

Jamal Khashoggi in the European Parliament: Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia: Reforms, Alliances, Regional Role

Public debate held at the European Parliament, June 27, 2018

Jointly organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, AJC Transatlantic Institute and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Three months before his murder in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Jamal Khashoggi joined EU policymakers in a public debate in the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss the reform process initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and how it would affect Saudi Arabia's position as a key player in Middle Eastern geopolitics. In the light of the events that have unfolded in late 2018, and in view of the lasting impact of Khashoggi's legacy on the global standing of Saudi Arabia, we decided to release this transcript of the June debate. It shows that he was neither a revolutionary nor a Republican. He did not view himself as a dissident but emphasized the opportunity in Mohammed bin Salman's reform agenda, and his deep wish to contribute to those reforms becoming a success.

This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

Welcome

Cristian Dan Preda, Member, European Parliament (European People's Party, Romania)

Johannes Huegel, Research Associate, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Kristina Kausch, Senior Resident Fellow, German Marshall Fund

Discussants

Jamal Khashoggi, Columnist, *The Washington Post* and Raseef 22

The Hon. Mary Beth Long, Principal, Global Alliance Advisors, and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Cristian Dan Preda: I am very happy to host today's conference. Saudi Arabia and the situation in the region is a hot topic that is very much on the agenda of the European Parliament. I would like to thank the AJC Transatlantic Institute, the German Marshall Fund and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for organizing this discussion. I also would like to welcome our speakers, Jamal Khashoggi, columnist for the *Washington Post*, and former US assistant secretary of defense Hon Mary Beth Long.

I was in Saudi Arabia in November 2017 with the very first mission from the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and it was a very interesting visit. Indeed, Mohamed Bin Salman has an ambitious project: he wants to liberalize the country economically and socially. You all heard about the fact that women are now allowed to drive and that stadiums are being retrofitted to accommodate women. You also heard that women's rights activists have been arrested recently. So yes, I would say that something is moving but can we really talk about transformation if there is no political change? This is I think a serious issue. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is a key player in the region and we have witnessed over the last few years a shift in its foreign policy that went from a quiet diplomacy to a militarized and interventionist one. I believe that we should put a focus on several elements today. First, I think the war in Yemen. There is a very worrying escalation of the violence and brutality of the conflict. Our first priority should be a ceasefire in Hodeida that will allow the access of humanitarian aid. We met as EPP [the European People's Party] last week, a lot of important people working in the Saudi Arabia military teams on Yemen issue, and we discussed a lot in the EPP the ways to improve the access for humanitarian aid. The protection of civilians is of key importance. Then we need a political solution urgently; the negotiations are at a standstill for two years now. Second, we are dealing with a major inter-Arab and inter-Sunni political crisis within the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] that needs to be solved. Showing zero flexibility, in my personal view, is not the way to go if we want to solve this conflict. The last point is the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Iran is a repressive country with an expansionist agenda in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen but we need to reflect on ways to work with its regime. As Europeans, you cannot ignore Iran. It needs to be confronted with creative diplomacy, so thank you again for coming. Thank you very much and welcome.

Johannes Huegel: Thank you. On behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, I warmly welcome our distinguished guests and speakers. Particularly, I would like to thank Mr. Dan Preda, member of the European Parliament, for hosting this timely event. Many thanks also to our project partners, the AJC and GMF, for the opportunity to collaborate on this important topic. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung is active in the region with its local offices since decades. In this context, I would like to mention the foundation's Regional Programme Gulf States, which works with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Its main objective is to improve mutual understanding between the region, Germany, and European countries.

Kristina Kausch: Good morning and welcome also in the name of the German Marshall Fund. Thank you, Dan Preda for hosting us, and to our partners from AJC and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung as well. Thanks to you both, Jamal and Mary Beth, for flying all the way to Brussels, and to all of you for coming here today to learn and discuss Saudi Arabia's reform outlook and

regional role. My colleagues of the German Marshall Fund's Mediterranean Policy Program here in Brussels and I look forward to engaging with all of you on this subject, and on many others to come. Thank you.

Jamal Khashoggi: Thank you all, thank you for coming and listening to me talking about my country, Saudi Arabia, which is going through the most important transformation of its history, probably since the founding of Saudi Arabia, so this meeting takes place at a very critical time. Mr. Dan Preda, you just asked a very important question, which I tried to answer when I was living in Saudi Arabia until two years ago. When Prince Mohammed bin Salman threw to us his Vision 2030, I asked this question in an article I published in the *Al Watan* newspaper: can transformation exist without political reform? I was in Saudi Arabia at that time; I was hopeful that it will succeed. I gave the example of three countries that made that transformation without democracy: Rwanda, Vietnam, and China. And maybe we could include Serbia somehow. But I'm talking here about a true economic success and it did happen in those countries. GDP increased in all those countries and the people are better off.

That is exactly what we want in Saudi Arabia; the people of Saudi Arabia are not very keen on democracy, especially when they see the situation in the Arab world. The people of Saudi Arabia want a better living standard. Mohammad bin Salman is providing them with something very important and valuable: social freedom. And this is very important. In the last two decades, I witnessed as a journalist at a newspaper living in Saudi Arabia the debate we had about the need for reform. There was a need for reform. All of us in Saudi Arabia saw it and debated about it and argued about it.

We debated women driving and I would go on television debating the issue with someone who refused women driving. I did that a number of times and then I grew tired of it, and actually, I wrote about the story in my last op-ed in *The Washington Post*. A lady presenter who had a television show told me she had heard of me saying that I would not participate in a debate about women driving, and she asked me why, and I said because both sides have presented their arguments repeatedly and now it is in the hands of the government to do something about it. The government must be courageous enough to take a decision, and that's exactly what Mohammed Bin Salman did, and I gave him credit for that. He finished, once and for all, this debate, which was really consuming our efforts and our energy.

