

## **The Middle East in the light of current events – a meeting with J.E. Adel Al-Jubeir, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.**

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The thousands of opinions, analyses, and thoughts on the root causes of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East make the geopolitical situation in the region a pertinent topic for this meeting. The killing of Iranian General Quasem Soleimani, ongoing tensions between the USA and Iran, and war in Yemen have a serious implication on the stability of the region. These issues are also relevant to current debates among scholars and pundits around the world, who are trying to predict the future shape and nature of Iran's relations with the rest of the world as part of their research. With regard to these considerations, on January 10, 2020, the Institute of International Relations Prague (IIR) held a meeting with Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, who is a Saudi diplomat and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the current Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. He served as the Saudi ambassador to the United States from 2007 to 2015 and was also an advisor for international affairs to King Abdullah. The main topic of the meeting was *"The Middle East in the light of current events"*.

The meeting began with a speech prepared by Mr. Al-Jubeir, who presented the Saudi perspective on current affairs in the Middle East. He emphasized the complex geopolitical context of the region and listed the conflicts specifically pointing to Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The minister repeatedly stressed the threat posed by terrorism that has affected Saudi Arabia for more than 30 years. He thus stated that the Persian Gulf is currently a volatile and unstable region.

Regarding the terrorist threat and ways of its mitigation, Mr. Al-Jubeir outlined the three priorities, summarized as 3M. First, "Men" who are radicalizing others or suspected of terrorism should be surveilled. One should consider their actions and the possible steps they might take. Second, it is important to follow the "Money", i.e. how funds are obtained for terrorist activity. Constant supervision of transactions and investigations of suspected cash flows is required. And third, the "Mindset" in relation to the threat is crucial. Based on many years of experience with activity of a terrorist nature, we should anticipate threats and take actions aimed at combating them and preventing their reoccurrence.

Another important issue that was raised was the involvement of Saudi Arabia in ongoing conflicts. First of all, the minister condemned Iran's position and its intimidation policy. He pointed out that nowadays the de-escalation of the conflict should be sought at all costs and at the same time none of the states should focus on expanding or acquiring weapons of mass destruction. When asked about the conflict in Yemen and the various Saudi human rights violations in the country, the diplomat pointed to the great financial investment that Saudi Arabia committed to improving the situation in the country and its military support to the Yemeni government. Another point discussed was the ongoing disputes between Saudi Arabia and international community regarding the potential resolution of the conflict and post-conflict political arrangement.

As for Saudi Arabia's vision for 2030, Al-Jubeir first pointed out the huge need for independence from oil. He stressed that recently Saudi Arabia has been focused on investments in artificial intelligence, electric cars, and modern technology. The minister noted that he understands the importance of tourism for the region and this is also one of Riyadh's priorities for the coming years. He also referred to sports and education as aspects that can have a huge impact on the next generation of Saudis and improve their chances for international development and cooperation with other foreign entities. The dominant idea in the Vision 2030 policy is investing in the private sector and trying to move away from military investment. Nevertheless, the country's organization of the Spanish Super Cup and participation as a host in the Dakar Rally are certainly public activities. He concluded, however, that this will not be possible if the security situation in the Persian

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Gulf remains at a dangerous level, as is the case now. The minister, however, ruled out the possibility of Saudi Arabia cooperating with Qatar or Turkey at this time.

In summary, the meeting was interesting as well as significant and above all showed a clear picture of how foreign policy is perceived by the most important people in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's policy for the next 10 years was presented. The question remains whether we can really count on the kingdom to reduce its expenditures on armaments and invest in the public sector. The debate was extremely important for understanding the contemporary situation in the Persian Gulf.

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