

## REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

[Preliminary – distributed for MIT community comment]

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To President Rafael Reif:

This short report presents the results of a review and reassessment of MIT's relationships with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. You requested this review on October 15, 2018, following the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul two weeks earlier. The review focuses primarily on the larger-scale activities that MIT is carrying out with the Kingdom. A full list of these activities is presented in Table 1. Not included are short-term or one-off visits, occasional lectures, and participation in conferences in Saudi Arabia by individual members of the MIT community.

In carrying out this review, I sought and received input and advice from a broad range of MIT faculty, students, staff, and alums. I also consulted the faculty International Advisory Committee. I am grateful for the thoughtful, careful, sometimes searing, but always civil comments offered by members of the MIT community. Although opinions on the situation and what to do about it varied widely, those who commented were united in wanting the best for MIT. I also sought the advice of external experts on Saudi Arabia and the region. An important source of information and insight was *The Tech*, whose coverage of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the MIT campus in March, and more recent coverage of the Khashoggi murder and its implications for MIT, has been thoughtful and informative. Though many people made valuable contributions to this review, the conclusions and recommendations are my own.

I am making this report available to the MIT community for comment. I will then forward the report, together with a summary of comments received, to you for your consideration. It will, of course, be up to you as president to decide on the course of action MIT will follow on this matter.

Some colleagues have wondered why the Khashoggi murder has triggered this reassessment, when other events and circumstances both in the Kingdom and elsewhere that might have provoked similar reassessments did not do so. In Saudi Arabia itself, large-scale violations of political, civil, and human rights have been extensively documented over a long period, and since 2015 the Saudi military has been a major participant in the devastating civil war in neighboring Yemen, a conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of civilian casualties and left millions more on the brink of starvation. To some, a reassessment of our Saudi relationships seems long overdue.

One reason for conducting this review now is that MIT had previously been considering a significant expansion of our relationships with the Kingdom. An influential view during these discussions was that, notwithstanding evidence of continued internal repression and external aggression, Saudi Arabia was on a path toward becoming a more progressive society, and that by expanding our engagement with the Kingdom we might contribute to this development, even if only in a small way. The Khashoggi murder has deflated many of those hopes. There were also the particular facts of this case, notably the combination of brazenness, brutality, and contempt for international opinion that made it stand out even within the crowded global gallery of official malevolence. There was, moreover, a disturbing sense of connection between the killing in Istanbul and the MIT campus. One of those individuals now known to have played a leading role in Mr. Khashoggi's murder in Istanbul had been part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's entourage during the latter's visit to the MIT campus.<sup>1</sup> This individual had engaged with members of the MIT community at that time—an unwelcome and unsettling intrusion into our space, even though evident only in retrospect.

In light of the events surrounding the Khashoggi assassination and its aftermath, and taking account of other relevant information, the question addressed in this report is whether MIT should continue its engagement with Saudi Arabia. What are the benefits of these activities to MIT and to Saudi society? Are they outweighed by the potential for negative impacts, including the possible costs to our reputation and the possibility that those in Saudi Arabia who may share in the responsibility for these events could derive some benefit from their association with MIT—an impact that we would surely wish to avoid?

I am writing this report at a time when the facts about the Khashoggi murder are still emerging. The question of culpability may continue to be disputed, but it is also possible that a complete account may become available at some point. Perceptions will likely change over time, as these events recede from public view and fresh outrages claim the world's attention. The situation in the volatile Gulf region will also change. The findings I report here may need to be revisited as additional information becomes available in the future.

## **1. Support from Saudi Arabia for MIT activities**

As I mentioned in my letter informing the faculty of this review, MIT has enjoyed highly productive educational and research collaborations with colleagues and sponsors from Saudi Arabia over many decades. The Institute has also derived much benefit from the presence of many outstanding Saudi students and researchers on our campus, and the Saudi students, faculty, and staff currently working here in Cambridge are valued members of the MIT community.

Today MIT is also conducting multiple activities with Saudi Arabian organizations. These can be grouped into three broad categories: sponsored research, philanthropic relationships, and a miscellaneous group of other activities (see Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm547>

## a. Sponsored research

Measured by annual rate of expenditure, the largest share of MIT's activities with Saudi Arabian organizations takes the form of sponsored research projects carried out on the MIT campus. These projects are led by MIT faculty members or senior research scientists. Typically they involve post-docs and/or graduate student research assistants, and some may also involve undergraduates. As most readers of this report will know, sponsored research is carried out under agreements between MIT and the sponsor that specify the area of work, the broad objectives of the research, and other terms under which the work is to be done, including the amount and timing of funding to cover research costs and the disposition of any intellectual property that may result. MIT does not grant sponsors any right to exert influence over the manner of performance of the work or its results. The agreements also guarantee the right of the researchers to publish their findings in the open literature. Sponsored research enables MIT, the sponsor, the scientific community, and the general public to benefit from new scientific discoveries and the development of new technologies. Sponsored research projects also provide important educational opportunities for MIT students.

