



Author Series
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On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—And Future

Diana Negro Ponte: And now the reason you came this evening, to listen to our heroine. Friends, friends, we're going to start the program. Good evening. You are not here under false pretenses, you are here to meet, listen and buy the book, for Karen Elliott House, author of *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion*, and then the next part of the title that I like so much, *Fault lines—and Future*. Karen is a friend, author, journalist, an academic, but also a wonderful writer. Most of us can't write properly; she writes brilliantly. It's a book that you take with you on that train journey, that long airplane journey, and you don't want to put it down. She spent time in Saudi Arabia, many years—over many years this book has been written, and so it has a depth and feeling about life in Saudi Arabia, about its people, about its young people, about its women, its leaders, the family, Al-Saud; it is wonderful. But before she makes her remarks, I want to recognize some fellow colleagues and board members of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We are an organization which is dedicated to women's leadership, and giving a voice, a woman's voice on key international issues, of which Saudi Arabia is a key one, particularly as we hear that the Saudi government is committed to supporting the Syrian opposition and that raises questions about how, when and where. But, fellow trustees: Gail Kitch, Carolyn Brehm, thank you very much, Donna McLarty! Donna, welcome to the group, you are a new board member, we are very pleased. And then we have two corporate members, our corporate council, DLA Piper and Procter and Gamble, and to both of them, thank you for your ongoing support. We appreciate it very much. From the diplomatic core, we have the Ambassador Abdallah Baali from Algeria and Yasmina Baali, we are very grateful, Ambassador of Bosnia, and we thank you for joining us and continue your great support. And now, for those who want a chair, grab one from the dining room. And now I will pass the microphone to the reason why you came here this evening, Karen Elliott House.

Karen Elliott House: Thank you, Diana. Thank you all very much for coming. It is a great opportunity for me, always, to talk about my favorite subject—Saudi Arabia—a country that I've been visiting off-and-on 30 years, and then intensively for the last 5. I began going for *The Wall Street Journal* so my life there was seeing officials on geopolitical or oil issues. And when I retired as publisher of *The Journal*, what I really wanted to do was understand the society, to see if one could talk to real people about real life, what did they think of each other, what did they think of their leaders, what did they think of us, and what could one deduce about the stability, of what to me is the most important Arab country. Because Saudi Arabia produces one of every four barrels of oil for export that anybody in the world can buy. And secondly because it does, and is, the well-spring of a lot of Islamic fundamentalism, which produces people who want to undo the western way of life. So they are both the source of preservation, and the source of, in the minds of some, destruction of the western way of life.

People ask me, why did you spend all that time? It is probably the strangest country most of you will never see. [*Laughter*]. And it is probably much less strange to me, as I try to say in the preface of the book, because of my own upbringing. I'm from a tiny town in the panhandle of Texas, where religion was the main source of entertainment of our town. There were 900 people, we had four churches, and one blinking stoplight, and no movie theaters. So everyone went to church. And I had a father who was very conservative so no pants, no shorts, no alcohol, no musical instruments in the church, no dice.

Even though we did have a Monopoly game, we had to hide it under the bed every time my father came home. So I found Saudi Arabia probably less strange [*Laughter.*], than most of you would.

My goal was to look at the people with an eye on stability. And to be brief about it, my view is that stability in the kingdom rests on three pillars: oil wealth, the religious establishment, and the Al-Saud family. And those latter two have a very symbiotic relationship that they've had since the mid-eighteenth century, when they met up with each other and decided to conquer Arabia. One wanted to conquer Arabia for Allah, and the other, the Al-Saud, wanted to conquer it for themselves, but together they did. And the Al-Saud have ruled Saudi Arabia off and on for the last 250 years. And, as I try to explain in the book, I think all three of those pillars have cracks. For us, it is very hard to—in a secular society—to understand how pervasive religion is, even for somebody like me. In every shopping mall, in every school, in every government building, there are prayer rugs with the proper point towards Mecca so that people know where to pray and obviously the call to prayer tells you when to pray. It is all-pervasive, all the time.