But the need for reform was way beyond that. We needed reform from oil [dependence], we needed to be free from the heavy presence of religious figures and communities, we needed to be free from the one school of thought about our religion, we needed to be free from radicalism. We were always debating that in Saudi Arabia for the last 20 years. And imagine young Mohammed bin Salman, maybe he was 20 years old, listening to this debate among Saudis, and maybe he whispered in the ear of a friend of his and said, when I become king, I am going fix all of that.

So, he began to fix all of that, but again, that will take us to the question Mr. Dan Preda raised. Can he do that without political reform, without the people's participation? I would like to have a say over the reform plans, but since I felt that I cannot have that say and I saw friends of mine being asked to sign letters to appease the government, I decided to leave the country and I am now in self-exile. I don't see myself as [a member of the] opposition, I just want to be more of a

participant. I want to participate and write and be a critic like any of you members of parliament or politicians or commentators when your government decides to build a bridge, or to sign an agreement, or to change a law. You all participate in this debate; we don't. Maybe he has a good plan for Saudi Arabia.

But I will not take long of your time, I am worried about two things. I'm worried about the lack of debate about essential matters that will affect the future of my sons and my grandsons, and that will affect my country. His plan for the future of Saudi Arabia is constituted of social reform; it is excellent, and we all support that social reform. We need to be entertained and drive cars, and our wives and our daughters to drive a car. We need to empower women. All of that we can call reform but it is more of a normalization; we are now normalizing our life. It is normal to go to the cinema, it is normal to go to a restaurant for a family gathering, it is normal to listen to music, it is normal to drive a car for a woman.

But all of that needs a good income, a prosperous society, so we will enjoy all those entertainments. His prescription for reform revolves around the following: to free the Saudi economy from oil, and by diversification to bring in foreign investment and build mega projects. And the last one worries me. Megaprojects can succeed, but we already have two mega projects in Saudi Arabia. They were built under the late King Abdullah. And he himself called the spending at that time inefficient spending.

So why should we repeat the same mistake? There is the King Abdullah financial city in Riyadh and the King Abdullah financial city on the west coast. And they are not at full capacity today. We spent billions of dollars there; he needs to fix them and he needs to bring business to occupy those cities. This is a huge task. The people are willing to work with him at that task; not to build new projects.

So, I want to have the right to debate whether those new projects are right or wrong. It will be beneficial for him and for the country to debate such an issue because if we build those projects and they don't work we cannot revise them again. They are already built and we will end up with a huge dent in our national budget.

Is that possible to happen? Yes, it could happen. Look to the inner city, to the unprivileged Saudis, not the privileged Saudis. We are a nation about 20 million. Two-thirds are less than 30 years old, a huge number are unemployed. The official government figure is 12.5 percent but we think it is way more than that. Those people are badly educated. They haven't worked all their life because we in Saudi Arabia are very much dependent on foreign labor. Foreign labor constitutes a large percentage of the workforce. In Europe, you worry about 12 percent or 10 percent of foreigners in your workforce. We have 70 percent who are doing everything in Saudi Arabia from the simplest to the most important jobs, and that is destroying the work ethic in Saudi Arabia and needs to be fixed. I would much rather see him spending more time on that front. On the inner parts of Riyadh that lack infrastructure, that suffers from unemployment rather than building a new project. That's basically what I if I had the freedom to write in Saudi Arabia, would write about.

I will end with a real issue: Saudi Arabia and Iran. There is an illusion that if Saudis and Iranians get together and have an agreement on rapprochement, everything would go well in the Arab

world. That's not true. Even if we and the Iranians, if Mohamed Bin Salman and Hassan Rouhani leave the room hand in hand, that will not fix the situation in Syria or in Yemen.

The Iranians and the Saudis have to change their perspective about the future of the region. We Saudis want to return the course of history to pre-2011 when the Arab world was ruled by authoritarian strongmen. That example has failed. The proof of that there were revolutions in 2011 in five Arab republics. That example failed so why should we bring it back again?

I would like my government to have a different approach and embrace the Arab Spring and support some form of power-sharing for those failed Arab republics. And I'm making a distinction between the failed Arab republics and the monarchies because the monarchies are functioning. Whether in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Morocco, they are functioning. They need reform but they do not need much attention. I am talking about failed Arab republics that are fighting each other and clashing, like Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

Where do the Iranians need to change? The Iranians need to give up their sectarianism. The Iranians are also not for democracy and power-sharing in the Middle East. They are for sectarianism, they want to create proxy governments that are part of their hegemony, and this will not work for the region. So, both countries will have to change their perspective for the Middle East before we agree. Maybe if we shed our perspectives we and the Iranians can have an agreement.

The last point I will make is I that would like to see more engagement from the European Union in Saudi Arabia. Engagement not in the form of business contracts, but in the form of sharing ideas and opinions and debate about the reform plans we have in Saudi Arabia. To share the experience that you have so we will avoid the mistakes of other countries. I am not happy, for example, with Germany and Saudi Arabia being in an argument right now over issues like selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and the Yemen situation. It would be much better for Saudi Arabia and the Europeans to engage more, especially at this moment because Saudi Arabia has to succeed. We should not let this reform of Mohamed Bin Salman go sour. It must succeed for the bettering of the Arab world and for the bettering of the relations with any country that needs oil from Saudi Arabia. Thank you.

Question: Thank you very much, Jamal. Maybe you can just say a few words about the crown prince's approach to Wahhabism?

Jamal Khashoggi: This is good news. I am sure my European friends are concerned and were concerned about the alleged support of Saudi Arabia's export of Salafism. It had been written repeatedly and Saudi Arabia recently decided to depart totally from radicalism. Actually, Mohamed Bin Salman said publicly that we are not going to allow radicalism in our lives, that we are departing from radicalism, and that we are going to embrace moderate Islam. What is moderate Islam? That is something for us to decide in Saudi Arabia and to debate because there are all kinds of moderate Islam. But, for sure, Saudi Arabia will not support or pass money to schools or mosques. In the past Saudi Arabia used to argue that not all Salafists are radical Salafists, but it looks like Mohamed Bin Salman has come to the conclusion that "I am going to cut it short and I am going to stop supporting – or my country will stop supporting – any form of Salafism, any form of political Islam, any form of Muslim Brotherhood." This is something he

has to debate within Saudi Arabia, what Islam should Saudi Arabia follow, but he is totally distancing himself and distancing the country from any form of political Islam.

