A KINGDOM IN TRANSITION

Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Leo Docherty

A CMEC Gulf Program publication

April 2016
CONTENTS

FOREWORD 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

PART ONE – MARCH 2013 3
THE END OF AN ERA
THE ARAB SPRING
THE US WITHDRAWAL
SAUDI YOUTH
THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION

PART TWO – APRIL 2016 5
A NEW GENERATION
A SWEEPING AMBITION
CONSTRAINTS TO REFORM
GRAPPLING WITH EXTREMISM
REGIONAL PRESSURES - IRAN AND YEMEN

CONCLUSION 8

TIMELINE 9
FOREWORD

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a crucial ally in a region wrestling with monumental upheaval.

Syria and Iraq have all but collapsed as nation states, with Daesh still on the rampage as Russia seeks to exploit the conflict for its own ends. A fragile ceasefire in Yemen between the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi rebels will hopefully last long enough to allow a political settlement, and if it does not, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula will look to profit from the chaos. All the while the Kingdom remains fearful of a resurgent Iran and is fiscally squeezed at home due to the collapse of the oil price.

More than ever before the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a crucial role to play as a force for stability in the Gulf region. This is an issue of huge importance to the UK, and CMEC’s Gulf Program seeks to ensure a more profound knowledge of the region in the parliamentary Conservative Party. Travel to the region - such as the two delegations to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia described in this publication - is critical to the success of this effort. I had the pleasure of leading the second of the two delegations and I am delighted to see this useful and timely report.

The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP
Chairman
Conservative Middle East Council
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in a period of transition. When the last formal CMEC Delegation took place in March 2013 there was an atmosphere of *fin de siècle* stagnation and uncertainty. Now, in 2016, there is an atmosphere of energy and central control.

2. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has launched himself into the task of reforming the Saudi state with great energy, while also leading the Saudi intervention in Yemen - a first for the Kingdom - and pursuing an aggressive play to maintain Saudi oil market share despite the fiscal trauma of tumbling prices. The long term feasibility of Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s reform agenda is an open question.

3. The Kingdom faces pressing regional challenges and senior Saudis expressed disbelief at the Iran deal. They are sensitive but optimistic about the Saudi-led Yemen intervention. The Kingdom is the leading nation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Following the Arab spring, Saudi Arabia finds itself in a more prominent position across the entire Middle East, at a time when Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus and other Arab capitals remain absorbed by crippling domestic pressures and conflicts.

4. The UK must do all it can to support the Kingdom to deliver stability and good governance for its people. The UK-Saudi Arabia relationship is of critical importance to both countries. Increasing technical and political support should be offered to the kingdom as it seeks to diversify and reform its economy.

PART ONE

MARCH 2013 – THE END OF AN ERA

Between 10th and 14th March 2013, a CMEC delegation visited Saudi Arabia. The delegation was privileged to have meetings with officials at the highest level of the Saudi government. During the course of the visit, the delegation met Crown Prince Salman (b. 1935), who later succeeded his half-brother Abdullah (1924 - 2015) as King of Saudi Arabia. The delegation also met Deputy Crown Prince Muqrin (b. 1945) and Prince Bandar bin Sultan (b. 1949), the Chief of Intelligence. There was also a meeting held with Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah (b. 1963), the deputy Foreign Minister who is a son of King Abdullah.

Discussions primarily revolved around the political situation in the Middle East in general. Domestic issues were scarcely touched upon at all during this delegation. The obvious reason for this omission was that the price of crude oil remained high throughout 2013, as prices fluctuated between around $100 and $120 per barrel. Oil is estimated to account for between 75% and 80% of the Saudi government’s total revenues. A meeting at the National Bank, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, showed a healthy fiscal position supported by historically high crude oil prices.
In terms of economic performance, it must be remembered that the situation in the Kingdom was much healthier in 2013 than in 2016. The average crude oil price in March 2013 was $102 per barrel. In contrast, this figure in March 2016 was $37. The population has increased from an estimated 29.3m in 2013 to 31.4m in 2016, an addition of 2 million people. An impressive fiscal surplus of 13.6% of GDP in 2012/13 has now turned into a large fiscal deficit of 19.5% of GDP in 2015/16. Perhaps most worryingly of all, the unemployment rate, as far as it can be measured, has doubled from 5.6% in 2012/13 to 11.4% in 2015/16.1

