

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia Middle Power Studies Network (FPCI-MPSN) held a virtual public discussion titled 'Eyes on Saudi Arabia: How a Pivotal Middle Power is Raising its Strategic Game' on 1st February 2024.  
(Rewatch via [bit.ly/mpsnsa](https://bit.ly/mpsnsa))

The panelists included:



**Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**, Founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center (GRC)



**Prof. Simon Mabon**, Professor of International Politics at Lancaster University



**Dr. Md. Muddassir Quamar**, Associate Professor at the Centre for West Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University



**Moderated by:**  
**Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**, Founder and Chairman of FPCI

I think Saudi Arabia understands its role in the Arab world and in the Muslim world also, and internationally. Saudi Arabia is still a key country in the Arab countries and the Islamic country.” - Dr. Abdulaziz Sager, Founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center (GRC)

## I. Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy fundamental

“Do we see Saudi Arabia as a middle power? Yes, like Indonesia, for instance. Indonesia also is a big Muslim country and they have a great population with a \$3.7 trillion ability in terms of economy with a great level of growth. We can also see a better role for the two good and important countries. We have seen them together touring the world with the other six ministers from Jordan, Egypt and other countries in trying to deliver the message about the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians in Gaza. That shows the closer and more important role of the two countries in how they play globally.

Saudi respects international law and human rights. Saudi Arabia still believes in the role of that one. Saudi Arabia still possesses 17% of the global oil reserve and plays a significant role with the non-OPEC countries, and we have seen how OPEC+ have played a role in stabilizing the market, and the relation between the supplier and the demand. Also, it is the largest economy in the Middle East, in one way or another. Then it has a very clear vision. In fact, in 2027 or 2028 Saudi Arabia is going to review and begin their Vision 2040, and we are going to go from that one.” - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

“If one looks at Saudi Arabia conventionally, there are three pillars of Saudi foreign policy. Oil/ energy, Islam, and the strategic alliance with the US. Over around a quarter of a century, because of developments at a systemic level and the subsystemic level, especially in the Middle East, and also developments within Saudi Arabia, all of the three have undergone some changes and shifts.

For over the past 25 years, there are five events which have impacted the thought process of Saudi foreign policy, and they are instrumental in understanding what is happening today and how Saudi foreign policy has evolved: the 9/11 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003; the global economic recession in 2007 until 2009; the events of Arab Spring since 2010; the continuing and the rise of the Asian economies– China, India, Japan, South Korea and then the Southeast Asian economies, ASEAN as an economic bloc; and at the domestic level, the rise of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Salman, and this is not just the rise of the prince, but a reflection of Saudi’s aspirations, the aspirations of the Saudi youth.

That does not mean Saudi Arabia was not a power before, it always had a certain degree of influence as far as the energy market was concerned and as far as the Islamic world was concerned. But Saudi has greater aspirations in the region and in the world, and its recent participation in forums such as G20 and then now joining BRICS, they have all kind of convalesced into that.

As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, this is my understanding, my personal view. I do not see Saudi Arabia only leading the global south and there are reasons for me to say that. One is that it is a global leader in the sense that Islam, the second largest religion and Saudi Arabia is recognized as a leader of the Islamic world. So it is not just about globalism. Secondly, when it comes to energy politics, again, Saudi Arabia is the leader. Look at the global energy market today, it is largely driven by OPEC+, which is Saudi Arabia and Russia, and then other oil producers. Then it is also a member of G20, and now BRICS and other multilateral forums. So whether you call it a middle power or you call it as a regional power, the fact remains that Saudi Arabia through internal transformation and its foreign policy priorities and behaviour has positioned itself as an important global power in various fields and it is trying to achieve something very important, very basic, very fundamental, and that is economic prosperity for the people of Saudi Arabia.” -**Dr. Md. Muddassir Quamar**

Are we dealing with aspiring global powers or is there a thought that maybe the way we conceptualize some of these distinctions between global and middle perhaps needs to be reconsidered?