Mary Beth Long: Thank you all for being here. It's a pleasure being here and I will focus my prepared remarks on what Mr. Dan Preda wanted to focus the conversation on. I would like to associate myself with almost everything that Jamal says. He's a brilliant scholar and I'm pleased to be here with him. I just want to frame what I am going to say about Yemen and some of the other issues in a slightly different look, but I am equally adamant that what the crown prince and the king are attempting to do now in Saudi Arabia is nothing short of being the change agent that the West has hoped for decades. And perhaps it is a generational opportunity that, if the West does not support it, will be lost for transforming Saudi Arabia in fundamental ways – to be more modern and more progressive – and more along the lines of what the West has been looking for, so that we dare not support him in this endeavor. He is doing nothing short of basically restructuring the social contract that the Saudi leadership has with the Saudi people. He's doing this through extremely aggressive social change, very rapid economic change, and other changes including decoupling between Saudi leadership and radical Wahhabism, which for many years was the basis through which the House of Saud had its legitimacy as leader of the Saudi people.

I agree with Jamal that the commitment of the crown prince and the king to not export Wahhabism and to not condoning or supporting radical Islamists abroad is a key feature to what the new Saudi Arabia aspires to be. I think it is important to understand some of the goals in addition to those general statements.

Number one, I think the crown prince and the king are also looking to foment Saudi nationalism that, rather than be a collection of tribes, or a collection of people who live in Riyadh or Jeddah and everybody else, or a collection of [Sunni]. That he is looking to develop a real sense of Saudi-ism among the people, under which the physical locations, the tribal relations, will then become secondary. Not unlike what Mohamed bin Zayed al Nayan has undertaken in the United Arab Emirates. I think he is taking a page out of that book of "nationalism".

I also think he wants Saudi Arabia to be the focal point of regional stability, not only as a practical matter but in the eyes of the West. That Saudi Arabia is seen as the leader of the Arab world certainly in the eyes of the Europeans, the Americans, and others. I think he wants Saudi Arabia to be the leader of economic modernization of an Arab world that is going to work. And many of those bold, sort-of-marquee efforts are large projects that have tremendous potential for putting Saudi Arabia on the map, but they also have tremendous potential for failure. And that's actually a real problem with his thinking. Coupled with the fact that the crown prince has so focused on the success or failure of all these reforms on himself rather than spreading it out. That – again – carries a high risk of failure, as well as making it hard to spread the blame when things are only under your name. If he succeeds it will be something unprecedented.

I think when you look at Vision 2030, it is interesting for what it contains and what it doesn't. There are several components of Vision 2030 – it really is the road map of what the king and the crown prince want to do. The first is, of course, economic modernization, and through that economic diversification – a move to expand Saudi economic underpinnings beyond oil and gas. Alternative energy resources, more technology, to really get more of an entrepreneurial spirit

going in Saudi Arabia that will complement the petroleum industry. I think that a lot of these entertainment things will not only be a great distraction for the youth bulge that he is going to be dealing with in the next couple of years when over 50 percent of Saudis will be under the age of 25 without much to do, but also to generate entrepreneurship and economic opportunities for Saudis to participate in a larger and broader economy.

Number two: security self-reliance. Saudi Arabia is buying lots from everybody and there are a lot of reasons for that, but it is really looking to become less reliant on the United States and Europe for its own security – particularly border security, which is one of the reasons why you see more of these aggressive expeditionary Saudi forces in Yemen and, I believe, elsewhere.

Foreign investment is key to getting this economic engine generated. They want to attract resources, investment into Saudi Arabia. This will be very tough and the preliminary figures are not as good as they had hoped.

They want to reaffirm, while they are limiting the export of Wahhabism, they are doubling down on Saudi Arabia as the go-to protector of the two holy sites. So, while stepping very far away from extremism, Saudi Arabia is not going to compete with Turkey, not going to compete with Egypt, not going to compete with Iran for the legitimacy of Islam.

Expanding diplomatic links and outreach to the rest of the world. I think we're going to see them not only in China and Russia but also in Central Asia, in Singapore, in Vietnam, and in South America. You're going to see an activist foreign policy.

And then finally a de-emphasizing of the United States. The one thing that we have learned is that there is a transactional U.S. president who in some respects suits them fine, in a limited way. But the one thing that they have learned from the Obama administration – and here we don't see a fundamental change with Trump – is that the United States is disengaging from the region, that the U.S. presence in the region will not be anything like it was in the past decade, and that there will be other power brokers in the region with whom they will have to have serious relationships, including economic ones, and they will spend accordingly.

What you don't see is political reform. I actually think that this is mostly designed to reinforce the monarchy, to reinforce this side of the family and that political reform to the extent that that is contemplated – and I haven't seen anything explicit – will only be through increasing economic participation. Democracy and participation by others in the decision-making process – I don't see it, I don't think it's coming. I think people who are equating Saudi reform with political reform will be grossly disappointed.

Which gets us to the war in Yemen. I think there are a number of reasons why Saudi Arabia – which has been long watching Yemen – is involved there. Partly it is because they grossly underestimated how difficult it would be to get in and accomplish anything and then get out. I don't think they are as anxious about the quagmire as we Westerners are. There is a view that the continuing conflict in Yemen allows Mohamed Bin Salman to promote this “nationalism” that he is looking for. Nothing like having the bad guys knocking at your door to consolidate sympathy and to have your domestic population overlook certain difficulties, particularly in the reform process. Cynically speaking, it's a trial period in which Saudi Arabia is trying to figure out how it does control its border with Yemen. Looking very closely at what might happen in Iraq