And I lived with a very religious woman who had translated for me at several meetings over several years with an imam's family. He had told me "you should see my mother and sisters and wife so you will understand how lucky Saudi women are and how happy they are." So my first meeting with them, she was the translator, and she got out a notebook when I walked in and she started to read to me. And I said I haven't asked any—and she noticed I wasn't taking notes, and she said, "You're supposed to take notes," she said, "I'm giving you answers." And I said, "but I haven't asked any questions!" [*Laughter.*] And so I explained to her how this was going to work, and she was so flustered that she could not translate. So she took the cell phone and called her brother, and for three hours her brother translated through a cell phone on speaker. Me to them, and them to me. And it was a very tense meeting, because they felt American women are really uncaring, self-centered women who—they asked me "do you ever see your mother?" You know, they had the idea that we're all busy, I guess having sex, ignoring our children and our parents, etc. Over time it got much better. But this lady translated, and I conceived of the idea that to really understand, I should live in somebody's home who was very conservative. But they needed to speak English, so I hit up on her, and she said yes.

And the country is—people live behind walls. Everyone's homes are surrounded by walls, and their minds are surrounded by even bigger walls so that the kingdom is, to me, very much like a set of those Russian dolls. The little inside one is an individual who is trapped inside his family, who is trapped inside his tribe, who is trapped inside the religious establishment, who are trapped inside the Al-Saud family. There's very little individuality or initiative or independence, obviously. So I wanted to experience life. I go to see this lady, and she opens the gate, and we go in and she says "she lives down here and I live up here." So wife number one lived downstairs, and she lived upstairs. And the husband went up and down every other day; one day with one family, and one day with the next. He and wife number one had eight children, and he and wife number two that I was living with had seven. And she was a very admirable and sincere woman because her only interest in life was getting her family to paradise. And I asked her daughter, nineteen-year old daughter, on a subsequent visit, "How do you think your life will be different from your mother's?" and she said, "my mother is doing everything possible to make sure I have a life *exactly* like she does." And she said that very admiringly. And I just visited them again in January and they all are consistent with this view. The wife had no interest in driving or going out. I was never introduced to the husband, even though he picked us up once—and we all had to be totally shrouded—and I sat right behind him. I might as well have been Casper the friendly ghost. There was no word ever exchanged, it was like I wasn't there. They talked to each other, and we got home.

So religion is a very omnipresent factor. But within these walls that everyone lives in, and these figurative walls of tribe, religion, Al-Saud, the internet and social media, and satellite TV are really beginning to break through those walls. 60% of the population of Saudi Arabia is under 20 years of age, and young people are communicating ferociously. Saudi Arabia has a population of roughly 27 million people—under 20 million Saudis, and the rest are foreigners. And they view 90 million YouTube videos a day. Because there is no other entertainment for people, so this ability to communicate matters a lot.

And I think it is changing people's views of each other, not unlike when the Pope went to Poland in the '80's and the Poles all discovered, when people turned out for the Pope, I'm not the only one who's anti-communist, who's Catholic. You know, they see hundreds of thousands of people and realize they're not alone. I think Saudis are also having—somewhat—that same kind of communication. So the religious pillar is, in my view, cracking, because people are increasingly seeing and discussing the gap between the way religion is preached and practiced. So it is preached constantly, for instance, that mixing of men and women is wrong and must not occur. And King Abdullah has created a new university outside of Jeddah where Saudi men and women mix, and Saudi men and women mix with infidel men and women. So when one of the senior religious scholars was asked on TV, "is this proper?" he said no. The king fired him, and certain of the other twenty senior scholars began to discover that the prophet had had his hair washed by women, and maybe it wasn't so wrong. So if you're very religious, like the lady I lived with, you feel that this is totally improper. And if you're a modernizer you say, "well if the king can get away with that, if he can create a mixed university against the will of the religious, why can't he do more?" Why can't he let women drive? Why can't he allow other western educational institutions into the kingdom, the way Qatar has? Or whatever your favorite desire is. And young people see palaces that stretch for blocks, and wonder what that has to do with the humility that the prophet preached. All of these things are on visible display, if you will, and has begun to erode the credibility of the religious establishment. And, by extension, the credibility of the Al-Saud because it is the religious establishment that gives the good housekeeping seal of religious approval to the family, which is their reason for ruling, is to propagate and perpetuate the one true Islam. Otherwise they're just another tribe.