There are perhaps instances where Saudi Arabia would be considered a global power, its Islamic credentials for example, its influence in sport, on the global economy, those are arenas which would very much consider Saudi Arabia a global power. But then to consider Saudi Arabia as a global power under some of the more traditional realist assumptions about military capabilities, et cetera, does not seem quite right. So maybe we need a more flexible way of reconceptualizing some of these ideas about global and middle.

In the empirical sense, Saudi Arabia is certainly aspiring to achieve global significance and global influence, but I think it acknowledges that it is limited in the areas in which that significance and influence can be achieved." - **Prof. Simon Mabon**

## II. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy values

"The values that we believe in are non-intervention and non-aggression. We do not want to interfere in people's affairs or country's affairs. We would like to maintain a good relationship based on mutual interest. At the same time, we have our own values when it comes to leadership of the Muslim world, and we have our Arab cultural values when it comes to our Arab belonging.

I think respective international law is also part of our deep values. When we feel it is extremely important, the right of the people, fair, justice, and human rights issues. That is also part of our values that we believe in.

Yes, when mistakes are made, we recognize them and act to correct those mistakes and take the necessary measures. So there is no country without a mistake, but what we are not endorsing is using a formula that works in one country and trying to apply it in another country. I think the Western world needs to understand that a lot of countries have their social values, traditions, their religion, and their own beliefs. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), for women's rights, and so we did agree to most of it, except for certain things, we said no, it does not fit with our religious belief.

They also need to respect our views and opinions on certain issues. But I think if we both realize the basic principle values that function in both, and that we have a different form of sharing of power, we have a different form of presenting our views to the government. We do not have to follow the same in London, doing such an approach to criticize or do something like this. I think we do have our own system and our own belief and our own culture and our own values that we stick to" - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

"I was in the British Parliament just before Christmas, and one of the things that we were discussing was this topic about the salience of quote unquote, Western values, British values, democracy, and human rights and all of these things and how salient they need to be in British Western foreign policies and what to do when there are increasingly influential actors that have different value sets.

I think that in part tells us as much about the crisis of the West, the crisis of what it means to be a Western state, the UK in particular is on the wane, and that requires a lot of navel-gazing, a lot of self-reflection as to how one ought to be in a position when their power is decreasing and other states who may not necessarily subscribe to the same value sets have their power increasing. And I think that is a, maybe that is a question for another time about the fall of middle powers but it points to some interesting tensions that we are witnessing particularly amongst certain circles in the West and certain circles in the UK vis-a-vis Saudi because there is an ideological tension in part that some do not know how to respond to and how to resolve. I think that the growing dominant position is one of pragmatism and acknowledgement of difference, and it has to be that, but there is a cabal who does not necessarily hold that view." **Prof. Simon Mabon**

### **III. Saudi Arabia's tourism vision**

"The Saudi government said we need to build infrastructure to support tourism plans. We have two types of tourism, tourists that are coming to perform the Hajj of Umrah, and the location is limited. They go to a similar location performing almost similar things at the same time. So there are some limitations in certain things. But at the same time, when you look at Al-Ula, that area has a huge archaeology, which many of the tourists are coming to discover, which before was very difficult to get a visa. Saudi Arabia today has opened to so many countries in obtaining visas.

Yes, Saudi Arabia is hosting Expo 2030. Riyadh is going to build more than 100,000 rooms in the hotel business because that is needed to support all the tourism, all the inflow of people, all the new corporate movement and all the desire for doing business in Saudi.

Saudi Arabia has also taken a great initiative in the Giga projects. You know this is the first time we have heard about the Giga projects in Neom, the Red Sea, in Diyar. We have 1,900 kilos in the Red Sea alone. So you can well imagine that there will be a lot of attractions.

I think the Saudi people, feel, that with the new young leadership of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, we start to discover many things we just forget about. There are close to 1,000 islands we have in Saudi Arabia, only in Neom, the islands that will be developed, close to 30 islands. The number of hotels in that area from Al-Aqaba to Neom is close to 300 hotels and some more infrastructures are to be developed.

So I think it is great to have that clear vision. It is great to work hard for it. We understand the challenges that we are going to go through to achieve such things. But I think if there is a will, there will be a way and I'm sure all that will and the enthusiasm when you see it on the coming to Riyadh and see the energy and the vibe that is saying, we need to move, we need to do it.