and that border, and how it learns to deal with the fact that you've got at least two countries – and possibly more – that will become Iranian proxies, or at least heavily influenced by Iran. And what your limits are in order to shape that and deal with it as a military and security concern. I think one of the big disconnects between Saudi Arabia and the United States now is this very fine line that the United States is attempting to walk. I am not part of the administration, but I can say that I know that President Trump and General Mattis are extremely worried about the Saudis and the Emiratis, of course, not being as effective in their desire to limit civilian casualties and damage to property in the Yemen endeavor. I do think, however, that we are convinced, at least as for now, that both of the countries have done just about all they can do from a systematic process standpoint to really concentrate and focus on the fact that there are certain activities that have resulted in the horrific deaths of civilians, for which I think the United Nations said that the coalition is at least responsible for 60 percent of those killed. For example, the air attacks by Saudi Arabia have been severely limited, in part due to their limited experience in having success in limiting these kinds of things. Most of the air attacks actually are by the Emiratis, although they very carefully make sure that these are Saudi-led. And whatever their air operations (for example, in areas of urban population or where there are a lot of refugees) I know that a process has been instituted so that the decision to go or not go is pushed to the highest levels. The highest level of both of those nations with some U.S. coordination in order to mitigate the damage. I know also that the Saudis are very concerned about the perception that the activities in Hodeida have evolved into a decrease in humanitarian assistance and in the offloading of ships that are providing vital support to the Yemeni population.

My understanding is that there has not been a cessation of the offloading of supplies and of relief. In fact, I know that there is a daily report that the U.S. government receives from the coalition on what ships have been offloaded. There is a big problem with civilians and refugees who vacated Hodeida and are clogging up transportation routes as well as presenting displaced-person challenges for the activities that are not only ongoing in Hodeida but others that I see in the planning stages. At least there is a prepositioning in key crossroads to the north of Hodeida where you have logistics and supply chains worked out.

So, there is a lot of consternation. I think the United States has taken the right position and I encourage the Europeans to do the same, which is to absolutely insist on the protection of civilians, on the flow of humanitarian supplies, and on accountability, but to also be supportive of the overall objectives of what the coalition is doing, which is addressing the counterterrorism issues there. We still have ISIS and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula very much active, unfortunately, in pockets. Now that the UN has come out officially in reporting that Iran is in violation of the 2015 arms embargo on shipping weapons to Yemen, the EU [should] be more vocal and be more insistent that Iran not continue to subsidize and support the broadening and intensification of this conflict by not only providing arms – of which we know we have UN confirmation – but by modifying existing inter-ballistic missiles so that Saudi Arabia suffers 141 inter-ballistic strikes or attempted strikes on its soil.

There is a bit of frustration I think in Washington that, for some reason, our European allies and others don't seem to see this and other examples of Iranian bad behavior in the region that is at least equally contributing to many of the crises, including the war in Yemen. As far as the GCC is

concerned, I know that the president is very active in mitigating that conflict or becoming active in resolving it. I think the current status is that both the Saudis and the Emiratis have waved off the Americans and basically said: "Thank you very much, Mr. Trump, for your involvement, but no thanks." I don't know if that message has been received in the most profound sense. This is a president that has tremendous confidence in his ability to negotiate. I think the conclusion of the Americans is that the Saudis and the Emiratis seem not to be willing to give any ground. We are constantly receiving communications from the Qataris that they want to speak and sit down, and they would be willing to consider a number of measures, but not those, unfortunately, that are considered infractions or invasions of their sovereign rights that were part of the list of the demands that the Saudis and the Emiratis requested. I know there is a conversation about having some kind of GCC meeting in September and in parallel to the UN General Assembly where Trump would again intervene. Without some significant movement, I don't think that will happen. The administration so far has avoided those, in part because we don't see a way forward. I think at this point the strategy is to remove that from being the focus of our relationship with the GCC.

On Saudi Arabia and Iran, I am probably going to be offensive to many of you. I think one of the reasons why the Trump administration feels like it has a terrific relationship with Saudi Arabia, and it has gone a long way to repairing the real distance between the Saudi leadership and the US administration, is the absolute alignment concerning Iran. And that alignment is that Iran has been clear that it has hegemonic aspirations in the region, especially by calling Bahrain a province of Iran. That its use of proxy forces and deployment of the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] and Quds forces in uniform in Syria as well as in other places covertly in Iraq; that the proliferation of Iranian technology in the inter-ballistic missile arena that are in fact flying into Saudi Arabia; that Iran's encroachment on Israel's airspace; that Iranian participation in genocide in Syria, directly or indirectly through proxy forces as well as the IRGC, are unacceptable. That is part and parcel to the United States having walked away from the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], and I don't think you'll see a change in that but a doubling down where the administration is getting more and more frustrated with the Iranians and will support more and more Saudi Arabia and the GCC efforts in countering Iran's meddling.

The conversation about how to work with Iran is an interesting point. I worry much more about the United States and Saudi Arabia having a conversation about how to work with the European Union. Are there places where, after the JCPOA, there is a convergence of interest where the United States, the EU, and the Saudis can work with each other in countering what Iran is doing? Or at the end of the day, are the European Union and European countries so concerned that they need to balance Trump's rhetoric and Saudi aspirations to be the dominant force in the region that they will allow Iran to continue this illegal genocidal aggression against their neighbors for fear of pushing the Iranians too far? It's a question that the Trump administration is asking and will continue to ask, hoping that there are some answers.

Question: Thank you both. My name is Ruth and I work for the European Coalition for Israel. We are a Europe-based, non-Jewish non-Israeli organization, and we are concerned with the relations between the EU and Israel and the context in the Middle East – and in relation to Saudi Arabia, where is the relationship with Israel at the moment and whether the reform –

obviously even the crown prince himself wants to see a reform in the relationship – does the population resent it so much that he has to be very careful at this stage?

