



Author Series
March 11, 2013
New York, NY

Karen Elliott House
Author and Former Publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*

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

Jonah Kokodyniak: Good afternoon and thank you for coming to the Institute. I'm our deputy vice president for strategic development, and we're pleased to host the Women's Foreign Policy Group, especially this discussion by Karen Elliott House on an area that's of great importance to IIE and our work on education exchange and scholarship management. To give a very brief overview, we've worked very closely with the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia to identify students from around the world, both men and women, who will make up the initial classes of that university. And through two of our centers, our Center for Leadership Development in Cairo and our center for Women's Leadership, we undertake a range of training programs, both for youth—for university students—and for women throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf, which include things from providing scholarships to underrepresented students throughout the region, to bringing groups of women in technical fields to undertake internships at Silicon Valley corporations throughout the Bay Area. So this is something that is very close to our work, and we are very excited to hear Karen speak about her perspective on Saudi Arabia. Thank you.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you so much, Jonah. I also want to recognize Peggy Blumenthal, our long-term partner from IIE. We just want to thank IIE once again for their very warm hospitality. We love coming here and meeting and partnering on many different programs, and we look forward to many more. So thank you all so much for coming. I'm Patricia Ellis, president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group; we promote women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day, and certainly our topic today, Saudi Arabia, is always one in the news. Most recently, the Saudis have announced stepped-up aid to the Syrian rebels—Secretary of State Kerry has just been in Saudi Arabia—so there's always something happening in the relationship.

We're so lucky to have Karen Elliott House here. She has such an impressive background. I'm just going to say a few things. She is a Pulitzer winning author and reporter. She's covered Saudi Arabia for 30 years, [and has] spent a long time working on this book to help us understand what Saudi Arabia is really all about, it's so shrouded in myth and mystery. The book is really fantastic, I highly commend it, and we do have it for sale there. It's a great read on all aspects of Saudi Arabia—political, economic, cultural—and it's really very, very interesting. So Karen was the publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*, she was the foreign editor, she was diplomatic correspondent—that's when I knew her in Washington. I was covering foreign affairs for MacNeil Lehrer, she was at *The Wall Street Journal*. So today we're really lucky to have her here to discuss her new book, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—And Future*. Just wanted to say welcome, our friends from US Mission and everyone else. I just wanted to mention, she got the Pulitzer for reporting and for coverage of the Middle East. She won several other awards, but one other I'll mention [is] a Hood Award for Excellence in Reporting for a series on Saudi Arabia. She's currently an adjunct fellow at the Belfer Center at the Kennedy School at Harvard. So please join me in welcoming Karen Elliott House. [Applause.]

Karen Elliott House: Thank you, Pat. Nice to see—I never can say old friends anymore at my age—but I also had the privilege of being a public delegate at the United Nations in 2008, so I got to deal with

Millie [Meyers]. I'm not sure why you're wearing orange; I'm wearing orange because I went to the University of Texas, but it looks good on you. I want to try to be brief, because I'm much more interested in everyone's questions. I am fond of saying Saudi Arabia is the strangest place you'll probably never see because most Americans do not have the—what I regard as—privilege of visiting there. As Pat said, I began going there in 1978 for *The Wall Street Journal* as diplomatic correspondent when the Saudis were buying arms from the US. Actually, in those days it was much more, if you will, free than it is now. I did not wear *abayas*; I wore long-sleeves, but normal length skirts. I remember actually going to dinner for that series on Saudi Arabia at a prince's home with his men in a room about this size. They were all sitting on the floor praying before dinner, and he talked to me in English and them in Arabic. And I was wearing just a skirt and blouse, with a skirt that came to my knees. When it came time to get up move and sit along the piece of plastic in the hallway to eat with our hands, the men simply could not look at me, because—I think it was like my first visit at age 22 to a topless beach in Copenhagen. I simply couldn't—it was too horrifying to look at anyone. The fact that I had bare legs was just too horrifying to look at, so they averted their eyes.

I went there repeatedly, but mostly to look at geo-political issues, so Iraq-Iran, Arab-Israeli, US-Saudi, oil. So when I retired in 2006 as publisher of *The Journal*, the one I really wanted to do was to see if it was possible to really write a book about Saudi society and culture, and try to understand how do they look at each other, how they look at their leaders, how they look at their religion, how they look at us, and what does all that say about the stability of a country that, to me, is the one genuinely strategic Arab country for the US because of oil, which underpins the western livelihood, and because of the role of Wahhabi Islam, frankly, in spreading terror, which threatens the very way of life. So [for] both our livelihood and our lives, I think the country is very important to understand. I went there [again], and it was necessary to wear an *abaya* because otherwise now you attract far too much attention. And, as it turns out actually, an *abaya* is a very useful thing. I did not cover my head; I always kept my scarf where, if the religious police, as they did several times, come up and say in perfect English, "cover your head, you're in Saudi Arabia," I could do so. And I covered my face again only when seeing senior religious people, a *Sharia* judge who insisted he would not see me unless I was totally covered up. But my goal was to really see if I could get all over the country, because I knew you couldn't pretend to understand, let alone write about a society, if you couldn't get all over the country and see all kinds of people. It would be like trying to explain US society by visiting New York and Washington, you know. It wouldn't be very accurate. And I did. I mean it took five years of real persistence, but I did manage to see rich people, poor people, businesspeople, women, men, young people, old people, religious people, princes. And [I] have my own set of conclusions, whether they prove to be right or wrong. My bottom line is that the country faces far more difficulties than the US ever wishes to acknowledge, partly because we don't know what to do about it. So we just do the ostrich thing, put your head in the sand and pretend it's not happening.