Also in other territories, we started creating a royal commission, a higher authority in each one of the provinces in Saudi Arabia to encourage competition between them, to look at the core competence of what they have, the specificity for instance in that territory or zone and what they need to develop. It is a great dynamic. What I can say is, that it is a great dynamic that we are having a hard time catching up with.

This is also the positive, hosting world cups, and the Asian Winter Games, attracting all of these things. Yes, we are open now to the rest of the world, we are welcoming everybody to come, whether you want to go for your religious performance or you would like to discover the archaeology and the natural side of Saudi Arabia. You know, this is the big change that we need.” -**Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

#### **IV. Saudi Arabia's regional leadership in shaping regional architecture**

“In the region, first started in January 2022, Saudi Arabia is trying to bring the whole Gulf country back to what it used to be after the disturbed relations that happened between some of the Gulf countries. But that still sent a very clear signal to the other countries in the region (i.e. Turkey, Iran), that Saudi Arabia is starting the talk with Israel based on very clear conditions that normalization of Israel would need to be after reaching a satisfactory agreement between the Palestinians and the Israeli- whether it is a two-state solution or other agreement to be reached between the two sides. But still, look at Iran and the rapprochement that took place in March 2023, and in Sudan, we did mediation. In Ukraine also, we had our own position. That has also sent a signal of how Saudi Arabia plays a very important role in regional security, resolving problems, and expanding peaceful and acceptable relations.

Saudi Arabia this year is still hosting the Presidency of the Arab League and the Arab countries, and of course the summit was extremely important in Riyadh. Many of the subjects have been discussed, including inviting the president of Ukraine to attend the Arab Summit meeting in Jeddah when it was hosted in 2023.

Regionally, we would like to have a zero problem, as they call it, which means very good, mutual interest relations with regional countries like Iran, Turkey, and many others.



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) so far has been successful, when you look at it from May 1981 until today. But we understood the challenges that we had to face, one of them being the difficult geopolitical situation since 1980, the Iraq-Iran war until 1988, the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, then 2000, the US invasion of Iraq, and then all that happened after that. So the geopolitical situation is a serious challenge that puts us together.

We also have a similar situation in the political system in the region. I think we are endorsing a full reform, but the reform has to come from the inside; it should be gradual, and it should respond to our cultural needs to implement it or try to apply it to the region. Economically, we have already moved forward.

We just recently issued the common vision on regional security because we always had somebody else tell us about our regional security. We had the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) from the US side, which was rejected by the Iranians. We had the Russian proposal, which was rejected by the US. We had the Europeans that focused only on maritime. We had the Chinese proposal. Then we had the Iranian proposal.

This time, we have our own views of how we would like to see our regional security structure. I think on all fronts we will see an improvement. Maybe the speed of change that people wish to see in the region is not up to their expectations, but I think there are many governmental and bureaucratic issues, and there is a great respect in the territory here about the sovereignty decision of every country. For instance, when two of the members of the GCC wanted to normalize and have a diplomatic relationship with Israel, the other country did not reject or object. We said this was their sovereign decision. They can do that, but at least we have a common vision in our foreign policy, in our defense issues, and in our security. We are trying to develop great interoperability on the defense side, with decentralization of the forces but centralization of the command.”

–Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

## **V. Saudi Arabia's geostrategic objective in building its military power**

“I think Saudi Arabia has no desire to be a regional hegemon or to have ever done any sort of aggression against any of the neighbouring countries. We would like to have a safe border. We would like to build our own capacity. We are a very large country geographically, and we have so many neighbours, large neighbourhoods on the Red Sea, and we have the Gulf water there, plus we have the neighborhoods of all the other Gulf states. At the same time we have seen the threat that happened to us during the Iraq-Iran war on the north side, and you have seen the Houthi fighting Iran as a regional power next door. I think our war in Yemen was a war of necessity, was a war in which we had to respond to that sort of threat and we have always enjoyed a very good relationship with Yemen. We have been a great supporter of the Yemeni people and the Yemeni economy.

