very good example is Pakistan. When the Saudis went into Yemen, they expected Pakistani support. In fact, they expected Pakistan to provide the ground troops that were going to accompany the air war. The Pakistanis looked at it and said no way. No way. If we intervene in what is clearly sectarian conflict, we will tear our own country apart, and we're not going to do that.

And the Pakistani parliament voted unanimously against supporting Saudi Arabia. I don't think the Pakistani parliament votes unanimously on very many things. (Laughter) And saying no to the most important source of foreign assistance in the history of Pakistan was a huge step and showed how dangerous the situation is.

You're absolutely right about Yemen. In the 1960s, there was an overlap of interests. Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt with a bugaboo of both Saudi Arabia and Israel, and today there is the same overlapping interests with regard to the ayatollahs.

So, you know, in this sense, there's nothing new under the sun here. Clandestine cooperation beneath the surface has gone on for a long time and there's probably a lot more examples of that that I don't know about, that I do know about. Whether it can be transformed into something out of the shadows, I remain from Missouri, show me.

MS. SLAVIN: And the question was whether the Saudis will ever sit down with the Iranians to talk about it?

MR. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SLAVIN: I mean, the Iranians keep insisting that they're offering diplomacy, they are trying, and they're always rejected. And the Saudis come back and tell them get out of the Arab world, and that's it. And that's the sort of beginning and ending of the conversation.

MR. RIEDEL: I don't see any sign of interest in a deal from the Saudis so far. To the contrary, if you listen carefully to what they're saying now, it's regime change that they're looking for in Tehran, which I think is fantasy world. It's not realistic. We're not going to see engineered regime change by outside forces in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In a previous career I spent some considerable amount of time trying to think about how we would do that for Mr. Bill Casey. And at the end of the day, we the analysts were proven right, there was no way to bring about regime change in Saudi Arabia.

In that sense, one of the puzzling parts, and this is a big puzzle to close on, is what is the kingdom's end game? Do they have an end game? And that's what I come back to on all of these cases: Yemen, Qatar, Lebanon, and Iran, big picture. I don't see an end state strategy. I don't see how we get from where we are to an acceptable end game.

And I know Americans from bitter experience have learned you've got to figure that out before you get in. And we haven't always been smart about it ourselves. Heaven knows, we've not always been smart about it ourselves. But it's striking in this case.

MS. SLAVIN: I can't resist. Could it just be distraction? Could it be a Trump-like technique to keep people on edge? And is that part of what MbS is doing by moving from one crisis to another?

MR. RIEDEL: It may very well be. You know, I think what one can say now is

that he has pursued his primary objective, which is getting himself next in line behind his father, with an efficiency that is remarkable. So as I said earlier, it's not so hard to do when daddy is helping you do it, but is done.

Is he going to step back at this point and say, okay, I've got it? Now I've got to deal with some of these other things. An awful lot of world opinion is measured by editorials, not just in the United States, but around the world, is pressing Muhammad bin Salman now to focus on Saudi Vision 2030 and the reforms that he's talked about, the genuine reforms, like tourism.

My understanding of Saudi Vision 2030, this is not tourism for you, this is tourism for Muslims to use the infrastructure of Mecca and Medina 12 months of the year instead of just 1 month of the year, which makes a lot of sense. It makes no sense to have thousands of hotel rooms that no one occupies except during the Haj. That's smart. Whether that translates into tourism for a broader audience, we'll see. We'll see.

The bigger question, though, is now that he's secured this position, which path does Muhammad bin Salman pursue in the future? And I think that based on the data we have so far, it's very hard to proclaim with confidence that you know the answer. Saudi Arabia is more unpredictable and more volatile than before, and a young man is at the center of that unpredictability and volatility.

MS. SLAVIN: I want to thank you, Bruce. (Applause) Bruce is going to be signing books outside for those of you who want to buy it. It's a great read, I highly recommend it. And thank you all very much for coming.

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you. (Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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