The country basically has three pillars of stability: the royal family, the religious establishment—which has 70,000 mosques and 20 senior scholars who make all the interpretations and rules—and oil wealth. And those three things are what the family uses to bind people in dependency, if not happiness. And, in my view, all of those pillars have cracks. And I will try to be quick on this, but he mentioned KAUST. As all of you know, women and men are forbidden to mix in Saudi Arabia, unless you're related. And King Abdullah created this university outside of Jeddah, where not only Saudi men and women are mixing, but [they're also] mixing with infidel men and women, and that is obviously very upsetting to truly conservative religious people. A lot of the senior clerics have call-in TV shows and one of them was asked, is this proper, and he said no. And the king fired him. Then some of the other senior scholars began to discover that the prophet had had his hair washed by women, and various other things to excuse it. But people see this gap between the way religion is preached and practiced, especially young people. And especially—it's especially commented on in social media now. Saudis, a country of 27 million people, view 90 million YouTube videos a day. 90 million. They have nothing else to do. So social media plays a really huge role there because people cannot communicate a lot otherwise.

I did not bring my stack of Russian dolls, but it is, to me, a terrific way to visualize Saudi society. An individual is like the inner doll. You are, whether you're male or female—more so if you are female, but even if you are a boy—your life is pretty much prescribed for you by your family, and that family is inside a tribe, which is contained within the religious philosophy and establishment, which is contained under the Al-Saud ruling family. So individual Saudis don't feel a lot of responsibility, let alone enterprise. Most Saudis work for the government, or they don't work. 90% of the private sector are foreigners. So education is largely intended—and this is changing, and it's what the king is trying to get at by creating that university, to make it change faster—but education is largely the purview of the religious establishment. It is intended to teach you to be a good Muslim, not to be a good employer in a private sector company. So the young people who make up—60% of the population is under 20 years of age, so those young people increasingly communicate. They, like young people everywhere, have high expectations and demands, and aren't always willing—not unlike this country—to work together to achieve those. They simply want more.

The economy is still—90% of the Saudi treasury still comes from oil or oil derivatives, petro-chemicals. The country is still very dependent on oil revenue. And that is a second pillar that Saudis worry about, because they see domestic consumption of oil rising, and they know that the export of oil is their livelihood, and so they worry that this consumption may curtail what there is to export. And some—and this would not be many—but some are beginning to focus also on the fact that energy and self-sufficiency in the US may affect the global price of what is exported, and thus their revenues. The third concern in the kingdom is the concern that the royal family itself is so large, and the brothers who have been king since their father died in 1953—he had 44 sons, 36 of whom lived to adulthood. And when he died, the first one became king and on down, brother to brother. And that band of brothers is getting very elderly. The king is 90, and the youngest of those [brothers] is 68. His current crown prince is said to have Alzheimer's. I don't know, when I saw him in 2010 he seemed perfectly fine, but now people say that is not the case. So the band of brothers is running out. It's very much like the old Soviet Union in the 80s, when Brezhnev was half-dead and finally died, followed by Andropov who didn't last more than a year, followed by Chernenko who lasted, I think, a bit more than a year, followed by Gorbachev, and by the time Gorbachev got the opportunity, it was too late. So the family is going to have to agree, at some point, on a next generation, on a nephew of that band of brothers. And that's very difficult because every brother says to himself, "why your kid instead of mine?" They had just named the 68-year old brother as third in line, which I think is a clear sign they still cannot agree. When I was there in January, everyone said there's going to be a deal, they're going to do it, and shortly after I left, they named another brother, the last brother. So I think that is evidence of their inability.