Oil wealth is another pillar. Oil wealth is what funds everything. It is still 90% of the Saudi treasury. They don't tax, so the money comes from oil. Most people work for the government or do not work at all. 90% of all the employees in the private sector are foreigners, because most Saudis prefer to work for the government; the hours are shorter, and you can't be fired. And since, in university, they study things like Islamic history and Arabic literature, by and large, most of them are not trained for the world of work. So unemployment is about 40%, between young people ages 20-24. We all think of Saudi Arabia as a very rich country, and it does have an enormous amount of money, but it is not a very rich people. There are very rich people, and there are a lot of poor people. And that was actually the hardest thing to penetrate, was to actually get to see poor people. I finally did. There are roughly 40% of people who live on less than \$1000 a month. So, hardly high living. But the oil wealth, because energy is subsidized in the country—gasoline is something like 50 cents a gallon, and electricity is cheap—people waste a lot. So the domestic consumption is rising, and Saudis have begun to discuss what if we don't have enough to export? And where does the money come from? There is a financial institution in Saudi Arabia that has predicted that the budget of the country will exceed oil revenue by 2014. I don't know if that will prove to be true, it obviously depends on the price of oil. And some Saudis have begun to look at the issue of American growing energy self-sufficiency and what does that mean for world oil prices. But clearly oil wealth is an enormous pillar because it buys acquiescence, if not the loyalty of the people.

And the third, and in my view, the most important is the Al-Saud family itself, which faces a generational change. When the founder of modern Saudi Arabia died in 1953, his eldest son succeeded him and he had 44 sons by 22 wives, and 36 of them lived to adulthood. So the crown has passed from brother to brother. And the current brother, King Abdullah, is nearly 90 years old, and the youngest one is 67. So, either by their choice or by God forcing it on them, they're going to have to pick a next generation prince somewhere in the next decade. The king has tried to set up some of the younger nephews, but I think they clearly have not been able to agree on any of those younger princes, because they just named two weeks ago this youngest brother, Prince Muqrin, as the third in line. Even though people have said, for all 30 years I have been going to Saudi Arabia, "Muqrin can never be king because his mother is a Yemeni, and you need to have a Saudi mother." But I guess—and maybe he still won't be king, but he's third in line. I think they face a number of internal issues, and that the combination of them, more than any one of them, I think, poses problems for them. And then externally—and I'm sure some of you will want to talk more about the external issues—Iran, Syria, democratic impulse and

upheaval in the greater Middle East, also make it more difficult for them to deal with their internal issues. So my analogy at the end of the book was to compare the country to a 747, where the cockpit is crowded with geriatric pilots [*Laughter.*], first class is crowded by princes who would be pilots—meaning this next generation—and the economy has a lot of frustrated unemployed youth, and a few jihadists, and some terrorists who would like to turn the plane around and hijack it to parts unknown. So that's the metaphor I leave you with, and I look forward to questions. [*Applause.*]

Negroponte: There are many questions, and I know Pat is ready with the first question right out the box.

Patricia Ellis: Well, it's actually a three part question—two external and one internal. If you could talk a little bit of the news, which is the stepped up involvement of Saudi Arabia in aiding the Syrian rebels, to the importance of the drone base in Saudi Arabia. And number three, this youth unemployment, particularly amongst all these educated Saudis who've been studying in the United States and other places, and they're also the same ones who are really into the social media and the internet. So, thank you.

House: I'll take number two first. I do not know the importance of the drone base there. I just don't know. I would assume it's very important because they don't really want an American military presence. They made a big point of getting us out, because that is another thing that has made the royal family unpopular with the religious conservatives. Having American infidel military in the country is a no-no, beginning with the invitation to US troops in 1990, so they have gotten out. So they clearly think it's important. On the first, their more active role in Syria—I personally think that it's déjà-vu all over again. That they constantly say to people like me, you know, "you Americans, you wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein. He was a nasty guy, yes he was a nasty guy, but you never thought about what you were going to do. And look what a mess you made, you handed Iraq to Iran on a silver platter." I think they want to get rid of Assad, who is indeed a nasty guy, and they're not thinking of what kind of mess they're helping to create. Even though at least the government says they're trying to keep the money and weapons out of the hands of jihadists, I don't think that's likely, so again—

Question: You mean you don't think it's possible or you don't think it's true—that they're being truthful?

House: Well, I don't know if it's true, but even if it's true, I don't think it's likely to succeed. And I think there are people, certainly in Saudi Arabia and in the religious wing of the country, that are delighted to fund those people. And money oozes out of the kingdom in all kinds of ways, so I think there's a big risk to them and us, from what's going on in Syria. And our government tries to keep arms length from it probably, in my view, too much. And they're eager to get in. So I just think it's going to get more and more unpleasant. And when it gets to be incredibly unpleasant in Syria, it will be incredibly unpleasant for everybody in the whole area. And the young people, what was the question?

Ellis: Well, what are the implications...?

House: The implications of all these 100,000+ Saudis coming back with no jobs... What they say is that they have 8 million foreigners working in the country. Now, a lot of those are taxi drivers and street sweepers, and jobs that Saudis don't want. But there are middle class, you know, some white collar jobs that these people are going to come back and take those jobs. That assumes they've studied something here that would qualify them for those jobs. I think these people will have a big impact. Because if they've actually mixed in this country, and seen and learned a bit about the way other people live, they can communicate when they're back. I mean they're not cut off. So, what happened to most of the Saudis who went to western universities in the past, they come back and they're quickly absorbed back under the Russian dolls, you know, they're back in the tribe, back in the family—smothered. But now I think they will have a much better chance of staying in touch with each other, and they certainly have much higher expectations.

Ellis: So they're going to put a lot of pressure on the government?

House: That may be the difficulty for the government—meeting the expectations.

Negroponte: I know there are other questions. We've got one here, and Mitzy, and several over there. Just please tell us your name.

Question: Charles Sills. You mentioned, of course, the increasing impact of social media in the kingdom. How about the influence of the nearby Emirates, which have been so much more socially progressive and modern, even since in the 70's when, in Bahrain, there were women cabinet members, etc. Then finally the causeway was built, against some Saudi objections. What about those influences from the nearby, far more modern Arab Emirates?

Negroponte: Thank you. And Mitzy?

Question: In 2005, I got into the energy game. And the thing that I kept hearing was, every year, when the questions were how much oil do you have—every year the answer came out the same, as if none was extracted. I mean, it was sort of an interesting game. The other thing I wanted to ask about is—I have a young friend who is a female, Saudi breast surgeon. And I'd really like to know something about women working. Because she actually went *back* to Saudi—she had a baby here—and turned out to be so unhappy, she can't wait to come back. So what's happening with these women who are getting educated and have jobs?

House: I think women are, as I say in the book—the activist women—are the thin wedge of change, but there's a bigger body behind them. Women do, not unlike women here, need to work to help support families, because people think the government education is not good, they want to send their children to a private school. That costs money. Women are doctors and there, they are almost—I'm fond of saying, which I believe is true—a western woman in Saudi Arabia is an honorary man. You can go anywhere, you get treated like, you know, a man. The men talk to you, and the women talk to you, so it's a big advantage. Saudi women doctors are almost honorary men. They can practice—much ritual is made of keeping women and men separate—but a woman can save a man, just like she can save anyone else. So there are lots of really impressive female doctors. The career mostly open otherwise to women is teaching, but that one is overcrowded now. But here are a lot of very intelligent, active women. Pediatricians who are trying to create family safety, to make beating your children and wife a crime, not just a family issue, which is how Saudis mostly look at it now. It's my property, if I want to rape my five year old daughter and murder her, as someone recently did, you just do it. So I think women are becoming much more educated and activist because of the education. ARAMCO—the Saudi oil company, which is an island in the kingdom, and a really interesting island because it really doesn't have much impact at all on the rest of the country. But, at ARAMCO, there are movie theaters, there are Sh'ias, there are Sunnis, there are men and women mixing; it's a totally normal place. And they can all get along and be productive in what's largely a meritocracy, which the rest of the country isn't. So they are taking women and sending them to the US. So I think women are a source of hope in Saudi Arabia.