THE ARAB SPRING
At the beginning of 2013, all Saudi attention was absorbed by the political situation in the Middle East. Of particular interest was the behaviour of Iran, and the perception that Iranian ambitions had significantly increased since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Saudi attitude to the Arab Spring, which shook the region at the beginning of 2011, can best be described as tepid in its enthusiasm. Indeed, there was considerable suspicion that a period of prolonged instability would compromise the security of the Kingdom. All sorts of strange theories were entertained about the motivation of the United States in invading Iraq. One of the CMEC delegation spoke with a member of the Shura Council, at a lunch kindly hosted by the Council, about US aims at the region. It appeared that, even as early as 2013, a number of Saudi officials were somewhat exasperated by the US attitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

THE US WITHDRAWAL
The reluctance of the United States to involve itself more energetically in the region was manifest to the Saudis in the ongoing Syrian civil war. In early 2013, before anyone had heard of Daesh, the Saudis expressed optimism about the possibility of reaching a resolution to the Syrian conflict. Indeed, it was remarked that Assad would probably be gone “in six months”. At this stage, the Syrian conflict was very much viewed as a straight fight between Assad and the Syrian opposition. The fracturing of the opposition, and the emergence of Daesh, would come to dominate the situation on the ground only in 2014. It was also hoped that the West would perhaps intervene more actively against Assad, though this expectation was dashed by the House of Commons’ refusal to sanction any intervention in the vote on 29th August 2013, some five months after the delegation.

The markedly different circumstances of the first half of 2013 can best be appreciated when we consider that the Muslim Brotherhood still held sway in Egypt. They were only replaced by the coup at the end of June 2013. Saudi officials did express some doubts about Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt. It must be admitted, however, that Egypt was not a prominent subject of discussion.

SAUDI YOUTH
A highlight of the delegation was a visit to the British Council, where the delegation had the privilege to meet a number of young Saudi men, mainly aged between 20 and 30. They gave the impression of being fairly conservative with regard to issues such as the recent admission of women to the Shura Council. This development was one of the progressive measures introduced by King Abdullah, who showed an interest in some degree of liberal reform. His successor has been widely perceived to have more conservative instincts.

1 All data is taken from the CIA world factbook, except population data which is from World Bank.
THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION

Overall the impression was one of relative stagnation. The regime seemed old. As a historical curiosity, it was remarkable that all three of the most senior members of the royal family - King Abdullah, whom we did not see, Crown Prince Salman and Prince Muqrin - were sons of Ibn Saud (1875-1953) the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After the death of King Abdullah, and the readjustment of the line of succession, a new generation, the grandsons of Ibn Saud, is coming into prominence.

Even in 2013 considerable challenges to the Saudi government were conspicuous. The ongoing relationship between the House of Saud and Wahhabi Islamic clergy is a continuing feature of great importance to the stability of the Kingdom. The perception of the delegation in 2013 was that King Abdullah’s regime was more liberal than many Wahhabi clerics would have liked. It appeared that any radical challenge to the House of Saud’s authority would emanate from the often extremely conservative Wahhabi religious establishment.

There was, of course, always the challenge of educating, and finding employment for, a youthful population. In 2013 there was the undoubted feeling that one regime was coming to an end. King Abdullah, then in his 90th year, was in poor health and was not expected to be on the scene for too much longer. It was anticipated the HRH Prince Muqrin was being groomed as “placeholder” Crown Prince in order that he might stand down to allow the first of a new generation – one of Ibn Saud’s grandchildren – to ascend to the throne. Favoured candidates then included Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (b 1959), the Interior Minister, and Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, (b 1952), the commander of the National Guard.

2016 would prove a markedly different situation from 2013. Many of the challenges of 2013 had become more complicated and urgent.

PART TWO – APRIL 2016

A NEW GENERATION

In early April 2016, a CMEC delegation visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As in 2013, the delegation was privileged to meet the most senior officials in the Saudi government. Of particular note were separate meetings with HM King Salman and his son the Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, whose official portfolios are those of second deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. It should also be noted that there were highly useful meetings with Prince Turki, the former Chief of Intelligence and a former ambassador to both Great Britain and the United States, and Adel Al-Jubeir, the foreign minister appointed in the summer of 2015. The delegation also enjoyed a meeting with the Finance Minister, Ibrahim bin Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Assaf.