I will close. People say it is inconceivable that there could be any upheaval here because people are passive, the regime has the very best intelligence available—which is true—that the military, people think is loyal. But that's part of the problem—loyal to whom? The National Guard is under one brother, the defense is under another, the interior ministry is under another. And that people are divided by religion, by tribe, by religious sect, by gender, and that the family is cloaked in legitimacy by the religious establishment, which they appoint and which they buy, and they get positive reviews. But I think, and I'm not here to predict the demise of Saudi Arabia, but I think they are beginning to have the problem of an increasingly lawless country. People take the risk to do things that are unlawful, whether it's to own a satellite TV dish, which is illegal but everyone has one, to using drugs, or alcohol, or protesting women are now marching regularly at the ministry of interior to protest husbands, sons, brothers, who have been arrested without charges or trial. That, if they confront these things, they may only make them worse, and if they don't confront them, they almost certainly make them worse. And it's a dilemma that they are—we can talk about that literally—trying to deal with right now. Everything is always seen as impossible until it happens. No one would have predicted Tunisia, over one poor man burning himself to death. And I like, and this will be my closing quote, to use this de Tocqueville quote from *L'Ancien Régime*, in which he said, "Only a great genius can save a ruler who is setting out to relieve his subjects' suffering after a long period of oppression. The evils patiently endured as inevitable seem unbearable as soon as the idea of escaping them is conceived." And I think that is a part of what's going on. People are asking themselves, is it inevitable? And so as he, de Tocqueville, went on to say, that on the eve of Louis XXVI's regime fall,

it still looked unshakable, even to those that were about to topple it. And that is true in Saudi Arabia. Only a handful of people really talk about democracy, or talk about getting rid of the royal family. Most people are passive, but that does not mean they're happy. And we, as a government, always tend to confuse stagnation for stability. And they're two very different things. [Applause.]

Ellis: Thank you very much. I'm going to open it up with some questions. So Karen, on a few different levels, because there are so many levels to explore—but just on a personal level, could you talk a little bit about your intrigue with the country and your coverage of it? I know in your book, you talked about a very personal way you related to the country. But, which sectors were most difficult to crack in terms of access? You had always been dealing with the officialdom, but what about the more conservative aspects of the society, or how hard was it to penetrate and really get inside there?

House: I think Saudi Arabia is probably somewhat less strange to me than the average American, because, as you can tell from my accent, I grew up in Texas, in a tiny town up near the Oklahoma border called Matador, population 900. And religion was our sole source of entertainment, too. So we had four churches, and one blinking stoplight, and everyone went to church. And my father was far more conservative than the average man in town. So, like a good Saudi girl, I was expected to obey and not question. Then I spent my whole life questioning. We were allowed to wear short-sleeved dresses, but no alcohol, no dancing, no music and instruments in our church, no dice in our home. For me, I spent time in Saudi Arabia living with a very religious woman, who had served as a translator for me with an imam's family. He told me, "you should see how happy our women are, you should go meet my wife and mother and sisters," and so I did. I had several dinners with them over five years. And this lady translated, and when I decided I wanted to live not just ask about, so I could see up close, I asked this woman, because I don't speak Arabic, and her English is not great, but it's communicable so I could have a conversation with her. So she told me my *abaya* was bad because it had decoration on the sleeve, [that you] shouldn't wear pants because that reveals your form. Her motivation for letting me live with her was to convert me. And she started with a video, a YouTube video, by a fundamentalist preacher from Texas, for one hour, who had converted to Islam. And when that didn't work, she called her brother in. And I read the Koran three times over the last five years, so I had great fun talking religion with people. And it was interesting—I found most Saudis can't actually discuss their religion. I mean, the religious scholars obviously can, but it's just, "Allah says, this is the way it is." It's something that you're brought up with. It's like somebody puts a diaper on you and you eventually learn to put your underwear on yourself, but you still don't think about it; it's just a part of your upbringing.

The hardest people to see were poor people, actually. I mean my goal with everyone I met was, you know, take me to somebody else. So I started with the people I knew, and this prince would introduce you to another prince. Then one of them—I profile in the book four princes, just to show the diversity—but one of them is a businessman who's a football fanatic, San Francisco 49ers football fanatic, so I went to see him and he said, "I'm sorry I'm going to have to be brief today because it's football tonight." And every Sunday he invites his friends over, and they watch NFL football on their TV's and eat dinner. So he invited me, so of course I went. There were like 12 guys there. I pick out three or four that seem interesting, and I exchange cards. Then I call up those guys and go see them. So everybody leads you to somebody else. But trying to see poor people—I tried through sociology professors, through women who helped poor people, and they would say, "oh yes I can do it," and then they'd come back and say they won't. Because it's embarrassing for everybody, that 40% of the population of Saudi Arabia live on less than \$1000 a month. We think it's a rich country, but it's not.

Question: I thought that the Saudi royal family—part of the revenue goes to the poor people, from oil, is that not true?

House: Well there's free education, free health care, but as the population has grown rapidly over the last 30 years, the demand outstrips the quality supply. So if you are really sick, you go to prince x or prince y, or prince z, and ask for permission—a chip to get you into a good hospital. And some people don't like what they regard as begging. They say, "the government should do better for us." So yes, the

money is spread around, but it doesn't necessarily lead to a lot—it's not as much appreciated as when the old king used to drive through the streets of Riyadh throwing gold coins, you know. There's a lot more money now, but people aren't as appreciative of it because their expectations are higher. And if you're a young person, 40% of people between age 20 and 24 are unemployed.