People in Saudi Arabia go across the causeway every Wednesday before their holy days, Thursday and Friday. The causeway has a two hour backup of Saudis going to Bahrain. People say, families say, "I just want to go watch a movie." And you say but you can watch it in your house, you can rent any kind of movie, but they want to see it with other people. They want to hear other people laugh or cry. It *is* different, watching a movie in your house and in a theater. In the book, I profiled—just to show the diversity of the country and of the royal family—four different princes. But one of them is the son of the current crown prince, who the Americans sent up in space as an astronaut in 1984. A guy named Prince Sultan bin Salman, who is their minister of tourism, which is an oxymoron [*Laughter.*] actually, since the only thing most people want to see, you're not allowed to see: Mecca. But he said to me, "we can't keep residing in Saudi Arabia and living only when we leave the country." And I think that's a

really terrific summation of the way a lot of people feel. It's this sense of being a mummy, wrapped and bound, all the time. And it's why people do want to go out. They don't really travel around Saudi Arabia. I can't tell you how many people expressed amazement to me, "you've been to Tabuk, you've been to Najran, you've been to the Eastern Province, you've been to Qatif"—I mean, I went all over the country. And Saudis don't do that; they go to these nearby gulf countries, or to the US and Europe. They have no curiosity about their own country.

Question: But you were an honorary man, so you could go anywhere you want.

Karen Elliott House: Yes, obviously if you're going to write a book about Saudi society, it would be like trying to write about America if you could only go to Washington and New York. [*Laughter.*] So I knew I couldn't go to just Riyadh and Jeddah, I had to go all over.

Question: I'm Sara Jane Crisanda, I'm with the Wilson Center as an intern. You talked a little about the three pillars, and about how they all have cracks. Do you think if one of them crumbles, that Saudi Arabia is going to fall victim to the Arab Awakening or the Arab Spring? Or do you think they're going to find a different way than the countries around them, because they look at the other countries and they say we don't want that to be our path?

Question: Shari Brown, DLA Piper. I would be curious to know what it is you like about Saudi Arabia, and what has drawn you back. I was there last week, I want to go back. It'll be another visit back—there is something that draws you there, and I'd like to know what that is and I'd like you to share that with everyone.

House: I'll take the last first. My editor asked me the same thing. It's really the only question she asked me about the book: "why are you doing this, why are you going there?" [*Laughter.*] For the last five years, when I turned it into her. And I said "because it's interesting." And she said "*Paris* is interesting." [*Laughter.*] She said go back there and don't try to report. Just sit there and answer the question she's asking, why am I drawn to this place? So I went back in January of 2011, and landed the night the president of Tunisia landed going into exile. But I think it is so different, everything about it is so different from us. You know, we Americans like to think that everybody—deep down, we're all alike. I don't think that's true. Saudis really do have a different way of processing and looking at life than most of us. And part of that is religious, and part of it is probably just the long tradition. But it's an absolutely fascinating place. There's no place else in the world where somebody tells you, "you don't really need to go to a gym, you just need to pray," [*Laughter.*] and gets down and shows you how limber you'll be if you just pray. The Imam's mother told me that, the 60 old. She was actually only one year younger than I, but she assured me that—and she was very limber. When I sat on my knees on the floor to eat my knees started to hurt, hers clearly didn't. I do not have a good answer for that, except to say that it is, I think for me, it is both the similarities to my upbringing and the total differences. Plus I enjoy talking religion with people. I read the Quran three times. I have, I think, a high antenna for hypocrisy. So I really enjoyed religious conversations.