The meeting with the King was animated, and he spoke generally about his regard for Britain and the challenges Saudi Arabia faces. One member of the CMEC delegation, who had met His Majesty in 2013, when he was the Crown Prince, felt that the King spoke more fluently and showed more interest in policy than had been the case at the 2013 meeting. This may have been a consequence of his greater responsibilities, as well as his being provided with more support and prompting.

The audience with the Deputy Crown Prince was particularly energetic and instructive. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is a big man, and, like his grandfather King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, stands at about 6’3”. He has a broad grin, an abundance of nervous energy and speaks with highly eloquent
rhetoric, and an impressive grasp of detail. He has a very bold vision of a reformed Saudi Arabia, but his capacity to deliver may be limited by the Saudi state’s inability to deliver reforms. The willingness of the socially conservative Saudi people to accept radical changes to their way of life may also be a constraint on his reforming zeal.

The Deputy Crown Prince is explicit about the Kingdom’s past failures. He rattled off facts and figures with considerable fluency, and he spoke like a young technocrat about the “tip of the executive branch” needing to be more active. He described how many of the governing councils which had operated in King Abdullah’s time had been abrogated or simply abolished. His vision encompassed the whole range of Saudi policy, across the economic, social, military and diplomatic fields. He lamented Saudi Arabia’s over-reliance on oil, and the government’s extensive state spending on welfare. It is clear to him that the kingdom must address these problems. Interestingly, the Deputy Crown Prince refers to the Saudi Army as “my army” and Saudi borders as “my borders”, wholly identifying himself with the Saudi state. It remains to be seen whether Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s self-confidence and forceful personality lead to growing tensions within the royal family itself. As in any politically active monarchy, much of Saudi Arabia’s future will depend on the longevity of its sovereign. Internal dynamics within the ruling House of Saud family may change considerably over the next ten years. This could conceivably be the period during which King Salman may, if he lives to the age of his half-brother King Abdullah, remain on the throne.

A SWEEPING AMBITION

Prince Mohammed bin Salman is clear that Saudi Arabia must reduce expenditure, increase non-oil revenues and introduce some measure of taxation. His National Transformation Plan will be announced in early May 2016. Following the collapse in the oil price the Kingdom has an annual revenue of $100bn from oil - down from $250bn - and $40bn non-oil revenues. The dramatic fall in the price of oil is viewed as an opportunity for much needed reform. Although the Kingdom has significant cash reserves (in the region of $600bn), and its net debt is just 6% of GDP, it is now running an annual deficit of $100bn (15% of GDP). 25% of government expenditure is on defence. Subsidy reform is on the agenda and is sorely needed – the Kingdom has the cheapest petrol in the world, and also heavily discounted electricity and water. The Deputy Crown Prince hopes to save $40-50bn over next 5 years with these reforms. He has also stated that privatization can generate $20bn. There are ambitious plans to raise non-oil revenues in the medium term from a number of sources: non-oil operations of Aramco; mining; a China – Saudi Arabia silk road into Africa; a railway network in the Kingdom; improved links within the GCC, such as a port road link from Fujairah in UAE to the Kingdom; links to India, whereby Saudi Arabia acts as a gateway for that country into the Middle East; and a land bridge to Egypt to facilitate Asia-Africa trade.

CONSTRAINTS TO REFORM

Despite Prince Mohammed’s obvious energy and commitment, he may find it difficult fully to realise many of his ambitious plans. The apparent reluctance of many of Saudis to work in place of millions of expatriates, particularly in roles perceived as menial and undignified, is a significant obstacle to economic reform. 70% of the Saudi population is under 30 years of age. By contrast, of a population of 30m, 10m are expatriate workers, employed at every level from manual workers to senior positions across all the Saudi economy.

Another risk is that the confidence of investors, both domestic and foreign, may be damaged if the behavior of the Saudi government is erratic or regarded as overly punitive, particularly with regard to the introduction of more extensive taxation.
Furthermore the social contract, whereby generous state handouts consolidate the loyalty of the population to the Al Saud family, may be compromised if welfare benefits are cut, and new taxes introduced.

