

## David Rundell

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### How has Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia been viewed in the kingdom?

These things are very carefully choreographed and so there shouldn't have been any surprises. The negotiations were already taken care of. It was unlikely that we were going to see major changes on any of the most prominent issues, such as the Arab-Israeli peace process, especially as Israel doesn't have a government at the moment. I didn't expect that there was going to be any kind of an Arab NATO, particularly because Saudi Arabia remains unpopular in the US, and you could never get something like that passed in the Senate. I didn't expect a breakthrough on Yemen because the Saudis already want that war to end so the US visit would not have made any difference. However, what I was hoping for and what would have made it worth Biden's while in terms of the heat that he is inevitably going to take back home for making the visit, would have been to take a first step in the rebuilding of this very important strategic relationship between the two countries. That really didn't happen.

### Can you elaborate on the steps that Biden could have taken?

We have moral values that we need to protect, but we also have interests and right now, those are about being able to buy gasoline and avoid inflation and that's something that the Saudis can help us with. Biden should have also stood up and said there are a lot of good things happening in Saudi Arabia, such as Vision 2030 - a profound social and economic change - and that the US ought to get behind that. Biden should have talked about food and fuel security which is already causing instability in Sri Lanka and going to cause instability in Pakistan and probably in Egypt. He could have stepped up to the plate and said America produces a lot of corn and can contribute that to the world instead of continuing to use 40% of it to put into ethanol production. ■

*\*Paraphrased Comments*

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