On what will it be like: if I knew the answer to that, I would be invaluable. Saudis are very passive because they're very dependent—on family, on tribe, on government. As one of them said to me, "we're not responsible. Other people decide things for us." You just absolve yourself of responsibility for anything—it's kind of...and yet, young Saudis, I think have an enormous amount of frustration, because not unlike young people here, they have extremely high expectations. They say, "we've got all this oil money, it's ours, it's not theirs." And they don't have the same respect or fear of the royal family that their parents had, or grandparents, who lived through a time when the kingdom was truly poor and people described having one outfit and sitting naked while they washed it. I mean, people don't have a lot of what they want, but they're not hungry. They're eating a lot of chicken and rice, but they're not hungry.

They do not want democracy, they say. They want quote “justice.” And if you ask, “what does that mean,” people explain it by saying “we want transparency and accountability by the government.” When things go wrong, nobody ever loses their job, nobody ever stands up—and it’s not unlike we’re becoming—but no one ever stands up and says “I did that and I’m gone.” And we want transparency about where the money comes from, where it goes to. And we want equality under the law. We want laws; we want clear laws and laws enforced equally. One of the terrorists I interviewed, who came out of Guantanamo who went through the rehabilitation program, he said, “I decided I learned something from being in Guantanamo.” And I said, “so what did you learn?” And he said, “two things: that there were rules, and they were enforced equally on everybody, and second that there was a time for everything and everything occurred on time.” And those are two things, obviously, that do not happen in Saudi Arabia. I thought that was interesting that those were the two things that stuck with him.

Question: Could you talk a little bit about Wahhabism and Sufism that seem—that have impacted so much, really, the rest of the world. The Wahhabism, and the funding of all the madrasas around the world, and the growth of jihadism, if you could talk about that. And what has been the US stand on that, and do we relate to that?

Question: I just wanted to add a little bit about why one likes Saudi Arabia, and I think it probably applies a lot the Middle East as well. But it’s the love of family, the love of religion—once a friend, always a friend. And if you meet a Saudi, you’ll kiss once on one side, once on the other side. And then, if you’re *really* a friend, they’ll hold your back and they’ll do it again, and you know you’re in there. But just finally—we’re very particular: we give a dinner party, we want to know who’s coming, and we put place cards. If you’re invited to a dinner in Saudi Arabia, and all of the sudden you have fifty uncles who’ve just arrived, you call up the hostess and she says, “bring them all.” It’s just wonderful, open hospitality. These are just light points, but I think you do feel warm, that they’re ready for friendship on a personal level.

House: The people are incredibly nice, if they choose to deal with you at all. [*Laughter.*] No, no, I didn’t mean that, that way. If they let you into your house, they really go overboard to be nice and generous, even when they can’t afford it, which makes you feel bad. One of the poor ladies I went to visit, her husband was in prison for drug-selling, and she and her three kids had one bed in one room, and, of course, the eternal lavatory for washing up for prayer. I go with this Saudi lady to visit her, and she makes tea in her little plastic pot and she brings out what I suspect were the last of her dates, and that was all she had to offer, but she offered it. It’s far more appreciated than when you go to rich people’s houses, who bring out endless things. But people are very generous, which is nice.

I don’t think the American government knows what to do about religion in Saudi Arabia. In my own view, we certainly have to respect their religion, but not the jihadist aspect of their religion. And I think we should be more inclined to say that more often. Lee Kuan Yew, this new book, if you haven’t seen it, by Graham Allison and Bob Blackwell, I just reviewed for *The Journal*. And I interviewed Lee many times over the twenty years, but the most interesting chapter in his book is on the future of Islamic radicalism. And he says, which I agree with, that the West—meaning America—can’t defeat Islamic radicalism, because the people we hit with drones are the worker bees, and the queen bees, who are the preachers, are safely in their mosques propagating these things. And that Saudi Arabia will be critical to what happens, because they’ve led people to believe that they are the gold standard for Islam, and it’s a standard that includes an unpleasant side effect. And that, if other more moderate Muslims don’t stand up themselves to defend against this brand of Islam, then they are all going to wind up living under Taliban governments or Iranian theocracies, so they better start standing up. And that what we in the West should do is be encouraging them. It’s more sophisticated than I’m explaining, but it’s an interesting view, which I think is right. I think the Saudis, because they need the religious establishment for their legitimacy—some of them say “we don’t need that, you know, we’re legitimate. We’ve run this place well for 250 years, we don’t need that blessing anymore,”—but that’s still part of the compact, if you will. And until they’re more willing to stand up to the religious—which Abdullah has

been, a bit—then I think you'll have the religious continue to spread a perhaps a kinder, gentler view of Islam at home in Saudi Arabia and a less kind and gentle view outside of Saudi Arabia.

