

**Keynote Address**  
**Women in Energy Conference**  
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**by**  
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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It is always a pleasure to return to Abu Dhabi, in particular on an occasion such as this, and I am delighted to be able to join you all at the Women in Energy Conference.

Since moving back to Washington, DC in 2004, at the end of my assignment as U.S. Ambassador, I've been fortunate to visit the UAE on a regular basis and have witnessed the enormous growth and dramatic changes that have taken place in this short time. One thing that hasn't changed, though, is the feeling I treasure of Abu Dhabi being like a second home to me, a place full of friends and colleagues who are like close family.

When I arrived in Abu Dhabi in 2001, it was three short weeks after 9/11 and I came with a very difficult — and very long — “to do” list for a first-time ambassador. Some senior officials in Washington were nervous about my assignment. Their unspoken concern was whether a woman would be able to manage the complex and often very sensitive issues we had to manage in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

I suspect very few of you will be surprised when I suggest that there is often a built-in bias that men are better suited to handle matters of terrorism, national security and intelligence, particularly at the most senior levels of government, and at a time of such international tension. This is the ‘glass ceiling’ women contend with in male-dominated professions or industries. And, when it comes to ‘glass ceilings’, there is probably none tougher to crack than the one women bump up against in the oil and gas industry.

I can tell you my bosses in Washington were both surprised and enormously relieved when they realized that the concerns they harbored about their ambassador in Abu Dhabi were not shared by UAE officials. Not only was I treated as an equal by all the senior Emiratis I worked with, I was recognized as a full partner, and as a result, we accomplished many important things together.

Looking back now, I believe being a woman was in fact a huge asset at that difficult moment when nerves were raw and patience was running thin. Why? Because women are often more effective communicators than men. In the first place, we are better listeners, and you cannot have a conversation with someone if you are unable or unwilling to hear what they have to say. Second, our interpersonal skills are usually far better honed than those of our male colleagues, a huge advantage in challenging times when there is great pressure to solve problems quickly.

During my time in Abu Dhabi there were no other female ambassadors in the foreign diplomatic corps and only a few junior women working in the UAE Foreign Ministry. I remember being invited by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed al Nahyan, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs at the time, to attend the swearing-in of the very first class of Emirati women diplomats. I believe this was sometime in late 2002 or early 2003 and they were a small group – fewer than ten! today, more than 200 Emirati women work in the UAE Foreign Ministry and at least four are serving as ambassadors.

Starting with the founding father of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, and of course Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the UAE's leadership have, for decades, championed women's issues from education to employment and everything in between. The progress is very visible today and also quite unique, not only for this part of the world – but globally.

### **Women in the UAE**

The role of women in the UAE demonstrates the progressive vision of this society and its leaders. Today the government cabinet of 30 includes nine women, nearly 30%. Some of the ministerial positions held by women focus on artificial intelligence and the sciences, which will play a critical role in preparing the country and the younger generation for the opportunities, as well as the challenges, of tomorrow.

The Speaker of the Federal National Council – Dr. Amal al Qubaisi – is the first woman to chair a parliamentary institution in the region. Seven women hold seats in the Federal National Council, nearly a quarter of the Council's membership.

On my board of directors at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, we have three very accomplished Emirati women: Fatima al Jaber, Ebtessam al Ketbi and Fatima al Shamsi. Not

surprisingly, the UAE has the highest number of women on the Forbes Top 100 Most Powerful Arab Businesswomen, with 19 on the 2017 list.

Just for the sake of comparison — in the U.S., we have 105 women serving in the House of Representatives and Senate — nearly 20% of the 535 members of Congress. So, we have a long way to go, as well. Although, I would note that we continue to send very smart women diplomats to serve as ambassador here in Abu Dhabi, as evidenced by the great work being done by my friend Barbara Leaf.

The progress achieved by Emirati women did not come without a lot of hard work. 77% of Emirati women enroll in higher education after secondary school and 46% of university graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — what we know today as STEM — are women.

To increase the number of women in the energy sector, the number of women STEM graduates is of course a key factor. The UAE's investment in the sciences is paying off as it has become widely recognized as a center for technological innovation and as the hub for STEM careers and opportunities in the region.

However, many challenges remain. While the number of women enrolling in science and technology programs at the university level is very high — the number of women entering the STEM workforce is not accelerating at the same pace. Some social stigmas and stereotyped gender roles persist as STEM careers are often viewed as more demanding or more dangerous. Meanwhile, motherhood and household responsibilities often result in high dropout rates of women transitioning from university to the workplace.

There are a growing number of role models in STEM careers in the region, from Mariam Mansouri, the UAE's first female fighter pilot, to the many Emirati women who have joined the nuclear energy industry. They now hold more than 30% of the positions in what is widely perceived as a male-dominated workforce.

Recently, we have seen some significant strides in diversity in the energy sector, such as with Vicki Hollub, who made American corporate history when she was appointed Occidental Petroleum's CEO

in 2016. In the region, Sara Akbar is the first woman owner of an independent oil and gas exploration and production company — Kuwait Energy. She is a real pioneer and role model.

Why is diversity so important? As women, we think, act and lead differently than our male counterparts. And that diversity of perspectives and assets enriches an organization.

A study by Price Waterhouse Cooper, in association with the Women's Oil Council, looked at the 100 largest oil and gas companies in the world and found only 11% of board seats are held by women.