Ellis: Karen, just picking up on that point, I have one question, internal, and [one] about the external. How has the Saudi government responded to the Arab Spring? And how worried are they about what might happen, because they have such a large unemployed and highly educated population that is very, as you said, on the social media, on the internet. And, related to that, what could they be doing now that they're not doing?

House: After the Arab Spring in March of 2011—King Abdullah had been out of the country with a back surgery—he came back and he passed out to the population \$130 billion on top of an \$180 billion annual budget that year, to create, for the first time, a minimum wage for Saudis to build homes. Housing is a big problem. Far more than here, young people cannot afford a home because the land is so expensive. Because, in the minds of many young people, the royals have taken the land and therefore it's very expensive. And [King Abdullah] gave money to the religious, increased student stipends—I mean money across the board to people—which, as far as I can tell, again didn't get a lot of gratitude. People say, "okay, now if you could give us all that, why didn't you give it to us before?" You can't help but, at some level, feel sorry for the royal family having to deal with people who say, "the country's rich, it's our money, not their money, so give it to us."

Ellis: In terms of foreign affairs, could you talk a little bit about the recent announcement that the Saudis are stepping up aid to the Syrian rebels? I was asking you before: is this motivated by a power struggle with Iran? And also, how important and significant was the trip by Secretary Kerry, in the sense that this is the first trip that he made overseas, to Europe and then to some countries in the Middle East?

House: I mean, I think it is pretty obligatory for American Secretaries of State to traipse through Riyadh fairly early. On Syria—I mean the Saudis and the Qataris have been aiding the Syrian rebels for well over a year. Even though Saudis say it's human, it's compassion for Syrians, at a government level I think it is very much to give the Iranians a black eye, if they can overthrow Assad. And eventually he probably will go, but I think in these last five years of going there over and over and over, if you talk foreign policy to people, certainly government people, they say you Americans you wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein because he was a nasty guy. Yes, he was a nasty guy, but you didn't think about what you were creating there, look what a mess you made. You gave Iraq to Iran on a silver platter. And I think it's déjà-vu all over again, as Yogi Berra would say. They want to get rid of a nasty guy, and it's hard to say Assad isn't a nasty guy, but they are not thinking a lot about what may come next. And I fear that some of the money and many of the people receiving it—I mean people are being radicalized in Syria. It seems to me unquestionable that those people will come home to roost for the Saudis and us, and others. I'm not writing about foreign affairs, and I honestly don't know what one would do. I think, if everybody had done more, sooner, it might not have gotten so bad, but maybe it would have. But it's going to get worse, I think—you can safely count on that.

Ellis: Okay, so let's open it up, and I'm going to take a couple of questions together.

Question: Judith O'Neill, CEO of Nakhota LLC. First of all, thank you so much for your presentation. Saudi Arabia has been on my mind for a lot of years, and I've been worried about it for the last several years. My connection with the country is long-term, but very narrow. It is in commerce, and it's mostly dealing with investors investing from Saudi Arabia to outside of Saudi Arabia who are very sophisticated, voracious investors, all over the world in pretty much everything, including the high-rises on the Hudson River in New York City. So that's pretty much everywhere. And I've always thought about that as I privatized different things all over Africa and the Middle East. How are they managing without private investment going into the country, which as you mentioned, is virtually non-existent? And I thought, well it's got to be the oil, obviously; they're 37% of the world's oil. And an interesting

statistic that I just read, that didn't make any sense to me yesterday, until I heard you today, is that, while OPEC's production is going down in recent times responding to global decrease in consumption or purchase from OPEC, Saudi Arabia's went up. And that may very well be for the internal use. And I thought, why do they do that? Because Saudi Arabia always controls their production of oil, so even as they measure against the US outstripping Saudi Arabia by five years of oil production, it's not an accurate statistic, because the Saudis control what they produce. But they're going up when OPEC is going down, and I suspect it's very much internal consumption. So my thought has been, well they're always safe because of oil, and now I'm wondering, where do they go if the oil no longer is a credible source of revenue? Denmark, while a tiny country, will not use any. The United States will be self-sufficient. Israel is now competing, or will be a competitor, in ten years, with Saudi Arabia.

House: Well, the Chinese and the Indians—I mean, there's still going to be a strong demand for oil. I think what's changed for the Saudis is that they are losing the ability to control the price. They used to be able to go up to keep the price stable, to go down to keep it stable. Now, they can't afford to go down too much, unless they can be sure the price shoots way up. They really have to have \$200 or \$300 billion a year of revenue.

Question: So they're not afraid that the US and Israel may export and interfere with their market in China and India?

House: No, the US people here will take the view that we can afford to be less dependent on Saudi Arabia because now we're going to be producing ten million barrels a day in another ten years. But it is a worldwide commodity, and the price—we're not going to have it cheap here because we're producing it, and it's selling expensive elsewhere. The price is going to be pretty much one price, and the Chinese demand and the Chinese economy is having troubles [with the fact] that demand may not go up as much as the Saudis and others will wish, but I don't think, you know, there's going to be a big collapse in oil prices in the future. Hopefully there's not a big increase.