Question: Hi my name is Elizabeth Close. I'd like to circle back to the women's issue just for a moment, and ask you if you've met many women who have a positive outlook on the women's situation in Saudi Arabia. Because a lot of my Saudi friends find this to be a really exciting time. 60% of the college graduates today in the kingdom are women, and the King has built the Princess Nora University—which is the size of the University of Michigan—which is all women. They are, actually, I think the secret sauce in the Kingdom that, were they to be unleashed, it would be a real economic powerhouse. I think the women there generally work harder than the men, and I think if you have something to do, you'd be pretty lucky to have a woman on your side there. And I think some of my friends say that they've seen more change in the last three years, than in the last 20. So are we expecting them to have a confrontational bra-burning revolution? No, unlikely there. But don't you find that the vast majority of the new businesses in the kingdom are started by women? So they're kind of going up and over the gender segregation issue, and starting their own businesses. There are a lot of entrepreneurs there, and I was just wondering if you've have any experiences or friends...

House: There are a lot of incredibly impressive women in business, in medicine, in universities. And there are a lot of women who live what we would call perfectly normal lives. They just don't have the freedom to drive or to do a number of other things. Driving is not by any means the number one issue to Saudi women. They are more interested in opportunity and legal standing than, can I drive, the wealthier women. For poorer women it is a bigger issue to have some ability to be mobile. But I think it is—people constantly predict well, they're going to let western women drive first, or they're going to let doctors—female doctors—drive. And this is how they will do it someday. When they introduced girls' education into the kingdom, the king said, "we're having schools your girls can go to, it's optional, you don't have to. Mine are going." And pretty soon, women all went. And it's the same way, he's now put these 30 women into the Majlis Ash-Shura, this pretend parliament, where he appoints all the people, but at least it is an opportunity for public debate. And I think the king is quite serious about wanting women to have more opportunity. But, for the religious establishment, and people like the lady that I lived with, this is the slippery slope to Hell. You know, having women out there—if I don't care if they now let women work in lingerie stores and cosmetics stores, she is absolutely convinced that if women are working, even in segregated stores, the next thing you know they're going to be men in there, they're going to be running off with the men, and it's the end. And she's not the only person who thinks that. But there are many women who continue to move ahead and to push on all kinds of things, whether it's more women's rights, more legal representation for women, homes for battered women, attempts to create both protection and laws against beating your wife and your children. So there is a lot going on, but everybody is careful to do it in the name of the Quran. So, as I say in the book, and as you just said, they're not going to be bra-burning. They're using the Quran to defend themselves against the religious establishment, the same way the religious establishment uses the Quran on women.

Question: But that's good right? I mean, the prophet's first wife was a very successful entrepreneur...

House: Yeah, they didn't get all this stuff from the prophet Mohammad, who they are so eager to emulate in every aspect. As you say, his first wife was a very successful businesswoman. She asked *him* to marry *her*, not the other way around. And when the man who succeeded the prophet as leader of the faithful, when he was just a companion, and came to Mohammad's house and complained about—after the prophet's first wife died, he then married numerous other women, but while she was alive, he was married only to her—and so his numerous wives are milling around and talking to him. And this companion of the prophet said to him in essence, "shape these women, they're talking to you." And one of his wives said, "listen, if the prophet doesn't mind it," in essence, "get out of here." So the time of the prophet—women were not treated as they are now. The Wahhabis have all kinds of *hadith* that they can cite these sayings and examples of the prophet. Not the Quran, all these things written down 150 years after the prophet was dead that they used to control everyone with.

Negroponte: Karen, do you have the strength, the courage, the will, for two more questions?