Mary Beth Long: I'll answer very quickly just from my perspective just because I recently was in Israel. From the diplomatic and defense people, excellent relationships with both. Whether you are talking about defense, security, or the economic sector, the Israelis for the first time really get it that at least as to Iran there is a coincidence of interest with the GCC. And Saudi Arabia, in particular, represents all kinds of opportunity. They are effusive in their praise of the very quiet military and other cooperation [with] the Saudis and Emiratis when it comes to counterterrorism – at least as an understanding of what Iran is up to. More importantly, I was very surprised from an economic standpoint; there were a number of initiatives that were floated by the Israelis under discussion (but quietly) in the private sector. For example, sharing Israeli technology, greening of the Negev desert, looking at sharing the technologies on alternative energy, looking at perhaps unofficially broadening the economic ties between the countries – hoping that the official ties, whenever the stars align, would be a *fait accompli* at some point. It becomes a recognition. A lot of it, of course, would have to depend on the Palestinian plan, that hopefully Kushner and the United States and Europeans and others will be able to deliver. My understanding is that plan is going to be pre-coordinated with the Israelis and the Saudis so that there can be full-court pressure on those who oppose it.

Jamal Khashoggi: Common wisdom in the Arab and Muslim world is that if you don't have to, you had better not have an open relationship with Israel, it will not go well with the public. The issue of Jerusalem is so dear to all the Muslims and all the Arabs, and the issue of Palestine is still there. We have not abandoned that issue emotionally. So why does Saudi Arabia challenge this common wisdom? If they need some technology, I think we can get it through a third party. We don't need an open relationship with Israel to buy that technology; it is available and everything is negotiable in the world of business. So why are we going out of our way to have a relationship with Israel, as is rumored? The only reason I found is that maybe the Israelis will do for the Saudis what the Americans failed to do: to get the Iranians out of the region. Can the Israelis do that? I think eventually the Saudis will realize that they cannot do that. What is Netanyahu doing right now with those bombings that are taking place in Syria is defining the rules of engagement between the new neighbors? The Iranians are the new neighbors to the Israelis in Syria. And he is telling with those bombings that this is what you can have and this is what you cannot have in Syria. But he will not go into downtown Damascus or Aleppo and fight shoulder-to-shoulder next to the rebels and fight the Iranians out. Actually, maybe he cannot even see the Iranians because the Iranians assimilate with the system; they are probably wearing Syrian Arab Republic badges and uniforms. And the Iranians in Syria are not in military bases, they are with the regime. They are sleeping with the regime. So, I think the Saudis will eventually in a year or two realize that to get the Iranians out we have to bring some form of democracy to Syria because free Syrian people are the ones who will demand to have the Iranians out of Syria. And I just hope my country will see that sometime in the future, but until we see that, it will be more suffering by the Syrian people. For the Kushner plan, again, we Saudis will come to realize that, no matter how convinced we are on the Kushner plan, we cannot impose it on the Palestinians in Palestine. They are the ones who decide whether to accept it or refuse it. So, the idea of going away from the Palestinians to find peace in Palestine

will prove wrong. It only started with their own analogy that the reason why Camp David failed is because the Arabs did not support Arafat. Arab support to Arafat or to any of the Palestinian leaders to accept a peace agreement that his people will not accept will not work. Later on, we will realize that.

Question: Socialist group here, I would like to dwell a bit more on the Saudi situation and my question is to Jamal. First of all, when we go to Saudi Arabia, we hear a lot of talk about reform, about drastic change in the ways of the country. At the same time, there are women-rights activists who are being arrested. Just today there was the arrest of Hatoon al-Fassi, who ironically advocated for the very things that the crown prince is allegedly promoting, so how does this reform revision square with the crackdown? That is number one. Number two is, considering the fact that the crown prince has accumulated such vast power in his hands and Saudi Arabia has always been a system that worked more on consensus than by one strong leader, do you think there is potential for backlash from traditional power brokers within the system? And final question: you pointed out the dangers of sectarianism and obviously we all share that. But Saudi Arabia sectarianism is actually fueled by discriminatory policies towards the Shia minority. So, the question is, do you see any chance of Mohammed Bin Salman forging kind of national Saudi national identity which is not sectarian-based but which is inclusive, including the Shias?

Jamal Khashoggi: Firstly, about the female activists. I don't think I have a good answer to that. It is totally unnecessary, bad PR, and it hurts the narrative of Mohammed bin Salman's tour in America and the EU. These women present no opposition movement. The only explanation is that Mohammed bin Salman does not want anyone to claim credit for the reforms except himself. I want to read to you a tweet of a friend of mine who represents the government of Saudi Arabia in Washington. He tweeted yesterday, actually this is in an article he wrote: "Saudi Arabia was being driven by old men at 30 miles per hour for decades. Now it is being driven by a young man at 100 miles per hour and he will get you where you want to go; he will get us where we want to go. But some people might get run over along the way." I'm sure you all disagree with that, it's horrible. But actually, it looks like many people around the country think that collateral damage has to happen. I might agree if those who will get run over along the way are trying to suppress or to revolt or to do a coup attempt or something like that. I don't see that happening. I don't have a proper answer. I just hope he will get a proper advisor who will tell him that you need people behind you, your people to support you, the people of Saudi Arabia need this reform and they will support this reform so you are just making it more difficult for yourself. This is my answer for him too.

I don't anticipate any backlash. He's totally in control; he has all the power he needs from his position as the crown prince. You know the king of Saudi Arabia rules by absolute rule; it is similar to the Middle Age concept of a divine rule: he is instructed by God to rule the nation so I don't see that any backlash will happen. The only condition is that he succeeds economically. What is economic success? We could debate about that. But if he provides jobs, lower unemployment increases GDP, puts more money in the hands of the Saudi people, then he has got it made. Put aside human rights, put aside everything. Right now in the hierarchy of needs, that is what the people of Saudi Arabia need. Human rights will come later. So he has to reform

economically to avoid any backlash – if there would be backlash it would be on economic issues. Not issues related to Palestine or women being arrested.

As to sectarianism in the Eastern Province, I anticipate this to be resolved soon. The religious establishment was very powerful in the past and the main obstacle to reconciliation. They were the ones who were insistent on making the Shia study textbooks contrary to their own faith. But recently Mohammed bin Salman released a number of Shia activists from prison. I think he will strike a point by appearing as a reformer by easing restrictions on the Shia community and, again, we the people of Saudi Arabia should be supportive of that. We should not be hung up and say “Hey, what about our Sunni brothers?”. That would be wrong. We need to fix the situation in the Eastern Province and deprive the Iranians of any reason to inflame the situation in our country.