The role of the clerical establishment is also a potential hazard in any attempt to introduce wider reforms. The royal family has long maintained an informal alliance of mutual support with the clerical establishment. This relationship may become strained under the pressures of rapid reform, declining government expenditure and the wider participation of Saudi women in the country’s economic and social life. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has indicated his belief that the role of women will inevitably change, as a consequence of government policy and the changing economic environment. Such beliefs may put him increasingly at odds with the most conservative elements in the Saudi clergy.

GRAPPLING WITH EXTREMISM

It is estimated that there are 3,000 Saudi citizens fighting with Daesh, but support for Daesh among the mainstream Saudi population is reportedly not widespread. This is partly due to the traumatic experience of the Al Qaeda bombing campaign in the Kingdom between 2003- and 2006, and partly attributable to the subsequent Ministry of Interior hard line policy against extremism led by The Crown Prince HRH Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Extensive de-radicalisation facilities exist in the Kingdom. These were established by Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, and it is reported that they have processed and reintegrated into society more than 3,000 ex-extremists since 2006. Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has, in the last few months, established a global Islamic Military Coalition to counter terrorism. It is hoped that this organisation will improve the efforts of Muslim states to fight extremism and terrorism. Its role will simply be one of organisation and coordination. There are no plans for the coalition to deploy military resources in any theatre of war.

Senior Saudis openly speak about the traumatic Saudi experience of extremism. They point to the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in that same year, as the beginning of a period of radicalization and renewed sectarian violence across the Middle East. They eagerly point out that Saudi Arabia did not suffer from terrorism before 1979, and that Iran is an overtly sectarian nation, exporting its Shi’ite revolution by violent means. It is widely accepted, not only among Saudis, that the Mujahideen war against the USSR in Afghanistan during the 1980s, led to increased radicalisation and terror. It should be remembered that Osama bin Laden received his first lessons in jihad in Afghanistan. An example of the usual conspiracy theories so popular in the region, we were told that Osama bin Laden had deliberately ensured that 15 of the 19 9/11 terrorists were of Saudi origin in order to portray the country as a source of terrorism. An alternative explanation would simply be that the country has among its population a number of young men uniquely susceptible to radicalisation.

REGIONAL PRESSURES - IRAN AND YEMEN

A frequent subject of our discussions was, of course, the nature of Saudi strategic interests in the region. Iran and Yemen can be considered to be the most urgent sources of concern in this context. The Saudis believe they have the upper hand in Yemen and hope that the Kuwait talks this spring will provide them with an exit strategy from the conflict. They state that the military intervention has been successful in reestablishing government control in 80-85 % of Yemen and in bringing the Houthis to the table. Prince Mohammed bin Salman has maintained that the Saudi government had no option but to act in response to Houthi rocket and mortar strikes across the Saudi border which have killed more than three hundred Saudis. Senior officials express uncertainty and dismay about the reliability of western suppliers of munitions to the Kingdom (who face pressure domestic due to civilian casualties in Yemen). They contrast this to the steady and reliable support that Russia offers its allies in the region. On the humanitarian side,
the Saudi government is proud of their generosity towards Yemen, which is coordinated by the King Salman Humanitarian and Relief Centre and reportedly reached a value of $420m in 2015.

Following the Iran nuclear deal, and the perceived US disengagement from the region, the Saudi leadership feels abandoned. They believe that the western perspective on Iran, the notion that there exists an internal struggle between moderates and reformers within Iran itself, is mistaken. In the Saudi view, President Rouhani is merely a puppet of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The Saudi’s believe that Tehran’s détente with the West will not last because there will be no change inside the Islamic Republic, and the regime will remain intransigent and aggressive.

“…they blow up our diplomats…we have been at the receiving end of their hostility for 35 years and we have had enough.” Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir

All our Saudi interlocutors expressed outrage at Iran’s meddlesome behaviour in the region. Some expressed shame and resentment about Iran’s boasting of its control of four Sunni capitals: Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad and Sanaa. They expressed hope that Iranian influence in Syria would decline after the removal of Bashar Al Assad from power.

