



Monday, November 6, 2023



9:00 - 10:30 am Ottawa - 5:00-6:30 pm Riyadh



zoom

SAUDI - CANADA RELATIONS : Next Steps

MODERATOR



Dr. Abdulaziz Sager
Chairman
Gulf Research Center



H.E. Ambassador Jean-Philippe Linteau
Ambassador of Canada to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



H.E. Dr. Ghazi Binzagr
Member, Shura Council, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Board Member of Binzagr Group of Companies



H.E. Hoda Al-Helaissi
Member Shura Council, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Dr. Christian Koch
Director of Research
Gulf Research Center



Dr. Thomas Juneau
Associate Professor
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
University of Ottawa



Dr. Bessma Momani
Full Professor of Political Science
University of Waterloo



Amb (Retd) Arif Z Lalani
Distinguished Fellow
Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy
Senior Advisor,
StrategyCorp



Hon. Gary Mar
President and CEO
Canada West Foundation



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Saudi-Canada Relations: Next Steps Summary and Key Outcomes

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Webinar Session on Saudi-Canada Relations: Next Steps Summary and Key Outcomes

The Gulf Research Center (GRC) held a webinar session entitled “Saudi-Canada Relations: Next Steps,” on November 6, 2023. The speakers of the webinar were **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**, Chairman of the Gulf Research Center; **H.E. Ambassador Jean-Philippe Linteau**, Ambassador of Canada to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; **H.E. Hoda Al-Helaissi**, Member of the Shura Council in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; **H.E. Dr. Ghazi Binzagr**, Member of the Shura Council in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Board Member of Binzagr Group of Companies; **Dr. Thomas Juneau**, Associate Professor of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa; **Dr. Bessma Momani**, Full Professor of Political Science at the University of Waterloo; **Ambassador (Retired) Arif Z. Lalani**, Distinguished Fellow, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy and Senior Advisor at StrategyCorp; and **Hon. Gary Mar**, President and CEO of Canada West Foundation. **Dr. Christian Koch**, the Director of Research at the Gulf Research Center, moderated the webinar. In total, more than 100 people attended the session.

During the webinar, the speakers highlighted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Canada, who first established relations in 1973. Since then, Saudi-Canada relations have witnessed cooperation on various common interests on peace and security issues (such as energy security, humanitarian aid, and counterterrorism), as well as advancing economic and cultural ties. The speakers explained that the restoration of ties should be strategic, as opposed to transactional, and is based both on necessity and shared interests. The webinar focused on the following themes:

Political Cooperation & Security

The session emphasized Saudi Arabia’s increasing role in promoting the security, stability, and economic prosperity of the Arab region. Examples include moves to end the war in Yemen, restoring full diplomatic ties with Iran, leading ceasefire efforts in Sudan, and normalizing regional relations with Syria. The Kingdom’s role in international peace was also underlined by the speakers, including the Kingdom’s mediating roles and evacuation role of Canadian citizens in Sudan. The speakers noted numerous areas of political cooperation, as both countries are part of the G20, especially on global issues such as food security, innovation and technology, development and humanitarian assistance, and climate change. In terms of security, both Canada and Saudi Arabia are committed to countering terrorism as well as increasing maritime and energy security.

Trade & Economics

The speakers reiterated that trade has always been an essential factor in Saudi-Canadian relations, and now, the implementation of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 to diversify its economy away from oil is opening the Kingdom up to the world, mainly as it further develops its industrial sectors, such as manufacturing, logistics, tourism, and entertainment, while also promoting the use of clean energy. Specifically, Saudi Arabia’s giga-projects (NEOM, Qiddiya, Amaala, Red Sea Project, and Diriyah Gate), as well as its growth in ICT, renewable energy, healthcare, education, infrastructure, entertainment, telecommunications, mining, and tourism, are driving a large number of projects in the Kingdom. These transformations have led to significant demands across various sectors in which Canada excels. Supply chain and value chain partnerships were noted as crucial areas of collaboration. Additionally, healthcare and space engineering were cited as potential issues for



substantive engagement between the two countries. The speakers noted that expanding economic ties between the two countries will further strengthen the bilateral relationship.

Education & Culture

The session acknowledged that for years, Canada has been one of the preferred destinations for students studying abroad from Saudi Arabia. In 2014, there were over 16,000 Saudi students with scholarships and over 1,000 Saudi medical trainees in Canada. The full restoration of ties offers an opportunity to bring back the positive relationship between Saudi Arabian students and Canadian institutions. Exchange programs, cultural events, and university programs were cited as ways to improve the Canadian public perception of Saudi Arabia. The resumption of direct flights between the two countries is a step forward in facilitating these ties.

Issues & Concerns

One key issue raised during the webinar is that, presently, the general disposition in Canada toward the Kingdom stems from cultural and societal misunderstanding, even in the midst of Saudi Arabia's immense transformation. There continues to be a negative narrative in Canada towards the Kingdom based on misconceptions fueled by pre-existing stereotypes. The speakers agreed that more needs to be done to improve public perception and awareness between the two countries and that Canada needs to be more open, especially now with the new and shifting geopolitics (BRICS+, G20, and the Red Sea). Another common issue of concern was the facilitation of Canadian visas for Saudi citizens for educational and tourism purposes.

Some of the suggestions put forward in the webinar for policy consideration include:

- Organizing Saudi-Canadian political dialogue meetings to engage in open discussion to understand each other's perspectives.
- Holding a Saudi-Canada Economic Forum to promote trade and dialogue.
- Enacting a strategic partnership and holistic framework that defines all the overarching win-win goals of the two countries and setting up a Saudi-Canada Strategic Council.
- Utilizing parliamentary diplomacy to promote better Saudi-Canada relations and mutual understanding, including reviving the Saudi-Canadian Parliamentary Friendship Committee at the Shura Council in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Conducting dedicated training and exchange programs to boost security skills.
- Enabling avenues of cooperation at the mid-level, parallel to high ministerial level cooperation, such as partnerships among think tanks, universities, R&D centers, and business-to-business forums.
- Reviving university programs, especially in the medical fields, as well as creating more viable programs for students from both countries.
- Encouraging people-to-people connections through cultural events and visits to improve mutual understanding and goodwill.
- Combining the commercial and business world with academics and media to help rewrite the narrative in Canada, as well as increasing awareness in Canada of Saudi Arabia's success stories, including on education, green energy, and tourism.
- Classifying Saudi Arabia as a priority for Canada to re-engage with the Kingdom as a complete trading partner.
- Having an increased Saudi Arabian presence in Canada to further improve public perceptions.

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