Question: Thank you. The European External Action Service. I’d like to have your assessment on two issues. One, what happened at the Ritz Carlton in November? How do you see it from your standpoint? Second, about something not even yet mentioned: Russia, the new elephant in the room. How do you see the new relations between Mohammed bin Salman and Putin? They were very friendly at the opening of the World Cup and seem to have a personal connection?

Mary Beth Long: We have divergent views so I’ll let Jamal go first.

Jamal Khashoggi: Going back to the two decades when we Saudis were debating corruption, it was one of the issues we debated every night. We always believed that they had to put an end to corruption; corruption grew out of control in Saudi Arabia. And we are not talking about routine corruption or 5 percent kickbacks or flying first class and charging it to the European Union or something like that. We are talking about corruption that hurts the country; projects that unnecessarily build kickbacks that amount to half the cost of the project. Muhammad bin Salman, in a famous interview to Bloomberg in March 2015 or 2016, spoke about inefficient spending over 10 years that amounted to about \$100 billion he described as inefficient. So, corruption had to be fought. So that’s when the Ritz Carlton episode happened. I came out in support of it in an article and in my twitter account, but now I changed my mind a little bit. It wasn’t transparent. It hurt the Saudi public sector and it drove investment away. Now I feel that it wasn’t conducted in the proper way of fighting corruption. Corruption is still unidentified clearly in Saudi Arabia. What is the corruption to fight? It appeared more to be a shakedown rather than anything else.

I still believe Saudi Arabia will never be successful economically without a true fight against corruption. But it has to be done the appropriate way through transparency and accountability, and by allowing the media to play a role. Other than that, I don’t think what happened in November benefitted Saudi Arabia. In fact, I think we lost more than what we gained. Particularly in the form of confidence for foreign and local investments. Saudi money is going out of the country right now. People are not investing and Mohammed bin Salman will have to work hard right now to resolving that confidence.

Regarding relations with Russia, Saudi Arabia has two interests: oil and Iran. For Saudi Arabia, it is important to have a good relationship with Russia to manage the oil prices and to attempt to drive a wedge between the Russians and the Iranians – although I don’t think that will work.

But it is good for Saudi Arabia to have a relationship with Russia as it is becoming a player in the region and filling in a vacuum in Syria. At the same time, we need to develop a clear vision of how the region should be like. Otherwise, we would have to submit to the Russian design for the region and I'm sure that cannot be in agreement with the Saudi Arabian design of the region. At least I hope not.

Mary Beth Long: I think that the Ritz Carlton was a brilliant strategic trifecta of commonality of interests between what the crown prince wanted to achieve. I think that it was primarily a shakedown. It was getting everyone in the room who was part of that side of the family that has done very well over the last decades and basically saying: there is a new sheriff in town and we have been asset-challenged – to put it in the politically correct way – and now is your opportunity to give to the greater good and get yourself back on the side of the angels (or at least out of the penalty box). Point number one.

Point number two, and probably in this order: corruption. I think there is a legitimate desire to align processes and to send a message, particularly to these players, as the major beneficiaries of corruption in the past, that this tolerance is no longer going to be part of your portfolio.

And thirdly I think what is probably more important was the message was directed at the people not in the room. This was a crown prince that was able and willing to be bold. He was going to be outrageously aggressive and not caring about consensus. He would literally put the major movers and shakers, in many respects and in many different areas of Saudi Arabia, in a room in the Ritz but on the floor, in lockdown, until he made his point. And he got what he wanted. I think there is also a message not only to the larger domestic audience but to the world, that this was a crown prince who was going to make his own set of rules. And he got at least a certain level of compliance. I think it was the first shot across the valley; it was a big splash and now you see people's attention turning to him.

I also think there was a message to [Mohammed bin] Nayef there because there were a lot of people waiting for that ultimate battle. I think in many respects this was a substitute for an ultimate battle that some people were expecting between Nayef and Mohammed.

On Russia, everything Jamal said I agree with. Fundamentally, though, I think that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states at large are much more oriented – people and government – towards the West. I think [Russia's] recent outreach to Saudi Arabia is much more practical. They acknowledge that Saudi Arabia is a player in the region and, in fact, in many respects in Syria and in other places Russia grossly outpaced the United States and Europeans in being able to shape and deliver results and be the major player, particularly in Syria. So, it was realpolitik: "I've got to have a relationship, and a close one, with somebody who filled the vacuum in many ways, and someone who is going to have not only now a major port in Syria, but other major facilities." And again, as Jamal pointed out, in the hopes of influencing Russia to at least at some point abandon some aspects of its relationship with Iran where they're not really naturally aligned. Buy from them the S400s, S300s, even though they are absolutely incompatible with American and European equipment. Do what you can to worm your way into Putin's heart and a lot of that is writing checks. I think the Emiratis as a result of U.S. pressure said never mind the S300s we'll just contribute to your sovereign wealth fund. It's check writing.

Question: The EU's Counterterrorism Coordinator's office. It has been fascinating listening to you speak. My focus is much more on radicalization and it was really interesting to hear what you said about the importance of the EU, in particular, supporting Mohammed bin Salman's reforms. There is a lot of hesitation about either getting it wrong and causing offense or fear that he doesn't mean what he says. But I'd be fascinated if you could go into a little bit more detail about what it is that the EU could do on this with Mohammed bin Salman? Are there areas that we should focus on? What is it that we should think about?

Jamal Khashoggi: I think there are two areas, or three. Number one is the economic transformation of Saudi Arabia and I'm sure you have many brilliant ideas about it. The second thing it is the issue of fixing the Middle East. The Middle East is falling apart. There is a need for ideas, for leadership, and to see the larger picture. Not only to see the suffering of the people in Yemen or how to send more aid to Hodeida. No matter how much aid you send to Yemen it will not be enough. No matter how much food you send to Syria it will not be enough. Syria, Libya, and Yemen are falling apart. So, there is a need to engage about this big issue of how to bring peace again to the Middle East. Of course, the Saudis might argue and present their ideas of stability first, and the need to bring strong leaders in the region. But if I was there I would argue against this idea. If the strong-leader argument was the solution, why did it fail in 2011? Those Arab republics need democracy, some form of power sharing. Maybe democracy is a big word; they need some form of power sharing. You could make all of the Libyans sit peacefully in one room like this and work together. The same applies to the Syrians and the Yemenis.