Clearly a lot more needs to be done: women need to make time to mentor other women; CEOs need to identify ways to make the workplace more accessible to women; and professional associations need to provide the networking and training opportunities for women who are pursuing careers in the energy sector.

These challenges are not unique to the Middle East or to the energy sector; we see them in many industries and professions worldwide.

### **U.S.-UAE Relationship**

As I look back on my time as U.S. Ambassador in the UAE, I feel honored to have had the opportunity to contribute at a critical moment to the development of what has become one of the United States' most dynamic and important bilateral relationships.

The three core components that make up the strong foundation of this relationship are:

- political and diplomatic
- business and commercial
- and defense and security.

These three pillars, each of which has grown stronger over the past 15 years, have contributed in their own way to the development of this unique, bilateral relationship:

- the UAE is the only Arab country that has partnered with the U.S. in six international military coalitions, including the current effort against DAESH or the Islamic State
- the UAE is the largest U.S. export market in the Middle East, and has been for the past eight years
- UAE investments in the U.S. help support hundreds of thousands of American jobs
- U.S. naval ships visit UAE ports more than any other foreign ports in the world

These are just a few of the characteristics that make the U.S.-UAE relationship truly a partnership, the importance of which can hardly be overstated when we look at the many challenges we confront today in this region.

The Middle East is undergoing a profound period of change. The transformations underway are of such significance that they invite comparisons to the tumult of the years following the first World War in which the political landscape of the modern Middle East was largely mapped out.

Syria and Yemen are wracked by civil wars; Libya is collapsing; and Iraq is struggling to overcome a myriad of internal challenges. Meanwhile, Egypt has returned to a familiar state of uneasy stability, but still faces a daunting domestic agenda.

The role of political Islam continues to be deeply contested in the aftermath of the 2010-11 uprisings and is at the center of an ongoing debate over the future vision of the region.

Some of the more stable countries in the region are undergoing a period of rapid social and economic transformation. The emergence of a larger, wealthier and more educated middle class; the revolution in the media and information landscape; and the ambitions of a more connected and worldly emerging generation presage fundamental changes in how these societies and their citizens relate to each other, conduct business, and engage with the rest of the world.

Notably, the Arab Gulf countries have assumed a new leadership role in the region. We see a growing assertiveness, particularly by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in defense of their national interests and in an effort to expand their influence while pushing back against spreading Iranian hegemony and the role of political Islam.

Many of the conflicts in the region today do not lend themselves to solutions crafted or imposed by external powers. Struggles such as the civil war in Syria, or the raging debate over the future role of political Islam, will require complex and evolving local or regional solutions that will take time to emerge and attract a broad consensus.

The emerging political and strategic landscape in the Middle East will therefore have to be largely defined by regional players. We see evidence of this trend in the decision of the recently formed

“quartet” of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain to sever ties with Qatar in June to force a change in Doha’s foreign policy.

Given this changing political landscape, and the need for regional states to assume a greater leadership role, it may be useful to take stock of the nature of the U.S. partnership with long-time Gulf allies.

### **Trump Administration**

The Trump Administration is clearly determined to not only rebuild, but enhance, traditional U.S. partnerships with key regional states: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain – as well as Egypt and Israel.

The primary motivation behind the administration’s more supportive approach is a renewed focus on countering two major threats to long-term U.S. interests in the Middle East:

- the first is confronting the rise of Iranian influence and hegemony in the region and halting the spread of Iranian-backed non-state actors such as Hizballah.
- the second is combatting the spread of terrorist and extremist groups, particularly Sunni Salafist-Jihadist organizations like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaeda.

The return to a tougher line toward Tehran, without completely scrapping the nuclear agreement, may have been an unavoidable response to Iran’s destabilizing behavior and opposition to most major U.S. policy goals in the region. Iran continues to see itself as a revolutionary state. It relies on the promotion and empowerment of a range of non-state actors, terrorist groups, and militias to achieve its goals.

The U.S., by contrast, is a status quo power. It remains committed to maintaining regional order and stability.

As long as this situation prevails, and Iran continues to act as a regional hegemon, the Trump Administration is likely to maintain its harder line against Tehran.

## **Global and Regional Powers:**

While the U.S. remains the most influential external force in the region, Russia is returning, especially via Syria, to a major strategic role in the Middle East. China and European Union members are also significant economic, diplomatic, and, in some limited cases, strategic players.

Regionally, Iran, Turkey, and Israel all have significant interests and roles in the Arab world, as, increasingly, do the Kurds and other major non-state actors.

I don't mean to suggest that what I have touched upon is by any means an exhaustive list of issues that concern the U.S. and its regional partners. I have not even mentioned the war in Yemen, instability in Libya and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, where the ongoing occupation continues to be a burden, not only for Palestinians, but for the entire region.

The complexities of these many challenges will require leadership from within the region, but also strong support from external powers. The U.S.-UAE partnership is a critical piece of this collective effort, and within that partnership, the unique skills of women will be required, whether in government, industry or academia.

"The future is female" is a popular call to arms for young women across the U.S. today, and their energy and determination to contribute meaningfully to their nation and the world inspire us all.

To be sure, the 'glass ceiling' is still an obstacle for too many women. but it is badly cracked. and as a certain woman who nearly became our president once noted, "light is shining through it like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time."

Until then, thank you all very much.