Question: You mentioned that women were protesting at the ministry of the interior. I wondered about women having a say in contemplating the future of Saudi Arabia. And I'm thinking of people such as Thoraya [Ahmed] Obaid, who many of us know because she headed the population fund at the UN, and she's back home now.

House: She's in the Shura council, that parliament, where he just appointed women to. I think women are going to be the salvation of Saudi Arabia, because they've now been educated for 30 years. And my religious friend aside, she's actually educated too, and her daughters are going to school, and the daughter says she intends to work, if it's okay with her future husband. But most of the young, educated women that I've talked to do want to work. Their husbands do want them to work. It is now the right answer to the marriage question, "are you going to work?" to say to this future husband, "yes." That's the answer he's looking for, as opposed to no. So I think women are—with better education and, again, more access to information—are increasing their own views of what life ought to be like. I read a book about a woman named Gertrude Bell, a British woman who helped divide up the Middle East in the '30s when they were re-drawing borders. In 1880 she went to Oxford, and there were four women at Oxford, and they were not allowed off campus without a male escort, not unlike a Saudi university. And she graduated and of course could do nothing, so she went traveling to Iran, and met a guy and wanted to marry him, and her father said no absolutely not, get home. And then he gave her money and she toured around the Middle East, learned to speak Arabic, traveled with her own bathtub, gifts for the tribal chiefs and all the stuff, and really learned Iraq, Saudi, Syria. So Churchill, when they were looking for somebody to draw lines with Lawrence of Arabia and divide up the Middle East, she was one of those. So, you know, 50 years later, she had a very important job.

I don't think it will take 50 years for Saudi women, I really don't. I mean there are lots of smart, educated Saudis. They have a five year plan for everything, but it's about as useful as the five year Soviet plans. They don't really produce change. But the people that are running all of them are very smart, very

dedicated, and then everything just dissipates below those people in the bureaucracy. So I think there are smart Saudis. And if you look at ARAMCO, the national oil company, it's a perfect model for a functioning society. Men and women, *Shias* and *Sunnis*. She worked at ARAMCO and she's *Shia*. And this King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, which he mentioned—the king chose a *Shia* at ARAMCO to create that thing, and it functions with foreigners and Saudis. 80% of the employees are Saudis. But all over the world internationally, men, women—when you visit there, you can eat in the cafeteria, and there are people talking to each other. It's a parallel society. It's an island. It doesn't have any effect on the rest of the country, but if they ever chose to want to run a different kind of country, they would have people capable of doing it. And the religious people are not allowed into ARAMCO. So there's a movie theater there. The only other movie theater outside of ARAMCO is at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, right next door to the mosque. But they don't allow Saudis to visit that university, so people don't see and don't know by design, because many of them wouldn't like it.

Question: My name is Gréta Gunnarsdóttir. I am the Ambassador of Iceland to the United Nations. I just wanted to ask you a follow-up on the Shura council. I mean, how much power does it actually have? Because that's one of the issues that are brought up now as an improvement—that there are women on the council—and I think you might, and some others might know that Saudi Arabia is now a candidate for the Human Rights Council. So they are pointing out things like that, and I think it is important to know what does it actually mean? And also, with education, because women are getting more education, but does it really mean that they are also taking more in the labor market? Does it materialize in jobs? And then maybe thirdly, maybe because you said 40% of the population lives on less than \$1000, and there is this huge unemployment among young people, but at the same time, there are a lot of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, and also a lot of foreigners working for all kinds of countries. So that leads to the other question of why aren't Saudis doing these jobs?

House: The Shura council is something that the government promised for nearly 20 years and finally delivered. This is the way things work in Saudi Arabia. You say—you promise change until the moment where you can't resist it anymore, and then you actually do it. So they did it. And it's like the elections in 2005 for municipal councils, which have no power. Women were not allowed to vote, and they said, "well in 2009 when the elections occur again, you can vote." In 2009, the elections never occurred. And then in 2011, after the Arab Spring, what do you know, there were elections, because it was a good time to do something. But again, women were not allowed to vote because there were not separate voting places, but now, the promise is that in 2015, they will be allowed to vote. You can flip a coin; it depends on what's going on in 2015, I think, whether they will be allowed to vote. There's been a push to elect the Shura council. All of them, all 150 members, are appointed by the king. It has no real power, other than the ability to talk about things, which is not irrelevant. I'll probably get my head handed to me—I would say it's a lot like the UN. People can talk at the UN, but the UN rarely can really end a war, because you've got to get everybody to agree. But it's not irrelevant that people cover what happens, and what people say. So the Shura council does debate things, and putting 30 women among the 150 is probably akin to counting African-Americans as three-fifths of a person. But nonetheless, it's a start. I don't think it will have a huge impact, but it really depends on those 30 women. If those women pick issues and raise them and discuss them—which could wind up being unpopular, obviously, with some like my friend the religious lady—they could wind up having an impact. I think a lot of these things, whether it is women in the Olympics, or women in the Shura council, or the promise of elections, are done largely for foreign consumption. But they still wind up having some domestic consequence, and they can no longer, in modern day communications, lead separate lives. The kingdom can't do one thing outside and another inside without people knowing. On jobs for women, they have—after six years of debating, women are now allowed to sell lingerie to women. Prior to that, you used to buy your lingerie from some Bangladeshi or Pakistani man. And they're working in cosmetic stores. Women—like my conservative lady was, when I saw her in January, absolutely horrified by this because it is a slippery slope. These women, there's no telling what they're going to do. And obviously, for women who have higher ambitions, they're horrified too that this is the best. Women can *do* things. More women start businesses, but you have to have a man that, in essence, fronts for you. And I talked to an anthropologist whose daughter wants to be an interior designer. And she said, "I could say yes, she