We need to protect whether through the Navy or Coast Guard or the Land Forces capability, Air Force capability, or Air Defence capability. Today you have seen it with the drone, how little it costs and how expensive you need to have a system to defend. We are building our defence capability to protect ourselves and to be able to provide the necessary security for the other Gulf states where we are together in the GCC. We have a very clear declaration on the GCC defence arrangement among us.” - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

“We see that most recently in the past three years, although the roots of it go much earlier, it is broadly within the growing socioeconomic pragmatism that is taking place at home, but also abroad. We know that over the past century, the region has been penetrated by external powers with military ambitions, extractionist ambitions, with colonialist ambitions, much like many other parts of the world. Yet, that has not been to the benefit of the people of the region.

I think the Saudis, under Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince, of course, have realized that there is a better way for the kingdom to engage with global politics, and that is to capitalize on the dominance of this sort of neoliberal capitalism by positioning themselves within these broader capitalist entanglements and to take advantage of the resources, the opportunities that it has. We see it with the developments that have been put in place under the banner of Vision 2030, but that alone is not enough for the kingdom to completely pivot away from how politics has been done in the region.”

- **Prof. Simon Mabon**

## **VI. Saudi Arabia’s “balancing” position and world order**

“Saudi Arabia has developed and is having a great relationship, whether in Asia, Africa, or even the Caribbean countries, they had their summit also in Riyadh with Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is not in support of going back to a Cold War era, nor in support of a single hegemony. So I still would like to see a balance of power, a diversified one, and also look into areas where there is growth and prosperity, and also contribute to international peace.

I think here I would like to mention that even sometimes when we try to make our balanced position, how is the other power responding? Last February in the UN Security Forum, I was there, and I asked Secretary Blinken. I said, we are trying to maintain a balance on the issue of Ukraine, whereby we have voted in the UN, we have issued our resolution in the GCC, we have supported the Ukrainian humanitarian, we have contributed to the release and also mediated the release of the prisoner. We have never endorsed any Russian aggression against Ukraine, and we support the unity of Ukraine, yet we do not want to cut our relations with Russia.

His answer to me was that there is no balance with aggression. I wish he remembered what he said and applied it to the Palestinian case today to the Israeli when he saw all that aggression from the Israeli side to the Palestinians. As I said, we realize the US is the most important partner with us, but at the same time, we need to maintain our good relationship with the different powers and we believe in multilateralism and not just a single government.

All of this was based on focusing on Saudi Arabia's key national interests and understanding that the U.S. is historically the traditional partner, and the U.S. is vital, but at the same time, Saudi has decided to diversify its international country network and good relations. So that being said, I think Saudi Arabia has also sent a very clear signal, whether during the visit of President Biden to the Jeddah summit in 2022, or for the Chinese 2022, or the Chinese president's visit to Riyadh, also in December 2022."

- **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

## **VII. Saudi Arabia's diversified engagements**

"At the same time, we build our capacity based on a very clear vision towards 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030), to build domestic growth in Saudi Arabia, to build our own military and security to protect ourselves, and to stop any sort of extended aggression coming to Saudi Arabia. Maintain excellent alliances and multi-alliances in the world, not only with one bloc as it used to be historically but now we have been open to different parts of the world.

One of the things that Saudi Arabia has learned, of course, very clearly, it is very difficult to depend on just one extended power. But diversification is still important, maintaining the relations with all different parties." - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

"In terms of impact, I think the nature of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US has changed from an alliance to a partnership. There is a greater emphasis in Saudi Arabia on strategic autonomy and then a degree of multi-alignment with external powers. To the US there is a degree of partnership, there is a mutuality of interest, but then Saudi Arabia is also expanding to relations. For example, if we talk about trade figures, China, India, Japan, Korea, and UAE are the five biggest trading partners of Saudi Arabia. I think this is reflective of what Saudi Arabia is trying to do, it is trying to place itself in a position where it can play a role in the region, stabilize the region and contribute to the global geoeconomic integration within the region and outside." - **Dr. Md. Muddassir Quamar**



## VIII. Saudi Arabia - China relations

“China today is the largest trade partner of Saudi Arabia. Almost 20% of our oil exports go to China. China is one of the big partners in the Middle East, they get about 40% of their energy from the Gulf countries. So that shows a very important size of the relations.