CONCLUSION

The two delegations described in this publication covered a remarkable period of transition within the Kingdom, as the leadership of Saudi Arabia saw the first appointments of the grandsons of King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud to the most senior roles after the King. The power shift to the next generation had begun.

The entire Middle East had also undergone a significant transition. Between March 2013 and April 2016, a large number of crucially important geopolitical events occurred: Obama’s red line in Syria proved to be illusory; Daesh exploded onto the scene, causing mayhem and bloodshed across much of Iraq and Syria; the price of crude oil fell by two thirds; the P5+1 powers agreed a Nuclear deal with Iran; Saudi Arabia led a military intervention in Yemen; and in what many regarded as a positive step, the Egyptian army regained control of that country after ousting the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Saudi Arabian government remains highly conscious of the volatile upheavals which have swept the Middle East in recent years. It is against this turbulent background that the Saudi leadership is embarking upon an ambitious and necessary program of reform. Successful reform is of enormous importance, not just to the Kingdom but to the whole of the Gulf region and beyond. The CMEC Gulf program will continue its sustained effort to understand developments in the Kingdom during the critical months and years ahead.
TIMELINE

2001 September 11 attacks.

2002 November Saudi foreign minister says his country will not allow the US to use its facilities to attack Iraq, even in a UN-sanctioned strike.

2003 April US says it will pull out almost all its troops from Saudi Arabia, ending a military presence dating back to the 1991 Gulf war. Both countries stress that they will remain allies.

2003 May Suicide bombers kill 35 people at housing compounds for Westerners in Riyadh hours before US Secretary of State Colin Powell flies in for planned visit.

2003 November Suicide attack by suspected al-Qaeda militants on residential compound in Riyadh leaves 17 dead and scores injured.

2004 April Four police officers and a security officer are killed in attacks near Riyadh. Car bomb at security forces' HQ in Riyadh kills four, wounds 148. Group linked to al-Qaeda claims responsibility.

2004 June Three gun attacks in Riyadh within a week leave two Americans and a BBC cameraman dead. The same week, a US engineer is abducted and beheaded, his filmed death causing revulsion in America.

2004 December Attack on US consulate in Jeddah; five staff and four attackers are killed. Two car bombs explode in central Riyadh; security forces kill seven suspects in a subsequent raid.

2005 February to April Nationwide municipal elections are held in Saudi Arabia for the first time. Women do not take part in the poll.

2005 August Saudi royal court announces death of King Fahd. He is succeeded by the former crown prince, Abdullah.

2006 June Six men allegedly linked to al-Qaeda are killed in a shootout with police in Riyadh.

2006 August Oil prices reach $78.30 per barrel.

2007 February Four French nationals are killed in a suspected terror attack near the north-western ruins of Madain Saleh, which are popular with tourists.

2007 July Saudi religious police are banned from detaining suspects.

2007 September Saudi Arabia and Britain agree a deal for 72 Eurofighter Typhoon combat jets.

2008 July Oil prices hit record highs above $147 a barrel.

2008 September Oil prices fall below $100 a barrel.

2008 December Oil prices bottom out at $32 per barrel.
2009 February  Interpol issues security alerts for 85 men suspected of plotting attacks in Saudi Arabia, in its largest group alert. All but two are Saudis. King Abdullah sacks head of religious police, most senior judge and central bank head in rare government reshuffle.

2009 October  Oil prices recover to $82 per barrel.

2009 November  Saudi troops move to enforce buffer zone in northern Yemen after becoming involved in border clashes with Yemeni rebels.

2010 October  US officials confirm plan to sell $60 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia - the most lucrative single arms deal in US history.

2010 December  Diplomatic cables revealed by whistle-blowing website Wikileaks suggest US concern that Saudi Arabia is the "most significant" source of funding for Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.

2010 December  Oil prices reach $90 per barrel.

2011 February  King Abdullah announces increased welfare spending, as unrest continues across Arab world.

2011 March  Public protests banned, after small demonstrations in mainly Shia areas of the east. Saudi troops deploy to Bahrain amid unrest.

2011 April  Oil prices reach $125 per barrel.

2011 September  King Abdullah announces more rights for women, including the right to vote and run in municipal elections and to be appointed to the consultative Shura Council.