could work in this office, there's an office for men and an office for women. But at some point they're going to talk to each other, and if at some point the religious police walk in on it, my daughter's reputation is ruined. She'll never be able to get married," etc. So there's a lot of self-censorship by people, but there are more women working. As for why do Saudis not take any of these private sector jobs, both the low and the high—as I said 90% of all those jobs are held by foreigners. Saudis do not want to do menial work. They don't clean houses. A few drive taxis. But the cleaning ladies are all Filipino or Bangladeshi. The doormen at hotels, the people who carry your bags at the airport, the taxi drivers are from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India. Muslims, but generally not Arab Muslims anymore, as they were in the '70s and '80s. They hope, they say—or the education minister says—that these 140,000 young people that King Abdullah has sent out of the country, including women, on scholarships will come back and take the high-end jobs held by foreigners, so that they will be able to come back to jobs, because a lot of the young people who are out—the first wave is starting to come back and the whole employment issue for those people is a big one. You certainly don't want have highly educated, young Saudis jobless. Their hope and goal is to replace some of the white-collar foreigners with white-collar Saudis.

Question: Well actually that leads right into my question. Peggy Blumenthal, Institute of International Education. It seems to me the bravest thing that the king did was to start the scholarship program. And it may be, if they're attracted back into high-paid jobs—aren't those going to be the force of change, because they have learned a heck of a lot of other ways to function?

Question: This is an aside. Millie Meyers, US Mission. But when they're watching like the football game, do they get commercials, or what?

House: Oh yeah, they're watching... They see everything. When I started going there in 1978, the government channel basically showed prayer all day long, and an Arabic language news. Now there's an English language Saudi government channel, and there is every foreign channel you can imagine. I can, like any Saudi, watch the BBC, Al-Jazeera, Egyptian TV, Syrian TV, CNN, Fox, the Discovery Channel, etc. Now obviously, you don't have to subscribe to that, and people like conservative people like my friend Lula, she gets only the religious channel, which has an education channel, a wildlife etc., but on none of those channels do they show a woman, because she does not want her sons seeing a female face. The Saudi state TV channel now has anchorwomen who wear scarves, but leave their faces uncovered, and she would not want her children to see that, so they only get the religious channel. But you *can* see everything.

At almost every one of these things that I've done, people ask the question: what are these people going to impact, what impact are they going to have? And I tend to think that they will have a bigger impact than Saudis who went back in the past. For two reasons. There are so many more of them—it's not 1,000 Saudis, or 2,000 that are out abroad as in the '80s, when it became very improper to go abroad. It's 140,000 of them, so there will be a—you won't just disappear back into the woodwork, adopting the mores and milieu of the majority, I think. And the second reason is because those people can keep in touch with each other *and* with people in China or Japan, the US, Britain or wherever that they actually became friends with. So my question to people has been, and I don't know the answer to this, are these Saudi students here—it probably varies but—how much are they, because they do exist in significant numbers, how much are they actually blending in this country, American society? And how much are they living in a Saudi ghetto? Because, if they're living in a Saudi ghetto here, they'll take that ghetto back. And I don't know the answer to that. Some woman in Michigan wrote me an email saying there are 70 Saudi students at the university, and some of them live in her house, and she thinks that some of them are, so I asked her, "do you think they mix" and she said, "not all of them"—that actually the wives who are not actually going to school tend to hide in their homes. But her belief is that they are mixing. But if they're mixing here in big numbers, then I think there's a chance they do have some—and if they go back and actually get jobs, and their parents allow them to work in on the edge situations. I mean that's the other problem: kids frequently want to do things that their families won't allow.

Question: I'm Amy Newell, and I was living for the last two years in Riyadh, and I was working at Princess Nora University, and...

House: That's a 50,000 student female university that the king just built in Riyadh, *enormous*, named after his sister.

