

Foreword

Welcome

أهلاً وسهلاً



Welcome to the Spring edition of Kingdom to Kingdom. As some of you may know this will be the last time I write the introduction to the magazine – by the time many of you get this I will have left Saudi Arabia. It has been an extraordinary three years starting with the Custodian's State Visit to London and ending with us just missing out on issuing our 100,000th visa for the year in 2009. As I have mentioned before on these pages this is actually my second time living in the Kingdom. So after six years I find myself leaving and thinking a lot about what has changed since I first arrived in 1995.

Of course there are a few easy things: the two tall towers in Riyadh; the traffic; the spread of the city ever outwards. But the human changes are there too: many more Saudis in managerial positions, universities in lists of the world's best; an increasingly vibrant Saudi media.

And the British Saudi relationship has changed as well. For decades the relationship was built on two main pillars: defence and trade. These remain strong. January saw trade between the Kingdoms rise 17% year on year. In the middle of the global recession these are staggering figures and do credit to the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of many Brits living and working in the Kingdom. As I hear from Saudi officers graduating from Sandhurst the military relationship remains immensely valued and important.

But the last ten years have seen the development of three other pillars which have diversified and strengthened our relationship with Saudi Arabia. The first is the counter terrorism relationship. By its nature a lot of this happens in private. But let me assure you that it matters immensely for the UK. Saudi Arabia's position as the location of the Two Holy Mosques gives it immense religious influence. We have a lot to learn about the intellectual security which the Kingdom has championed. The second of the three new pillars is co-operation on regional issues. As I often tell Saudi students we want a two state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict just like you, a fair deal for refugees just like you, Jerusalem as the capital of both states just like you, we want an end to illegal settlements, and to violence on both sides. Ultimately we want a stable, secure, prosperous middle east – and so does Saudi Arabia.

The final new pillar to the relationship is educational. The British Council continues to do fantastic work in Al Khobar, Jeddah and Riyadh. British technical and vocational training colleges are twinning with their Saudi counterparts in large numbers. And most importantly of all the number of Saudi students choosing to study in the UK has risen from 3,000 to 20,000 in the three years I have been ambassador. That is an extraordinary increase and speaks volumes about the future relationship between our Two Kingdoms.

So let me just finish by thanking all of you who have made Vanessa and I feel so welcome in the Kingdom. It has been a fascinating three years.

**Sir William Patey KCMG
British Ambassador**