China never wanted to be involved in a regional security or even geopolitical situation. But after the President visited Saudi Arabia, the GCC, and the summit that took place, I think China realized that without addressing the regional security issue, it will be very difficult. Look at what is happening in the Red Sea today, and that is part of the regional security issue. Look at what is happening in maritime security and energy security. Those issues are extremely important.

China used the good occasion of being a great partner to both Saudi Arabia and Iran and suggested mediation and brought the two parties together, which resulted in the 10th of March announcement of the agreement between Saudi and Iran.” - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

## IX. Saudi Arabia - Iran relations

“Let me verify, the agreement between Saudi and Iran is addressing the technical issue and the unilateral, but not the multilateral.

We have agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Embassies were opened in Tehran and Riyadh– the assurance from the Iranian side that the protection of the Saudi diplomats and the Saudi premises would be well taken care of under the Vienna Convention.

The second issue is aggression and interventions. Saudi Arabia still remembers the attack on our two critical oil facilities, which have cost Saudi Arabia more than \$5 billion in one month. And then it did stop 50% of the exports. However, Saudi and Hamdan were great in addressing those issues very quickly, restoring the facility and back again into the market. And the intervention, of course, sometimes Iran used to do the sectarianism side in justifying their own internal intervention. This has been assured by the Iranians, so this is fine.

I think the last issue with Iran is the regional issues, from regional security, like maritime security, energy security, interventionist policy, expansionist policy, using sectarianism as a reason for additional expansion, and support of extremism in neighbouring countries.

I think we are going through three steps. Step one is the de-escalation, which has received very good and positive signals from both sides. The second is the normalization, which has taken place already by technically opening the embassies so you can have a direct talk and deliver direct messages and so on.

The third is cooperation. It is difficult to move to this level if we do not have the sanction removed from Iran because as long as there is a sanction, it will be difficult to do any commercial or economic collaboration.

However, what we are going to judge in Saudi Arabia is the Iranian behaviour, and how they behave, and we have seen lately some escalation by some of their partners that they support, whether it is in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, or also in some other area. We still like to see de-escalation and for Iran to not use their arms left and right in raising an issue related to regional security.” - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

## **X. Saudi Arabia - India relations**

“There is significant enthusiasm for what is happening in Saudi Arabia, both inside and outside the country. That is visible in the way the engagements between the governments of India and Saudi Arabia have increased over the past decade or so. As far as the Global South is concerned, let me clarify, India certainly sees itself as a leader of the Global South, but it no longer sees itself only as a leader of the Global South, it also wants to be viewed as part of the “first world or developed world” or the broader global leadership.

Let me just very briefly touch upon the point about multilateralism. If you look at the Middle East region, multilateralism has not evolved. There are many organizations, but they have not been able to effectively address the challenges facing the region, except the GCC, absolutely with its own internal problems. We have seen that in the past. When it comes to economic issues, the GCC has been much more successful. But this is not a problem only in the Middle East, except for the EU, with its challenges, and ASEAN, which is largely focused on economic integration. Multilateralism does not necessarily mean multilateral organizations. For example, in South Asia, SAARC is defunct because of intra-region problems. There are other multilateral organizations which have not necessarily been very effective.

India has been focusing on IMEC, which is focused on connectivity, but this is also a very early stage to say whether it will be effective or not. As far as the region is concerned, the Middle East is concerned when it comes to multilateralism. If one looks at the trends in recent years, there is a trend of unilateral initiatives. And there are two in which India and Saudi Arabia are involved. In the other it was India, UAE, Israel and the U.S., the I2U2, a unilateral initiative with focus on food security and energy security. So maybe multilateral organizations may not always be very effective because of their unwieldy nature, there are sovereign states. So perhaps unilateralism is one of the answers that the policymakers have come up with.