Question: It's huge and it's growing. And I must say, and no situation is perfect, but I found Saudi Arabia to be an absolutely amazing place. There are many issues, like any university, but the government has started to invest a huge amount of money in education because they're urgently trying to spread the amount of sectors that Saudis are involved in. And it's opened up education to people of all walks of life, so from lower-class to upper-class, across the board. But what I was thinking—you were talking about Saudis here, and the new generations at home, and places like KAUST. KAUST is an interesting experiment, but is it necessarily an ideal or superior way? I just feel that the gender segregation society can be difficult in some ways, but maybe actually there are some very positive sides to it as well. And that the Saudis that are living here, I think they do mix and blend with everybody and socialize and on the internet, but perhaps when they go back, they will influence Saudi, but in a very Saudi way. I think people are very loyal to what Saudi is, to not take on too many values from outside. So I don't know—in my mind, it was a very positive experience, and perhaps people going back will take the good things they've learned from here, but they will influence it in a very Saudi way.

House: I didn't meet any Saudis that are looking to dress like American teenage girls, so I think you can take back—you can have a more open, relaxed society, without it being un-Muslim or un-Islamic, and that is mostly what people want. I quote the prince, Sultan bin Salman [Al Saud], that we sent up to space in 1984 and he's now kind of the tourism director of Saudi Arabia, which is really an oxymoron since you can't go there for tourism, if you're a non-Muslim, at least. The only thing that anyone would ever really want to go see is Mecca, and you can't if you're not Muslim. But I quoted him saying, "we can't continue to exist here, and live only outside the country." People just want a little less rigidity. They don't want westernization, they really don't. They believe—most young Saudis that I talked to—that you can have modernity without westernization. And I think that's true. You don't have to be as materialistic, or morally bankrupt as much of the rap music in our country is—sorry to express my view—but I think there is a third way, if you will, between ours and theirs.

Ellis: Could I just ask you a question, could you tell us a little bit about what these women were studying, and what was happening to them when they finished?

House: Well nobody has finished yet, because the university has just started. It's only two years old.

Question: Well, it's not the only women's university. There are universities like King Saud, and there are women that are my age and older who came out of there, so I think in terms of studying, you can study pretty much what you want, but at that university, since it's new, it was a little limited. Well, there was nursing, there were arts, but there were other subjects as well. And business. Yes, business is a very popular one.

Question: Where were the educators from?

Question: It was a wonderful legion of educators from all over the world. That's what I thought was fantastic. A lot of people from Egypt, Tunisia, Jordanians of Palestinian origin—they couldn't get jobs in Jordan—Moroccans, Americans, Canadians, a lot of South Africans, a lot of British people. Basically people from all over.

House: If you need to speak Arabic, the professors tend to be from Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt—the females, and males too—and then a lot of Westerners.

Question: Yes, I'm Ellen Gorman. Women's City Club of New York. And I'm kind of curious about the youth—the male youth as you've described them. Because it almost feels as if you've described them as enjoying sitting around and not doing anything. And I would think that they would be restless and want to do something, and they might be people who would start businesses and might be enterprising in the society.

House: I mean, there are clearly some who do but, fundamentally, young people yes, are very bored. I went out with two young guys—two brothers—15 and 17, their father had been in school in America, so he wanted them to meet a strange American. And he allowed them to take me out to dinner, so I asked them, "what do you do?" The young one was very engaging, the older one was quite sullen and he just said, "I watch Egyptian soap operas." The young boy liked to play computer games and I asked, "if you could change one thing about the country, what would you change?" And the young kid said instantly, "let boys and girls go to school together." Young men can't go to shopping malls because you might prey on women, so unless you're accompanied by—I mean, young women at least can walk around malls together. Young men are, in that way, more constrained. There are no movies, there are not a lot of sports facilities. If you're wealthier, you obviously can rent movies and you can watch anything in your home, but external entertainment is very limited.

One of the things that struck me most was when I spent time with at a terrorist rehabilitation facility that they have. They've done a fairly good job of rehabilitating people. But there, they do for those people everything they don't do for the society as a whole, which really intrigued me. So art in the society is basically a no-no, you must not create any human likeness, so no sculpture, no painting. There, they asked people to paint. They have a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, a Saudi, who reads the art for what's in the mind of the person. And they have them hanging around the wall. So it was fascinating. One guy had drawn these telephone wires over a mountain. And he [the PhD] said, "he's still in Afghanistan, he's not ready to talk." And another guy had a campfire and he said, "that guy's ready to talk." So they want to know what's on their mind. As a young Saudi, whatever is on your mind is never to be expressed. I mean, nobody cares.

Ellis: Karen, how susceptible do you think these young men, then, are to radicalization?

