

The Speech of the GRC Chairman, Abdulaziz Sager, The  
Gulf Forum 2009: US-Gulf Relations Post-Election

US-Gulf Relations Post-US Presidential Elections  
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Your Royal Highnesses

Your Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to Riyadh and to express my sincere gratitude for accepting the invitation of the Institute of Diplomatic Studies and the Gulf Research Center to participate in the 2009 Gulf Forum entitled “Issues and Prospects for GCC-US Relations under the Administration of US President-elect Obama.”

GCC-US relations have seen ups and downs recently, mainly after the September 11 attacks and due to the key role of neoconservative policy makers in the Bush administration. These relations focus on important issues such as energy, trade and economic relations; countering terrorism; GCC internal reform; the situation in Iraq and the Iranian nuclear threat.

In light of our previous experience, these relations ought to be seriously re-evaluated, with a broad examination of the priorities and direction, in a way that serves the interests of both sides. The election of a new US President, the global financial crisis and Gulf security as well as the political shifts could be turning points in the US-GCC relations.

Furthering US-GCC relations requires a good deal of transparency, which would be in line with the new approach signaled by US President-elect Barack Obama during his election campaign. Each actor should understand the interests, priorities and concerns of the other. In this context, I would like to throw light on the following main issues:

First, the GCC states are extremely concerned about the future of Iraq as an Arab state, realizing that a deterioration of the situation in Iraq will have a spillover effect in neighboring

countries. The new US administration should coordinate with the GCC governments regarding any arrangements in Iraq. The pullout of US forces will be catastrophic unless non-sectarian and strong Iraqi armed forces and police force are established, real national reconciliation is reached and reconstruction programs are implemented.

Second, a Gulf region free of weapons of mass destruction and the prevention of a military confrontation – triggered by Iranian nuclear ambitions – are among the top priorities of the GCC states. In fact, GCC governments support a peaceful settlement of the Iranian issue provided that this settlement does not come at their expense pursuant to a possible deal between Washington and Tehran.

Given that Gulf security is an issue of concern not only to the US and GCC states but also to other regional and international actors, an opportunity should be given to these parties to have a role in Gulf security arrangements in view of the fact that energy security is closely linked to a stable Gulf.

The US policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is blindly biased towards Israel, casts its shadow on GCC-US relations and has been embarrassing sometimes to the Arab allies of the US. The new US administration should reconsider the American strategy towards this conflict as it fuels regional tension and extremism.

In light of the global financial crisis, US-GCC economic relations should be reviewed mainly because the currencies of all GCC states except Kuwait are still pegged to the US dollar.

The post-9/11 anti-terrorism strategy of the US is not achieving its goals – the world has only become increasingly insecure – and, therefore, it should be reconsidered. The GCC states are supportive of fighting terrorism through coordinated international efforts. However, a distinction should be made

between terrorism and legitimate resistance against occupation. A comprehensive strategy should be adopted to eliminate terrorism. Security measures, though necessary, are not enough to stem the sources of extremism and terrorism.

The Bush administration has successfully managed to tarnish the US image across the world, including in the Gulf region. Refurbishing this image will now require more than public relations campaigns and exchange of ideas. A positive shift in the US strategy towards key regional issues is of paramount importance.

Finally, a coordinated GCC stance in dealing with Washington could put GCC-US relations on the right track and serve the best interests of both sides.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your participation in the Gulf Forum this year. We are sure that your contribution will play a significant role in the success of the forum.

Best regards