There is a significant uptick in India's engagement with the region, especially with the Arab Gulf countries. The UAE and Saudi Arabia, are the two countries where India's relations have moved significantly in a very multifaceted way. There was a time when Indian foreign policy in West Asia or East was largely focused on either Cairo or Baghdad. That was during the Cold War and early 1990s.

Now if you look at it, it is Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, and this is not just in one aspect. You have the energy relations– very significant– moving into newer areas, non-renewables sectors, and regular political engagements (visits and dialogues). If you look at Prime Minister Modi's foreign visits, the Middle East features most prominently among any region in the world, and that is mainly because of the economic opportunities India sees there, and also because of security. The security of these two regions– South Asia and the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula– is linked. Whether you talk about the problem of terrorism or the problem of maritime security. Look at the situation today, the most immediate impact is on the Arabian Peninsula and India. There are other navies also active, but the Indian Navy is very active in partnership with regional countries. So economic, political, security, and strategy, all are converging as far as India's reach to the Gulf region is concerned. The immediate priority is Saudi Arabia and the UAE.”

- **Dr. Md. Muddassir Quamar**

## **XI. Saudi Arabia on the Israel-Palestine conflict**

“All we are hoping and wishing at this moment is not just to have a temporary ceasefire, but to see a permanent ceasefire, allowing humanitarian support to go to the Palestinians.

We fully understand the right to existence for both sides. We are not saying that there is no right of existence to any side. But at the same time, how far can Israel and its government continue to be in such a situation? They achieved the goal after four months of bombarding Gaza, killing close to 30,000 people, with 65,000 injured and many missing, and destroying 70% of the property and buildings in Gaza. I think the Palestinians showed that this is their country, they are not willing to move, not willing to leave it. I think the message is clear to the Israeli government. You cannot get rid of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians have a clear message now that you can not get rid of the Israelis. So we have to find a formula where both can live next to each other, where both can respect each other territorial-wise and where both focus on their people and their political system.” - **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

## XII. Perception of Saudi Arabia from the West

The Saudis have been able to get that line of the longer term vision, despite a lot of pressure from other states around the world to compete and pressure from the West to stop FIFA from letting the World Cup go back to the Gulf so close to Qatar 2022. So I think the question is **how is Saudi Arabia being perceived in the West amidst all of this transformation?**

**I guess the answer is not well. That short answer is deeply problematic because when you look at the opinion pieces in various daily newspapers, and in think tanks, there was a lot of Orientalism, there was a lot of Xenophobia, and deep-seated suspicion. There is a lot of– dare I say– racism and Islamophobia, and this all came to a head, with the Saudi football league and last summer when a lot of premiership football players decided to reject contract offers from other teams in Europe to go to Saudi Arabia for the money. This was a real moment when people in the West, in the UK, and across Europe, were incredibly critical of the Saudi project and of the players themselves for giving up on their careers to go and chase lots of money. It prompted a lot of derogatory remarks and a lot of condemnation of Saudi Arabia.**

What was interesting was that there was very little coverage of the fact that a large number of the players that were going to Saudi were Muslims, who had expressed the desire to go and live and play in the Saudi state, to be close to Mecca and Medina. To reduce it all to money was crass. It also sort of opened up these broader, problematic, lazy stereotypes and assumptions about what the Saudi state is trying to do. Scholars of sort of critical race and post-colonial studies can do deep dives into some of this discourse and it will paint a very dark and very bleak picture for many people in the West and I think it is important to acknowledge that.

But I think there is also a slight concern amongst policymakers that there is a new powerful figure on the scene, that Saudi Arabia can exert influence in the region on global politics, whether it is considered a global or a middle power, it can exert influence and significant influence on global politics. There is the slightly more pragmatic, suspicious, realist fear of another influential player. Then there is the more pragmatic, well, this is a transactional opportunity. Those opportunities are not just in the Kingdom, but one of the football teams in my family is Newcastle United, which has been taken over by Saudi PIF. There is a vision for making these numbers real and that vision is having a manifest transformation of Newcastle and its surrounding areas– areas that have been hugely deprived of funding by the British government itself. So it is saying something that it has taken Saudi investment to come and revive an area of the Northeast.” - **Prof. Simon Mabon**