House: It's not radicalization; it's boredom. They do it to have a purpose in life. The rehabilitated terrorists, at least that I talked to, insisted—and maybe it's just a line—but they kind of said, "well, I wasn't really religious. I was abused by my father." This kid was one of 32 children from 2 wives, and he was the eldest, so he was supposed to actually step up and help take care of everybody. He didn't want to do it, life was boring, so he went to Afghanistan. It's fundamentally more about trying to find some meaning in life, something that is bigger than yourself, when you just sit around and don't have that much to do.

Ellis: Well Karen, this was fantastic. I know we all learned so much. We really appreciate your taking the time and thank you all for...

Question: Sorry, just one quick question. Wayne Doyle from World Information Transfer. I'm also a free-lance journalist. But I'm just wondering—there doesn't really seem to be a societal framework for change. It doesn't seem like it's going to organically happen, because people—especially young people—are so suppressed, with such mundane daily things, they don't really have the desire to see change.

House: They don't—the government obviously does not want a lot of change. I think Abdullah has been very sincere about trying to do a little bit of change, to let a little bit of steam out. And because I think he does really believe, as he says, that oil is not the wealth of the country, the people are the wealth of the country, and we have to teach them to create wealth, not take wealth. I think it's a very good description of what's necessary. But if you're reared without much ability to be independent or think, you don't have a lot of individual initiative. So most kids who go to college study Islamic history,

Arabic language, Arabic literature—things that don't qualify them for the workplace. And there are no civil or political organizations.

And I will close on this: there's, right now—which I think is a microcosm for what both the way a little bit of change occurs and the risk in that—there is a man, who is a PhD in economics, Saudi, from the University of Indiana. He teaches economics at the Diplomatic Studies Institute, and when he first went back from the US there, they gave him his own TV show, [a] current affairs TV show. And then he participated in starting something called the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association in 2009. And suddenly he lost his TV show. Now, usually a few things like that and people shape up. But he didn't. He persisted because his view, as he told me then, was, "I want my kids to live in a freer society, and I'm going to change this society legally." So he continued to raise questions about people who were held in Saudi jails without charges and without trials. The government says they're terrorists, people like him say they're political opponents. I don't know—I haven't met any of them. But that debate goes on. Then in 2012, he called for the removal of the minister of interior, and his trial for crimes against humanity for holding these prisoners. So at that point he was charged, and his trial has been going on since last September. I saw him in January, and he figured he would get sentenced, but it just keeps rocking on. In those six months, they have become more sensitive since the Arab Spring, and as this campaign about prisoners who have not been charged or tried began to circulate on Twitter and Facebook and other social media, then the wives and mothers and daughters of these people began, in full black regalia, to go demonstrate at the ministry of the interior in Riyadh. And that spread to Buraidah, which is the bible belt of the corner of Koran Wahhabism. A couple of weeks ago, women in Buraidah burned the photo of the minister of interior in front of the internal security cameramen all taking pictures. 20 of them were arrested. It's a tiny thing, but this stuff clearly is now being seen as a challenge to authority.

It is the point that, if you let it go on, more people see that there are no consequences, may decide to participate, and if you choose to snuff it out, you may increase [it]. So the most popular sheikh, who has also himself spent time in jail in the '80s just tweeted—and he has 2.5 million followers—that prisons and sacrifices create more supporters. So this guy has been sentenced, he and another, to ten years in prison. Now, this organization that they tolerated for five years, they have ordered shut down, and its property confiscated. I doubt it's any other property than the building they meet in, but we'll see. Now it's probably going to get more publicity, and when that happens, sometimes the king involves himself. There was recently a man who was accused of raping and killing his five year-old daughter. That got enough attention that there was some involvement to keep him in prison past four months. But it's an interesting example of [how] there is no vehicle for change; that is the short answer to your question.

But there are people who are determined to try to [enact change], because there is a good deal of discontent, of people wanting what they call justice. Not democracy, justice, by which they say, "we mean laws that are clear and equitably enforced." I talked to people about car theft—why does it happen? It's not poor kids who steal cars. It's rich kids who are bored, and they steal them and race them, and so the police don't want to actually charge the poor kids that steal them because the rich kids that steal them get off. So everybody feels free to live by the laws they want, enforce the laws they like. So that's what I mean by it being an increasingly lawless society, which shocked me to death because I assume everything is rigidly *Sharia* etc., etc. And it's not. People are increasingly taking whatever liberties they think they can. For some people, they say, "look at the princes, they take land." People are tweeting around, a tweet with a white fence, if you touch that fence, it falls down, and there's a picture of a senior prince who is famous for fencing land. People communicate these things. And, again, I have no idea if it's accurate. At some level, the country runs on rumor, so people communicate these things to each other, and I think that's beginning to have some impact on how the government controls. Because they haven't tried, like China, to just squash all the social media because Saudis don't like that. They want the ability to be educated, civilized; they're not prepared to live like the Chinese. But they might learn to, if the government chooses to try that route. Thank you.

Ellis: See why we are all so lucky to have Karen here! Thank you. We have copies of her book out there, and it's really a great book—I highly recommend it. Yes, thanks a lot. [Applause.]