The largest Saudi sponsors of research at MIT are: Saudi Aramco, the state-owned company that is the world's biggest oil and gas producer; King Abdulaziz City of Science and Technology (KACST), the Saudi national science agency and national laboratory; and SABIC, one of the world's largest chemical producers. Other research sponsors are Saudi universities, primarily King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM).

The research projects supported by these sponsors cover a broad range of scientific and engineering topics. Saudi Aramco, which in recent years has been the largest Saudi funder of sponsored research at MIT, has supported faculty-led projects in fields including computer simulation of oil and gas reservoirs, catalysis, and carbon capture technology. Saudi Aramco is also a founding member of the MIT Energy Initiative (MITEI). The KACST relationship established the Center for Complex Engineering Systems (CCES) within MIT's Institute for Data Systems and Society (IDSS). A parallel center was established at KACST. At MIT, CCES provides support for research on computer simulation and data analytics and visualization ranging across domains including public health, urban water management, urban mobility, electric power systems, and regional climate change impacts. Also funded under the KACST agreement, five or six Saudi students each year (selected from an annual application pool of about 1,500) are invited to work with MIT faculty and students over a two-year period of advanced graduate training, which is typically followed by the admission of these students to graduate science and engineering programs at leading universities in the U.S. and Europe. Since the KACST program was launched, 15 of these students have been admitted to MIT, of whom 60% are women. Other research relationships have included participation in a research consortium at the MIT Media Laboratory by the MiSK Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The MiSK Foundation's membership in this consortium ended recently.

Over the last three years, sponsored research projects funded by Saudi organizations accounted for 52% of all Saudi-funded expenditures at MIT. In FY18, these sponsored research projects involved 28 MIT principal investigators.

## **b. Gifts**

MIT has received gifts from Saudi Arabian sources, including both private and corporate gifts. MIT alumnus Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel '78, a Saudi businessman and philanthropist, has funded a number of important programs at MIT through the social enterprise organization, Community Jameel, of which he is chair. Community Jameel has supported the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Laboratory (J-PAL) at MIT since 2005, the Abdul Latif Jameel Water and Food Systems Laboratory (J-WAFS) since 2014, the Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL) since 2017, and most recently the Abdul Lateef Jameel Clinic for Machine Learning in Health (J-Clinic), launched in September 2018. The endowment of these programs by Community Jameel has enabled MIT to enter important new fields of research on a substantial scale, and to attract additional support from governments, foundations, and individuals for this research, with beneficial impacts felt around the world. For example, J-PAL, the oldest of the Jameel family of programs, works to reduce poverty by conducting randomized impact evaluations to test and improve the impact of social policies and programs. J-PAL has built out a network of 171 professors at 49 universities on five continents pursuing research of this same type, and it now has affiliated offices in Africa, Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, and Latin America. Mohammed Jameel has also created separate endowed funds for student scholarships and fellowships at MIT.

MIT has established the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship Program for Saudi Arabian women. The program began under a research collaboration with King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), but it was significantly expanded by a subsequent gift from Saudi Aramco. Today, it is supported by a gift from the King Abdulaziz City of Science and Technology (KACST). This competitive fellowship program, open to Saudi women holding a doctoral degree in science or engineering, funds each Ibn Khaldun Fellow to spend a year doing research on the MIT campus in collaboration with an MIT faculty member. The program helps the Fellows to develop as leaders in research, teaching, and technical management. Since its inception the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship program has supported 27 Saudi women fellows at MIT.

Other gifts to MIT, funded mostly by Saudi alums, also play an important role in supporting a wide range of activities at MIT, including undergraduate scholarships and graduate fellowships.

Altogether, activities funded by gifts from Saudi Arabian donors accounted for 44% of all Saudi-related expenditures at MIT over the past three years. This includes contributions from expendable gifts made during this period, as well as endowment distributions from prior gifts.

## **c. Other relationships**

Other programs have accounted for the remaining 4% of Saudi-funded activity at MIT over the past three years. These have included three Saudi memberships of MIT's Industrial Liaison Program (Saudi Aramco, SABIC, and the Olayan Financing Group); and Saudi participation in MIT executive education programs, including the participation of two Saudi city teams (from Al Madinah and King Abdullah Economic City) in the Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program. In the Kingdom itself, our alumni/ae participate in the MIT Club of Saudi Arabia.

#### d. Possible new engagements

During the past year, MIT considered entering into a new relationship in Saudi Arabia involving NEOM, a large new economic development project on the Red Sea coast of the Kingdom championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. However, MIT is not considering Institute-level involvement in the NEOM project at this time.<sup>2</sup>

In the aftermath of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to MIT in March 2018 there was considerable speculation about new relationships between MIT and Saudi Arabia that the visit had enabled. In fact, four agreements were signed during that visit, but only one concerned a new activity—a one-year-long research project sponsored by SABIC to support an MIT faculty member to design and test a novel reactor for combustion pyrolysis of methane. A second agreement extended the existing KACST-sponsored research program in IDSS through 2028. Another agreement with KACST renewed the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship Program for Saudi Arabian women for another 10 years. The fourth agreement was a letter of intent to renew Saudi Aramco's founding membership of MITEI for another five years. The MITEI membership renewal has not been finalized at this point in time. If it is renewed, the funds will again mainly be used for sponsored research projects, and the scale of funding will be the same as it was during the past five years. At various times there has been discussion of the possibility of augmenting the existing sponsored research relationship between Saudi Aramco and MITEI with a major new program in the field of environmental sustainability. However, no plans for this are currently in place.

## 2. Assessment

The larger context for evaluating these activities is MIT's general strategy for engaging with the world, as described in the document titled *A Global Strategy for MIT* (May 2017).<sup>3</sup> As noted in that document, learning about the world, helping to solve the world's greatest problems, and working with international collaborators who share our curiosity and commitment to rigorous scientific inquiry are core values for MIT. Taken as a whole, MIT's international activities play an important role in helping the Institute accomplish its mission of advancing the frontiers of knowledge in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship, bringing such knowledge to bear on solving the world's most challenging problems, and educating future leaders with the ability to work creatively, cooperatively, and wisely for the betterment of humankind.

All of MIT's global partnerships and collaborations must comply with all relevant federal and state laws and regulations. They must be led or co-led by MIT principal investigators, whose responsibilities include ensuring that the work meets MIT's standards of quality and excellence. There must be no external interference in the conduct of research. There must also be no sponsor-imposed restrictions on the publication of research results in the open literature or on any other communication by the investigators about the results of their work. Safety and security risks to participating MIT students, faculty, and staff must always be of the highest priority.

These conditions are inviolable for MIT. However, taken on their own they are generally insufficient to determine which international opportunities we should pursue and which ones we should forego. For

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<sup>2</sup> Two members of the MIT community have served in a private capacity on the advisory board to the NEOM project. Both recently announced that they have suspended their participation on this board.

<sup>3</sup>*A Global Strategy for MIT*, <http://web.mit.edu/globalstrategy/index.html>

example, certain opportunities may enable us to carry out work that is important to MIT researchers and that promises to yield significant societal benefits. Yet the partners and sponsors of these activities may simultaneously exhibit values in other domains that our Institute does not share, or they may conduct other activities whose methods or goals are actively opposed by members of the MIT community.

Deciding whether to pursue such opportunities typically requires complex assessments, grounded in MIT's values. General principles must be considered in light of specific and sometimes contradictory information about the sponsor, the project, and the external environment. Difficult judgments balancing the benefits, costs, and potential risks to MIT's reputation often need to be made. Whatever the conclusion, it is unlikely that all members of the MIT community will agree with it.

Regarding MIT's Saudi activities, I recommend the following course of action:

1. We should continue to welcome outstanding Saudi students and researchers, as well as appropriate Saudi visitors, to our campus.
2. I recommend against terminating any of our existing engagements with private Saudi donors and sponsors.
3. I also recommend against terminating our relationships with the Saudi government agency KACST, the state-owned enterprise Aramco, and SABIC, a public company majority-owned by the state. Although the assessment is less straightforward here, I do not find a compelling case for withdrawing from these relationships. It is true that those organizations are part of a government that has been implicated in the murder of journalist Khashoggi, that is pursuing repressive policies at home, and whose participation in the Yemeni civil war has been widely condemned. Some members of our community argue that MIT's continuing association with KACST, Aramco, and SABIC is an implicit endorsement of Saudi government actions that have generated widespread revulsion around the world. They believe that MIT has an obligation to speak out on these issues and that we should be joining in efforts to isolate the Saudi government. However, there has been no suggestion that any of these organizations had any role in the planning and execution of the operation that ended in Mr. Khashoggi's murder. It also seems unlikely that they have any control over any of the other Saudi government actions mentioned above. Nor does it seem likely that termination of MIT's engagement with these entities would have any meaningful ameliorative effect on those actions. On the positive side, these organizations are supporting important research and activities at MIT on terms that honor our principles and comply with our policies. They are also providing critical resources to support the education of outstanding Saudi students and women scientists and engineers, who will surely be in the vanguard of social change in that country. Moreover, most of this work can be expected to deliver benefits of one form or another to Saudi society or to the physical environment in the Kingdom. I judge that the balance of actual and potential impacts, positive and negative, weighs in favor of a continuation of these relationships.

There will certainly be members of the MIT community who disagree with this conclusion.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, if any of the principal investigators who are leading these projects conclude

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in a thoughtful and impassioned letter to *The Tech* (see <https://thetech.com/2018/10/25/reif-cut-ties-saudi-arabia>), a group of graduate students in the Department of Political Science have already argued against this view. Conversely, in interviews conducted as part of this assessment other members of our community have argued, with equal

that they do not wish to continue to do so in light of recent events, the Institute should work with them to minimize the resulting disruption to the research and to affected personnel, including most importantly our students. Our faculty will make their own determinations as to the best path forward. As long as these faculty members continue to be willing to lead these projects, I do not recommend withdrawal from MIT's current relationships with our Saudi sponsors and donors.

4. From time to time MIT undertakes large overseas engagements that require the physical presence of significant numbers of MIT people in those countries for substantial periods of time. We have no such engagements in Saudi Arabia today, and I recommend that we refrain from any such engagements in the future, at least until conditions on the ground have changed significantly. For any international engagement of this type, a necessary condition is that activities that are carried out under the Institute's auspices should be guided by the same core values that inform life and work on the MIT campus.<sup>5</sup> For example, on our campus we work hard to ensure honesty and integrity in all academic and personal dealings, fairness in the treatment of all individuals and groups, an open, respectful approach to discourse, and reliance on objective, fact-based inquiry. Obviously we cannot require other societies to conform to our values, and we should be respectful of social and cultural differences. But when MIT has a significant presence overseas we must be confident that these values will be upheld at least within the frame of our own operations there. In Saudi Arabia—where cultural norms, laws, and policies are biased against women, against certain religious groups, and against groups based on sexual orientation and gender identity—we ought not to proceed with major engagements unless we can be confident that members of those groups will experience no such bias within the frame of MIT's own activities. That is not the case today.
5. If opportunities arise in the future to enter into new Institute-scale research or educational relationships with private Saudi donors or sponsors that are primarily conducted at MIT, we should consider them as long as the activities comply with MIT's policies and principles and relevant laws and regulations, and as long as faculty are willing to lead them. We should also be willing to consider new Institute-scale research and educational relationships with Saudi government entities like KACST and Aramco under these same conditions, as long as MIT's senior leadership, in consultation with the faculty leader and with appropriate internal and external advice, concludes after careful deliberation that the balance of actual and potential impacts, positive and negative, weighs demonstrably in favor of the relationship.

-- Richard K. Lester

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conviction and passion, for continued engagement with the Saudi people through the research and educational programs that MIT is pursuing with Saudi government sponsorship.

<sup>5</sup> *A Global Strategy for MIT*, <http://web.mit.edu/globalstrategy/index.html>.

**Table 1: Current MIT activities enabled by Saudi collaborations and financial support**

Type of activity	Sources of support	Share of total expenditures (FY16-18)
1. SPONSORED RESEARCH PROGRAMS	Aramco SABIC KACST (King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology) KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology) KFUPM (King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals) Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University	52%
2. GIFT-ENABLED ACTIVITIES  Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) Jameel Water and Food Systems Lab (J-WAFS) Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL) Jameel Clinic for Machine Learning in Health (J-Clinic) Ibn Khaldun Fellowship Program for Saudi Women Student scholarships and fellowships	Community Jameel  Community Jameel  Community Jameel  Community Jameel  KACST  Various	44%
3. OTHER PROGRAMS  Industrial Liaison Program memberships Executive and professional education programs	Aramco, SABIC, Olayan Financing Group  Various	4%