The last thing is about extremism. Muhammad bin Salman vowed he would return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam. But what is moderate Islam? In an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic*, he defended Wahhabism. And he blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for radicalism. There's a need to have a debate about that. Wahhabis or Salafis don't believe in or practice democracy whereas the Brotherhood does practice democracy. If democracy returns to Egypt, political Islam will automatically come back with it. So how can we fight political Islam, or eliminate political Islam, without eliminating democracy? This is something on which Europe could engage with Saudi Arabia and other countries. And they should go beyond radicalism and Salafism. What produces radicalism and Salafism is the prisons, the failed states. The failed states of Syria and Iraq are what produced ISIS. So, it would be much better to address the reasons why these states failed: the lack of democracy, the lack of freedom, and the lack of human rights. That's something the European Union and the Saudis can work on together.

Mary Beth Long: I would agree with Jamal. Somebody asked earlier about the arrest of the woman driver after the fact that the law passed that permits women driving. I think the EU and the Europeans could really be helpful in helping [Crown] Prince Salman and those around him understand that dissent, in particular, dissent that really doesn't impact your power or your ability to execute what you're doing, sometimes provides a useful mechanism through which people can vent frustration or maybe ideas and concepts that are contrary to what yours are. But that outlet is necessary lest you contain and explode. And I think this is something that we talked for a long time about. What would be the purpose? Why would you spend political capital, putting down people who are really no harm to you and arresting them? Not arresting them would have gone unnoticed by the world, but by arresting them you have raised their profile and raised the fact that the West, in particular, sees you as intolerant and unfair.

And I think there is a negative impact on his narrative of him being benevolent and accepting – this arrest being an example. He needs to know that it undermines his credibility and undermines the whole thought process of whether we take him at his word and believe that he's really looking at reform. It makes me wonder why would you bother to arrest a woman that frankly is advocating for something you already changed the law about? So, I think there is a political message there that they don't understand the word receding whether they like it or not.

And secondly, as Jamal pointed out, I think that the Europeans, in helping him understand that dissident parties – and there's a difference between extremist violent political Islam and political Islam – are already part of the government bodies in Kuwait, Tunisia, Morocco. That he has got to figure out. The Saudis and the Emiratis have not benefited from lumping all of the Muslim Brotherhood together and saying they are terrorists. They're just not. It's not credible that they are saying so. They are part of the government structures of allies of those countries, and I think it undermines the point the Saudis are trying to make, which is that they are concerned about the violent aspects of political Islam. They have got to find a way, rather than calling them terrorists, to deal with dissident voices that want to be part of the political process.

Question: You were talking a lot about relations of Saudi Arabia with players in the Middle East, the movers and shakers. We have talked about Israel, Russia, we have talked about other surrounding countries, Iran of course. Is there anything to say about Turkey and Erdoğan who is also moving and shaking?

Jamal Khashoggi: Yes, big time. This is one of the points that caused the fallout out between me and the government. They hated me when I would say "We need to have a good relationship with Turkey." For some reason, Saudi Arabia does not want to have a good relationship with Turkey. They more and more see Turkey as an adversary, with the Qatar crisis, with the Turks committing troops in Qatar that made Saudi Arabia angry. Turkey is seen as competing with Saudi Arabia in the so-called competition to lead the Muslim World, even though this doesn't really mean much, to lead the Muslim world.

If I were an advisor to my government I would tell them that you need to work with the Turks or you can't create a counterweight to Iranian expansionism in the region. Now, unfortunately, we began to speak about blocs, Turkish, Qatari, even though there is no such thing. Okay, the Turks and the Qataris are close. Malaysia now is also coming into the picture with its change in government and the coming of the Islamists. It is an interesting time. The Saudi relationship with Turkey needs to be monitored. Maybe before the elections, the Saudis were hoping that Erdoğan would lose. But the fact is that he won and the fact that he will rule for another five years with so much power. Maybe that will make Saudi Arabia reposition itself towards Turkey. The good relationship between Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not break and is still there; they maintain a decent relationship. If you monitor the Saudi media, you will expect that a war would break out between both countries. So, we just hope for realpolitik to chip in and improve the relationship between both countries.

Question: A Ph.D. candidate at the Catholic University of Louvain la Neuve, and at the same time I am a representative from a business in Turkey. My first question was about Turkey but

you answered it. My second is about the Qatar issue. There is an initiative by Mohammed bin Salman. Do you see any solutions to that in the upcoming weeks or months?

Jamal Khashoggi: The only ones who can provide or push for a solution are the American administration as we speak. I would like to hear Mary Beth's views about that. But the position in Saudi Arabia is totally their style, totally refusing to compromise, they want total surrender from Qatar. In my opinion, it is about the Arab Spring. Qatar is providing a breathing space for Arab Spring advocates to speak from Al-Jazeera or other Qatari media outlets. Maybe Qatar is also [giving support to] to political organizations but I don't count this because even the Muslim Brotherhood are low maintenance and they can probably finance themselves. But I wouldn't rule out that the Qataris are helping out. But even if they are helping out, how can Saudi Arabia be sure 100 percent that they will reconcile with the Qataris on the Brotherhood? The Brotherhood is an idea and ideas are hard to die. So, I think the main thing the Saudis want from Qatar is Al-Jazeera and a number of media outlets because that is what is providing a live breathing space for those ideas of the Arab Spring. It is not dead yet. But the only ones who can put an end to this right now are the Americans if they decide to do so. But I will leave the rest to Mary Beth.