2011 October  Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz al Saud is named as the heir to the throne, after Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Saud dies.

2012 June  Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz dies and is succeeded by Prince Salman.

2012 August  Barack Obama makes statement that Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons in Syria would constitute a “red line.”

2013 February  King Abdullah swears in 30 women to the previously all-male Shura consultative council - the first time women have been able to hold any political office.

2013 March  CMEC delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Oil price $102 per barrel.

2013 August  UK MPs vote to reject UK military action in Syria. President Obama subsequently postpones a military strike against the Syrian government in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack to seek authorisation first from Congress.

2013 October  Saudi Arabia turns down a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, accusing the world body of double standards for what the kingdom sees a failure to act on Syria.
2013 November  Geneva interim agreement (Joint Plan of Action) signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries.

2013 December  Daesh militants in Iraq take control of Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in Iraq.

2014 January  Daesh takes over Raqqa in Syria.

2014 March  Saudi Arabia designates several Islamist groups as terrorist organisations and bans funding or support for them. The groups include the Muslim Brotherhood, the Al-Nusra front and the Daesh.

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2014 June  Oil prices reach a nine-month high of $120 per barrel.

2014 August  Daesh takes control of the Mosul Dam and the Kurdish towns of Sinjar and Zumar in Iraq.

2014 August  Oil prices fall to below $120 per barrel.

2014 September  Saudi Arabia and four other Arab states take part together with the United States in air strikes against Daesh strongholds in Syria.

2014 December  Daesh is pushed out of most of the Sinjar region of Iraq.

2014 November  OPEC holds meeting in Vienna. Before the gathering, there is speculation that OPEC countries might cut back on their own oil production, but in the end this does happen.

2014 December  Oil prices fall to $65 per barrel.

2015 January  King Salman ascends throne after King Abdullah dies.

2015 January  Oil prices fall to a five year low of $47 per barrel.

2015 March  Saudi Arabia launches campaign of air strikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen.

2015 April  In a major generational shift, King Salman appoints his nephew, Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef, as crown prince.

2015 April  Framework for a Comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme reached in Lausanne, Switzerland.

2015 April  Iraqi Government forces regain control of city of Tikrit from Daesh after month-long siege.

2015 May  Daesh captures the city of Ramadi in Iraq.

2015 June  Daesh’s Yemeni branch claims responsibility for a series of car bombings in the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

2015 July  Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – known as the Iran deal – reached in Vienna, Austria.
2015 August  Daesh claims responsibility for a suicide bombing on a Saudi Arabian mosque that kills at least 15 people.

2015 September  Hundreds die in stampede near Mecca during the annual Hajj pilgrimage, days after 109 people perished when a crane collapsed at the Grand Mosque.

2015 September  Russia begins airstrikes in Syria.

2015 November  Women stand in municipal elections for first time, 20 are elected.


2015 November  Kurdish forces seize Sinjar in Iraq from Daesh.

2015 December  Iraqi military forces seize Ramadi from Daesh.

2016 January  Crowds in Tehran set Saudi embassy alight in protest at execution of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr, which also prompts Shia demonstrations in Iraq and Lebanon. Saudi Arabia breaks off diplomatic relations with Iran.

2016 February  It is reported that mortars and rockets fired at Saudi Arabian towns and villages at the border with Yemen have killed 375 civilians, including 63 children.

2016 February  Oil prices fall below $30 per barrel.

2016 March  Three explosions at the Zaventem airport and a metro station in Brussels kill at least 30 people and injure dozens of others. Daesh claims responsibility for the attacks.

2016 April  CMEC delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Oil price $37 per barrel.
KWASI KWARTENG MP
Kwasi Kwarteng is the Member of Parliament for Spelthorne in Surrey.
He is the author of *Thatcher’s Trial, War and Gold: A Five-Hundred-Year History of Empires, Adventures and Debt* and *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World.*

LEO DOCHERTY
Leo Docherty is the Director of the Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC).
He is the author of *Desert of Death: A Soldier’s Journey From Iraq to Afghanistan.*

*Conservative Middle East Council*
55 Tufton Street, London, SW1P 3QL

t: +44 (0) 20 7340 6007
e: info@cmec.org.uk
w: www.cmec.org.uk
@CMECnews

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