Question: Urmila Venugopalan, I was born and raised in Qatar. And my family and I represented one of the many South Asian expatriates that dominate, in many ways, the GCC. And we traveled extensively around the GCC, and my husband and I just returned from Dubai—we relocated from Dubai. So I've been able to witness the different societal and cultural aspects of the GCC, and how different each of the countries are. We actually traveled extensively around the region during the Arab Spring. And so my question is, to what extent did the Arab Spring affect and change the dynamic between the three pillars that you talk about in your book? And has it exacerbated the tensions or the relationship, and to what extent, do you think, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, do you think that the relationship between the three pillars will continue to change, or will it sort of revert back to what it was before the Arab Spring?

Question: Hi. Helene Genetos, United States Institute of Peace. I used to work for King Abdullah University of Science and Technology. And I was curious what your thoughts were on the future of KAUST, and if there's a future for similar institutions, both co-ed and also international, there are 62 countries represented at KAUST by students and faculty.

House: The Arab Spring certainly increased the sensitivity in the royal family, to what was going on in the region. The king came back and passed out \$130 billion dollars to try to assuage, make everyone happy. And I think in many ways it just made people say, "see? There's a lot of money, give me more." I don't think it made people any happier. And to the extent that it made them even less enterprising, I think that was not a good thing. Because somewhere, at some point in time, Saudis are going to have to work in the private sector, not just for the government because the population is just too big, and the economy needs to be less stultified and more creative. Otherwise, I cannot profess to know how the religious establishment would have changed because I haven't been there talking to the religious people in the last two years. But I think, to the extent that things do not go well in Egypt and Syria—and they're not going well—that does tend to make Saudis a little more inclined to say, "well we better be careful what we wish for." The people I've talked, at least, have no wholesale desire to throw out the royal family—there are some who definitely want to do that—they would just like a more energetic, alive person. And the country is very much like the old Soviet Union in the 80's, when Brezhnev died followed by a half-dead Andropov, who died quickly, who was followed by half-dead Chernenko, who died quickly. You know, sort of comatose leadership. I mean, people like Abdullah, but he's 90 years old and he just doesn't have a lot of energy and enterprise.

On the issue of KAUST, the new university that King Abdullah had built that has supposedly an endowment given by him, second only to Harvard. I think it will not have any impact—much—on the rest of education in the country because it's an island; people can't go there. It's just like ARAMCO. The things that function in Saudi Arabia are really off-limits to the rest of the population. So, if you don't work at ARAMCO, you don't visit. It's a gated community, so people don't get to visit this university. It's like us trying to visit Fort Knox. You don't do it.

Ambassador John Negroponte: The gold is all gone anyways. [*Laughter.*]

House: That's what I hear. [*Laughter.*] What they said the king wanted—and he took it away from the ministry of education, and had it created and built by ARAMCO with the idea that it would ultimately be a beacon of light and would change the rest of Saudi education. But Saudi education is really still the pervue of the religious, and it will be a long, hard battle. They've re-written textbooks, but as the guy who was in charge of that said, "when the teacher closes the door, who knows what she says; we can't control it." So KAUST is there, Princess Nora University, which she mentioned that the king built in Riyadh, named after his favorite sister. 50,000 students. But Saudis say, "where are they going to get jobs?" These 50,000 women, they're not allowed to do anything but teach, and teaching is already full. Most of them won't become doctors, and Saudi women don't want to be nurses. That's a field only

beginning to be—it's not that it's not open to women, but their families don't want them doing something like that. So the country is full of Filipino nurses who are getting trained there, and then try to get a job in New York, and succeed in some cases. Thank you all very much. [*Applause.*]

Negroponete: Karen, for one hour you have kept us riveted. You've kept 30 people standing on their feet. Their arthritis is flaming up, including yours. But your capacity to capture a country, which for many of us is a mystery and for some of us is a country of great allure and great sensitivity, and I think you captured that in this hour that you've shared with us. So from each one of us here, thank you! [*Applause.*]

House: On behalf of each one of us here, thank you to you for hosting this!

Pat Ellis: And I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank Diana and John Negroponete for their very warm hospitality, and thank you all some much for joining. And Karen you were fantastic, we really appreciate everything that you've done. [*Applause.*]