Mary Beth Long: Both envoys I've talked to consistently report that – as Jamal alluded to – not only do the Saudis and the Emiratis not want the United States involved anymore – in part because, I think, they know how frustrated the Americans are – but neither of them has shifted their position at all. They want total capitulation. While President Trump is going to back off unless he sees movement, there is some holding out until a meeting in September but I don't see any meeting unless there is progress. You never want your president to have a meeting unless there is something to meet about, and right now there isn't. I agree with Jamal on Al-Jazeera. There are a lot of legitimate and illegitimate allegations and complaints against Qatar. You saw them flip-flop from pro-Qatar at the very beginning to now a very supportive, excuse me, pro-Saudi and Emirati, out of the gate with a very strong statement. Now I think many would see it as pro-Qatar. There are things that bother the administration most. First that we are being pushed away as a mediator. Number two, the list of demands is deemed by us to be an infringement on Qatar's sovereignty and ridiculous – some of them. Three, most of the complaints are old complaints or complaints we have heard before. And the timing of the blow-up was in the middle of Trump's first historic trip to an Arab country, which was huge for the United States. For us, it's enough to go to Israel for a first foreign trip, and to go to Saudi Arabia was “ginormous” and controversial. The president really wanted to say we had the GCC working against ISIS. Not even 48 hours later, the GCC falls apart. And I think there is a real resentment in the administration that “why would you do that on the trip”? Unless there was some critical, time-sensitive issue. Blowing up my announcement of a successful trip. And there has been really no response, no information from the Saudis or the Emiratis on why they did it on the trip. Particularly, because Mohammed bin Zayed was in the White House the week before and didn't give the administration a heads-up. So, there is real anger and frustration there, and legitimately so.

Jamal Khashoggi: Why do you think the Saudis and Emiratis went all in with the Qataris. I mean, there was no reason to go against the Qataris. I mean, they knew everything.

Mary Beth Long: My private opinion, honestly, particularly given that Mohammed bin Zayed was in the White House the week before and Qatar wasn't even raised – you know, preparing the White House for the trip. I honestly believe that we all knew that the Saudis and the Emiratis have been very active in the United States for the last years, pushing anti-Qatar. I think there was a gross miscalculation that the trip to Saudi Arabia was going so well and the photo opportunities were so fantastic and it was never going to get better for this president. He didn't complain, he was leaning towards anti-Qatar, and I honestly believe that a calculation was made: "Look, we're riding high and this is a president who is embattled with a Russia investigation, there are all kinds of issues with Congress, his power will never be greater vis-à-vis us. We are going to do it on the heels of this trip because it's a golden opportunity to get out there and get it done." And they grossly miscalculated.

Jamal Khashoggi: But nothing has happened? I mean, the year passed.

Mary Beth Long: They got what they wanted. The president came out and said "You're right, you're right, you're right," and what the president did not understand was the president's advisors were going to get to him and say "ah ah ah," and then the president was going to realize they took the carpet out from underneath his first successful trip and tainted it. And I think they are paying the price. I think it was a gross miscalculation where they thought they were going to take advantage to ride a wave and the wave collapsed.

Jamal Khashoggi: I call it the Glaspie effect. Do remember [April] Glaspie, the American ambassador to Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait? She gave an ambiguous answer to Saddam Hussein and he took it as "Go ahead and invade Kuwait." It's just something like that. It looks like Trump gave an ambiguous response to the Qatar crisis.

Question: Why go against the Qataris? They haven't done anything new.

Jamal Khashoggi: Because God smiled on us and gave us Trump. It was the opportunity that we have Trump on our side.

Mary Beth Long: But the underpinning, Al-Jazeera, was formulated to poke the eyes of the Saudis way before. There is nothing new, it was an opportunity.

Question: Jamal, this is the third debate we have had with you today. And in these debates, you have said many times that the Saudi narrative is that more pluralism than in the reforms proposed by Mohammed bin Salman is not possible because opening up more would bring the radicals to the fore. Some Arab countries, like Morocco, have been using the safety valve function of dissents, which you can in turn also use strategically. Sell this to Mohammed bin Salman and say "Okay look, this is in your interest to ease public pressure", and this is true both of voicing opinions and regarding the integration of certain groups. I wonder if there is room to use this option more. Do you think that there are any lessons to learn from this experience?

Jamal Khashoggi: I'm a strong believer in democracy as the solution for the Arab world in general, and particularly for the failed Arab states like Libya, Syria, and Yemen. That is the only thing that can bring a diverse group of people into a room and work peacefully together. I could take the example of Lebanon. I always call Lebanon the best failed Arab state. It functioned for two or three years without a government. Just because the Lebanese people have some form

of power sharing. There is corruption but they have some form of power-sharing that keeps them from fighting and killing each other. But the lack of democracy as a form of power-sharing leaves those failed Arab republics with no choice but to kill each other. We see that in Libya; we see that in Yemen.

How will Mr. Haftar win in Libya? By force, by overriding his opponents. And how would Bashar prevail in Syria? By overriding his opponents. That is not a solution. Radicals are not necessarily a part of openness in the Arab world. I will take you to the moment of 2011 in Tahrir Square. Everybody could have stood there in 2011 with any slogan he wanted. Not a single Egyptian rose with a picture of Osama bin Laden. There was no mention of Al-Qaeda, no mention of Osama bin Laden in Tahrir Square during the revolution. The revolution in Egypt in 2011 – suddenly all Egyptians become believers in democracy. And their most famous slogan was: “Freedom, Dignity, and Good Living.” They agreed on that without anyone standing and giving them a speech about the values of democracy as if democracy was built inherently in them. So we should take that moment in history as the true example of the Arab mindset. Same thing at the beginning of the revolution in Libya, at the beginning of the revolution in Syria, and even in Yemen. It was all about the same ideas. That will prevail. But when military force came in, it destroyed the picture. How did ISIS come to Syria? Because Bashar resorted to violence against his own people and somehow he encouraged the rise of ISIS. So, radicalism is not a necessity of freedom in the Arab world. In fact, it is freedom in the Arab world that will eliminate radicalism.

Cristian Dan Preda: Thank you all for coming, I think it was a very good exchange. It is great to be part of these meetings and thank you very much.