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Judicial Changes in Saudi Arabia

As the Saudi lawyer involved in the case against former Saudi minister Alawi Kayyal ["Saudi Court Case Raises Question of Wide Corruption by Leadership," front page, Jan. 2], I would like to point out that the case against Mr. Kayyal and the stripping of his ministerial immunity, which permitted the case to go forward, are part of the solution to the problem of corruption, not simply further evidence of corruption itself.

The receptiveness of the Saudi court to hear the case is the news. Properly viewed, the case is a significant step in the evolution of a self-corrective process in Saudi Arabia.

Corruption described in The Post article has to a great extent been exported from elsewhere into the Saudi scene. Such articles omit mention of all the achievements in Saudi Arabia in a few short years, and ignore the glaring examples of corruption in neighboring countries that lack these achievements. They also do not draw the comparison with America's own "robber barons" amid all the industrial advances at the turn of the last century.

With the economic boom in Saudi Arabia peaking in the 1970s, cash flowed in and with it hundreds of financially hungry companies. This occurred in a society in which tender

and procurement regulations were not well developed.

This environment proved fertile ground for a certain type of expatriate, largely Mediterranean, with a command of languages, charm and style and an infrastructure for entertaining. The traditional open-door approach of ranking Saudis allowed these foreign charlatans to create a false impression in the minds of their foreign clients about their special access to the centers of power.

When the potential of the phenomenon became obvious, there were two interventions: one on the American side, symbolized by the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and the other on the Saudi side prohibiting "intermediaries" or "brokers" and then legalizing and regulating a limited role for Saudi "service agents" in government contracts. The Americans distanced themselves adroitly by giving prominence to the term "*foreign corrupt practices*."

There is a strong element of economic sharing and redistribution downward in almost every arguably corruptive act in Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries. I dare say that any royal family members who may have become involved in business promotion at the pressing inducement of intermediaries have long since re-

channeled such revenues, which they viewed as accidental windfalls and as to which they considered themselves primarily as conduits to many others and for many worthy purposes.

What was considered a normal business practice 20 years ago is deemed corruption today. The business environment in Saudi Arabia is much improved for many reasons, including the infusion of American values as well as the ideas of the new Saudi generation, but above all owing to the continuing efforts by the leadership of Saudi Arabia—not to accommodate American expectations but primarily in observance of our own values found in Islam.

Such developments as the Kayyal case are not mere anecdotes but milestones in a human, and therefore imperfect, effort to rein in the enormous forces, concentrated in a few decades, that Saudi Arabia has had to confront.

SALAH HEJAILAN
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia