

Saudi Arabia in Perspective
An Orientation Guide



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Chapter One – Profile

Introduction

Saudi Arabia, a modern theocratic monarchy slightly more than one-fifth the size of the U.S., is the largest state on the Arabian Peninsula. Known to the ancient Romans as *arabia felix* or “light-hearted Arabia,” today it is a devout and insular country awash in a petrodollar economy that came from exporting more than a million barrels of oil each day for fifty years. Its founder, King Abdulaziz bin Abderrahman ibn Saud, the Lion of Nejd, proclaimed his tribal confederation a kingdom in 1932. His heirs and descendants adopted the auxiliary title “Guardian of the Two Holy Sites,” Mecca and Medina. At the geographic center of the Islamic world, the Kingdom’s scholars are the arbiters of religious orthodoxy for nearly a billion Muslims throughout the world. On 11 September 2001, fifteen Saudi men were among the nineteen terrorists who planned and executed the attack on the United States.



© Chris Christie
Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter)

Facts and Figures¹

Area: slightly more than one-fifth the size of the U.S.

total: 2,149,690 sq km (829,999.9 sq mi)

land: 2,149,690 sq km (829,999.9 sq mi)

water: 0 sq km (0 sq mi)

Bordering countries: Iraq 814 km (505.8 mi); Jordan 744 km (462.3 mi); Kuwait 222 km (137.9 mi); Oman 676 km (420 mi); Qatar 60 km (37.3 mi); UAE 457 km (283.9 mi); Yemen 1,458 km (905.9 mi)

Population: 27,601,038

Population growth rate: 2.06%

Note: This includes 5,576,076 non-nationals.

Nationality:

noun: Saudi(s)

adjective: Saudi or Saudi Arabian

Ethnic groups: Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%

Religion: Muslim 100%

Languages: Arabic

¹ Figures taken from the *CIA World Factbook*. All estimates are as of Oct 4, 2007 unless otherwise noted.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 78.8%

male: 84.7%

female: 70.8% (2003 est.)

Median age:

total: 21.4 years

male: 22.9 years

female: 19.6 years

Infant mortality rate:

total: 12.41 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 14.24 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 10.48 deaths/1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 75.88 years

male: 73.85 years

female: 78.02 years

Total fertility rate: 3.94 children born/woman

Country name:

conventional long form: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

conventional short form: Saudi Arabia

local long form: Al Mamlakah al Arabiyah as Suudiyah

local short form: Al Arabiyah as Suudiyah

Government type: monarchy

Capital: Riyadh

Administrative divisions: 13 provinces (*minaatiq*, singular - *mintaqah*); Al Bahah, Al Hudud ash Shamaliyah, Al Jawf, Al Madinah, Al Qasim, Ar Riyad, Ash Sharqiyah (Eastern Province), 'Asir, Ha'il, Jizan, Makkah, Najran, Tabuk

Independence: 23 September 1932 (unification of the Kingdom)

Constitution: Saudi Arabia is governed according to Islamic law. The Basic Law, which outlines the government's rights and responsibilities, was promulgated by royal decree in 1992.

Legal system: Saudi Arabia utilizes Shari'a law although several secular codes have been introduced. Commercial disputes are handled by special committees. The government has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction.



Suffrage: 21 years of age; male only

Executive branch:

Chief of state and head of government: King and Prime Minister ABDALLAH bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (since 1 August 2005); Heir Apparent Crown Prince SULTAN bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (half brother of the monarch, born 5 January 1928).

Note: The monarch is both the chief of state and head of government.

Cabinet: The Council of Ministers is appointed by the monarch every four years and includes many royal family members.

Elections: None, since the position of monarch is filled by heredity. The Allegiance Commission was created by royal decree in October 2006. It created a committee of Saudi princes who will play a role in the selection of future Saudi kings. The new system will not take effect until after Crown Prince Sultan becomes king, however.



Legislative branch: Consultative Council or Majlis al-Shura (150 members and a chairman appointed by the monarch for four-year terms). The Council of Ministers announced its plan in October 2003 to introduce elections for half of the members of local and provincial assemblies and a third of the members of the national Consultative Council or Majlis al-Shura. This was to be phased in over a period of four to five years, but to date no such elections have been held or announced.

Judicial branch: Supreme Council of Justice

Political parties and leaders: none

International organization participation: Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA); African Development Bank (AfDB); Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD); Arab Monetary Fund (AMF); Bank for International Settlements (BIS); Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations (FAO); G-77; Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); International Chamber of Commerce (ICC); ICRM; International Development Association, World Bank (IDA); Islamic Development Bank (IDB); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Finance Corporation, World Bank (IFC); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS); International Labor Organization, United Nations (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF); International Maritime Organization (IMO); Interpol; Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, UNESCO (IOC); Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); International Organization for Standardization (ISO); International Telecommunications Union (ITU); League of Arab States (LAS); Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, World Bank (MIGA); Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC); Organization of American States (OAS) (observer); Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC); Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA); United Nations (UN); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO); Universal Postal Union (UPU); World Customs Organization (WCO); World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU); World Health Organization (WHO); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); World Meteorological Organization (WMO); World Trade Organization (WTO)

Diplomatic representation from the U.S.:

Chief of mission: Ambassador Ford M. Fraker²

Embassy: Collector Road M, Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh

consulate(s) general: Dhahran, Jiddah (Jeddah)

GDP – per capita: \$13,600 (2006 est.)

Agricultural products: wheat, barley, tomatoes, melons, dates, citrus; mutton, chickens, eggs, milk

Industries: crude oil production, petroleum refining, basic petrochemicals; ammonia, industrial gases, sodium hydroxide (caustic soda), cement, fertilizer, plastics; metals, commercial ship repair, commercial aircraft repair, construction

Export commodities: petroleum and petroleum products 90%

Export partners: Japan 17.6%, U.S. 15.8%, South Korea 9.6%, China 7.2%, Singapore 4.4%, Taiwan 4.4% (2006)

Import commodities: machinery and equipment, foodstuffs, chemicals, motor vehicles, textiles

Import partners: U.S. 12.2%, Germany 8.5%, China 7.9%, Japan 7.2%, UK 4.8%, Italy 4.8% (2006)

Internet users: 3.2 million (2006)

Airports: 208 (2006)

Railways: *total:* 1,392 km (864 mi)

Roadways: *total:* 152,044 km (94,475 mi)

paved: 45,461 km (28,248 mi)

unpaved: 106,583 km (66,227 mi) (2000)



© bungiemunch / flickr.com
Date vendor in Jeddah

² This updated information taken from the CIA World Factbook, 16 August 2007.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html#Govt>

Ports and terminals: Ad Dammam, Al Jubayl, Jiddah, Yanbu' al Sinaiyah

Military branches: Land Forces (Army), Navy, Air Force, Air Defense Force, National Guard, Ministry of Interior Forces (paramilitary)

Military age of service and obligation: 18 years of age (est.); no conscription (2004)

International disputes: Saudi Arabia has reinforced its concrete-filled security barrier along sections of the now fully demarcated border with Yemen to stem illegal cross-border activities. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia continue discussions on a maritime boundary with Iran.



Refugees and internationally displaced persons:

refugees (country of origin): 240,015 (Palestinian Territories) (2006)

Trafficking in persons:

current situation: Saudi Arabia is a destination country for workers from South and Southeast Asia who are subjected to conditions that constitute involuntary servitude. This includes being subjected to physical and sexual abuse, non-payment of wages, confinement, and withholding of passports as a restriction on their movement. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable because some are confined to the house in which they work, unable to seek help. Saudi Arabia is also a destination country for Nigerian, Yemeni, Pakistani, Afghan, Somali, Malian, and Sudanese children trafficked for forced begging and involuntary servitude as street vendors. Some Nigerian women were reportedly trafficked into Saudi Arabia for commercial sexual exploitation.

tier rating: Tier 3 - Saudi Arabia does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.

Chapter 2 – Geography

Introduction

Saudi Arabia occupies the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula, a geographical place name that is derived from the language of the majority of its inhabitants. Many of the countries in the peninsula are principalities governed by a monarch where the leader is known as a King, as in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, or an *emir* (prince) as in the Gulf States. While the region has unrivaled oil reserves, it is also replete with unresolved interstate conflicts, weapons proliferation, and political systems that have failed to modernize.³



The Neighborhood

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shares boundaries with seven countries and three major bodies of water.⁴ On the west, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea form an ocean boundary that is 1,800 km (1,118 mi) in length. This border runs parallel to a mountain chain for approximately 320 km (198 mi) down to the area around Najran before terminating in Yemen. These mountain ranges rise to over 2,740 m (9,000 ft). The southeastern portion of Saudi Arabia, known as the Rub al-Khali, shares a border with Oman. Literally meaning “Empty Quarter,” the Rub al-Khali is the largest sand desert in the world.⁵

Saudi Arabia’s eastern neighbors include the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. The rest of the eastern border is made by the Arabian Gulf. The border with the UAE is not demarcated. Furthermore, the al-Buraymi Oasis, which is shared by Oman and the UAE, has been a source of border dispute for years.⁶ The short border with Qatar was established at that country’s independence in 1965.

Saudi Arabia’s northern neighbor states are Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait. The northern border stretches from the western Gulf of Aqaba to Ras al-Khafji on the Persian Gulf, measuring almost 1,400 km (870 mi). The Kingdom’s maritime claims include a twelve-nautical-mile extension from its coastal borders. The Saudis also assert jurisdiction over numerous small islands, and claims some sea beds and subsoils beyond the twelve-nautical-mile limit.

³ Foreign Policy Research Institute. Kemp, Geoffrey. “The New (and Old) Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf.” April 2000. <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/061.200004.kemp.geopoliticspersiangulf.html>

⁴ Library of Congress. “Saudi Arabia: Geography.” <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/14.htm>

⁵ Arabian Careers Limited. Saudi Arabia. “Geography of Saudi Arabia.” No date. <http://www.arabiancareers.com/saudi.html>

⁶ Country Studies. Saudi Arabia country studies. “Geography.” No date. <http://www.country-studies.com/saudi-arabia/geography.html>

Geographical Regions

The Hijaz

The western region (Hijaz) includes the west coastal area, which encompasses two mountain ranges that diverge near Mecca. Hijaz translates to “the barrier,” which comes from the “backbone” created by the Sarat Mountains.⁷ Only a few places in the northern Hijaz range exceed 2,100 m (6,889 ft) in elevation. This rugged landscape receives little rain and intense sun. Near Mecca, this mountain range gradually decreases southward to around 600 m (1,968 ft). The Red Sea coast lacks natural harbors and is dotted by a few coastal plains.

The steep western slopes have been left bare by soil erosion, which has been exacerbated by occasional heavy rainfalls. Infrequent rainfall creates rivers that fertilize valleys and the coastal plains, allowing for some farming.⁸ The more gently rising eastern slopes are scarred by wadis (seasonally dry river beds) that mark the path of ancient rivers; and, occasionally, carry water from infrequent rain storms down to the plains. This water, along with scattered oases, that draw water from springs and wells, allow for some subsistence farming. The biggest oasis is that surrounding Medina.

The Asir

The mountain range that continues below Mecca contains peaks much higher than those in the northern range. This region is known as the *Asir*. Peaks in the Asir range reach as high as 3,000 m (9,842.5 ft). Along the western side of this range lie the Tihamah lowlands, a coastal plain that averages 65 km (40.4 mi) in width. This rich alluvial plain is bordered on its west side by a tidal plain and on the east by fertile upper slopes, which are terraced to allow for land use.



© Meesho Amdo
Al Hada in the Asir Mountains

The eastern side of the Asir range slopes gently downward. The Rub al-Khali, or “Empty Quarter,” Lava Beds (*harrat*) are part of the eastern plateau topography of the Hijaz and Asir mountain ranges. They represent evidence of relatively recent volcanic activity. Oasis agriculture takes place along the fertile wadis that travel down the eastern slopes. Of the most important are Wadi Bishah and Wadi Tathlith.

The Nejd

The Nejd, which means “highland” in Arabic, is a stony plateau located east of the Hijaz and Asir. Spreading across the peninsula, the plateau slopes toward the east from an elevation of 1,360 m (4,461 ft) in the west to 750 m (2,460 ft) at its easternmost limit. A number of wadis run eastward away from the Red Sea. Jebel Tuwayq, an arc-shaped ridge with an elevation of between 100 to 250 m (328 to 820 ft) above the plateau, is the

⁷ Places of Peace and Power. “Mecca, Saudi Arabia.” 2006.
http://www.sacredsites.com/middle_east/saudi_arabia/mecca.html

⁸ Microsoft Encarta online Encyclopedia. “Saudi Arabia.” 2007
http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761575422/Saudi_Arabia.html#s2

center of Nejd. Many oases are found here and large salt marshes (*sabkah*) are scattered throughout the area.

Northern Arabia

Geographically a part of the Syrian Desert, northern Arabia is an upland plateau dotted by wadis. Known as *Badiyah ash-Sham*, this area extends across eastern Jordan, southern Syria and western Iraq. The grass and scrubs bring nomadic and semi-nomadic herders seeking pasture for their flocks. The most significant feature of Northern Arabia is a large basin near the border with Jordan, *Wadi as-Sirhan*, which dips as much as 300 m (984 ft) below the surrounding plateau and offers evidence of an ancient inland sea. For thousands of years, it served as a caravan route between the Mediterranean and the central and southern peninsula.



© Ryan Whisner
Wadi Rum, Northern Arabia

Eastern Arabia

Eastern Arabia is sometimes called by its ancient name al-Ahsa, or al-Hasa. It is one of the most fertile areas of the country and the location of al-Ghawar, Saudi Arabia's massive oil fields. The as-Summan Plateau lies east of the ad-Dahna sands, a narrow strip of red sand dunes east of Riyadh. This rocky plateau is about 120 km (74 mi) in width. It descends in elevation from about 400 m (1,312 ft) in the west to about 240 m (787 ft) in the east. The as-Summan Plateau is mainly barren, and comprised of ancient river gorges and isolated buttes.

Moving eastward, the terrain changes abruptly to flat, rocky, lowland coastal plains. These flat lowlands lack discernible geographical features and are covered with gravel or sand. The north is comprised of a gravel plain, known as ad-Dibdibah. The south is a sand desert, the al-Jafurah, which merges with the Empty Quarter (Rub al-Khali). Occupying much of southern Saudi Arabia, the Rub al-Khali is one of the largest deserts in the world with dunes that sometimes exceed 300 m (984 ft) in height.⁹

The coast includes sandy plains, marshes, and salt flats that merge into the sea. In some places the water rises almost to the surface. Shoals and reefs extend far offshore. The construction of massive breakwalls at Saudi Aramco's petroleum terminal, Ras Tanura, has enabled seagoing tankers to reach the Saudi Coast.

Deserts

Saudi Arabia is a land of deserts, with more than half of the country being arid, dry and sandy. The three largest deserts sit on three sides of the central plateau. In the north, the An-Nafud has longitudinal sand dunes averaging 6 to 15 m (20 to 50 ft) high but some reach as high as 30 m (100 ft). This vast desert has a reddish hue that comes from the iron oxide found in the sand. Moving south, the next and smallest of the three deserts, is ad-Dahna. It runs south for 125 km (77.7 mi) in a narrow arc. Often called the River of Sand, this narrow band of rose-colored sand dunes connects the North to the Rub al-Khali. Its

⁹ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Rub al-Khali." 2007. http://i-cias.com/e.o/rub_al-khali.htm

width varies from 24 to 80 km (15 to 50 mi). Although minimal water is retained, winter and spring pastures bring the Bedouin here to graze their animals.

The Rub al-Khali is a barren desert that is larger than the other two deserts of Saudi Arabia. There are no oases in this vast, dry land that takes up 550,000 sq km (212,356 sq mi). The elevation drops from 600 m (1,968 ft) in the west to 180 m (590 ft) in the east. The sand is just as varied; it is soft and fine in the west, while the east is covered in stable sand sheets and salt flats. Sand mountains can reach as high as 300 m (984 ft). There are no permanent dwellings in the Rub al-Khali and few wandering tribes pass through.

Climate

Temperatures across the peninsula from May to September are very high and mercury readings of above 48° C (120° F) are not unusual. Inland, the humidity is moderate while on the coast the higher humidity makes it uncomfortable during the summer season. Nighttime temperatures may drop considerably.¹⁰ In the Gulf region, a special kind of storm known as a *kauf* is typically accompanied by an increase in temperature and humidity.

Winter brings cooler temperatures, especially to the mountains and interior where frost and snowfall is not uncommon. Nighttime in the desert during these cold months is chilly and strong winds may pick up sand, making for a cold blast of winter air. This sand-laden wind that blows from the northern deserts takes its name from the Arabic word for north, *shamal*.¹¹ Most prevalent during the late spring and early summer, winds can gust to 50 km (30 mi) an hour for days at a time and create blinding sandstorms.¹² It is stronger during the day than at night. One of the driest countries in the world, Saudi Arabia's rainfall averages less than 127 mm (5 in) per year.¹³ However, this average masks the range of extremes from zero in 10 years in the Rub al-Khali up to 508 mm (20 in) per year in the mountains of Asir province.¹⁴



¹⁰ BBC Weather. "Country Guide: Saudi Arabia." No date.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT002770

¹¹ About.com. Library of Congress. "Saudi Arabia: Climate." December 1992.

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/anepalacesgeography/qt/ClimSaudiArabia.htm>

¹² Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Shamal." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9067102/shamal#269287.hook>

¹³ Arab Net. Saudi Arabia. "Climate." 2002. http://www.arab.net/saudi/sa_climate.htm

¹⁴ Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Saudi Arabia. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Facts and Figures." No date. <http://www.un.int/saudiarabia/sa-prfl.htm>

Bodies of Water

There are no natural rivers or lakes in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the country's available surface water and groundwater resources are limited because rainfall precipitation is low and the evaporation rate is high.¹⁵ Because of the aridity, desalinated water production accounts for approximately 30% of the world's total for desalination; thus, making Saudi Arabia the world's largest producer of desalinated water.¹⁶ It is the primary source of potable water for human consumption in the Kingdom.

The Saline Water Conversion Corporation (SWCC) is the official public entity responsible for overseeing the desalination process, as well as the logistics of supplying water through pipelines.¹⁷ It administers a network comprising 2,500 km (1,553 mi) of pipelines, 21 pumping stations, 131 depots and 10 stations for combining the desalinated water with scarcer underground water.¹⁸ At present, there are 30 desalination plants in the country that provide water to more than 50 cities and distribution centers. These plants satisfy approximately 20% of the Kingdom's electricity needs and simultaneously generate chlorine gas as a byproduct. The gas is capped and used in the Kingdom's petrochemical industry. The high rate of population growth has put a strain on the government's ability to deliver enough water to meet consumption needs. This has resulted in efforts to make investment in desalination more attractive to foreign corporations.¹⁹

Major Cities

Riyadh

Riyadh, the capital and largest city in Saudi Arabia, is built on the site of an ancient town. The name is derived from the Arabic word *rawdah* meaning a place where flowers grow. Nestled amongst many wadis, it has been a fertile area since antiquity. In 1824, Riyadh began its origins as an urban center. This is when Turki bin 'Abdallah bin Muhammad bin Sa'ud (1824–1834), the founder of the Second Saudi State (1824–1891), established control over the city and made it his capital.²⁰



© Habbib / Flickr.com
Kingdom Tower in Riyadh

¹⁵ International Development Research Centre. Abderrahman, Walid A. "Water Demand Management in Saudi Arabia." No date. http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-93954-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

¹⁶ U.S. Commercial Service. "Saudi Arabia: Water Resources Equipment (WRE)." c. 2001–2007. <http://www.buyusa.gov/saudiarabia/en/113.html>

¹⁷ Institute of Engineers: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia Center. "Desalination in Saudi Arabia." 2001. <http://www.iepsac.org/papers/p09a03.htm>

¹⁸ Mena Report. "Saudi Water Desalination Output Exceeded One Billion Cubic Meters in 2002." March 2003. <http://www.mindfully.org/Water/2003/Saudi-Water-Desalination30mar03.htm>

¹⁹ Naval Postgraduate School. Goetz, Adam. "Demographics: The Downfall of Saudi Arabia." Master's Thesis. December 2003.

www.nps.edu/academics/sigs/nsa/publicationsandresearch/studenttheses/theses/Goetz03.pdf

²⁰ Centers for the Study of the Built Environment. al-Hathloul, Saleh. "Riyadh Architecture in One Hundred Years." 21 April 2002. http://www.csbe.org/e_publications/riyadh_architecture/essay1.htm

Apart from the fort and a few traditional Nejdi palaces near Deera Square, little trace of the old town remains. The current population is 4.7 million.²¹ Riyadh's location in the interior of the Kingdom makes it the central hub for transportation and government. It is also one of the fastest growing cities in the world.²²

Jeddah

The name means "Ancestor of Women" and refers to a small city square where according to local lore Adam's wife, Eve, was said to be buried.²³ Jeddah, today, is the primary industrial port on the Red Sea and its air terminal and passenger seaport are the main points of entry through which most pilgrims pass en route to perform *umrah*,²⁴ *hajj*, or to visit the two holy mosques. It has grown to be the second largest city in Saudi Arabia with a population of 1.4 million.²⁵

Dhahran-Dammam-al-Khobar

Dhahran-Dammam-al-Khobar is a triangular, coastal metropolitan area in the oil-producing Eastern Province, which borders the Persian Gulf. Many residents are employed by the airport, the University of Petroleum and Minerals, or ARAMCO. A minority are in private enterprise providing services necessary for daily life. Almost 90% of those employed in the private sector are foreign national contract laborers, mainly from South Asia.²⁶ Foreign residents when counted, easily equal the number of Saudi nationals. Except for the customs of closing shops during prayer, and veiling women, there is little which is indigenous to Saudi Arabia.²⁷ The combined population of these three cities is 2 million.

Jubail

Jubail, 100 km (60 mi) north of Dammam, is the largest and most important industrial city in Saudi Arabia whose petrochemical plants account for more than 7% of the Kingdom's GNP. Jubail Industrial City and its twin, Yenbu Industrial City north of Jeddah, were developed in the early 1980s as a civil engineering project by the Royal Commission. Their purpose was to create a competitive industrial base that would augment Saudi



²¹ NationMaster. "Statistics on Saudi Arabia." c. 2003–2007. <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/saudi-arabia>

²² Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Riyadh." 2007. <http://i-cias.com/e.o/riyadh.htm>

²³ Pint, John and Susy. "Discovering Old Jeddah: An Enchanting Jewel on the Red Sea." 2005. <http://www.saudicaves.com/saudi/oldjeddah.html>

²⁴ Umrah is sometimes called the mini-pilgrimage in that it can be performed any time of the year and takes but 30 minutes to complete. It is not a substitute for hajj or major pilgrimage which occurs during the Hajj month and takes five days to complete.

²⁵ Saudicity.com. Jeddah General Information. "Jeddah." 1999. <http://www.saudicity.com/jgeneral.htm>

²⁶ Swedwatch. Norbrand, Sara. "Just Another Commodity: A Report on the Situation of Migrant Workers in Swedish Companies in Saudi Arabia." June 2005.

<http://www.swedwatch.org/swedwatch/content/download/371/1871/file/Saudi.eng.SwedWatch.pdf>

²⁷ *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*. Fandy, Mamoun. "Introduction [p.2]." 1999. New York: St Martins Press.

Arabia's income from oil. It has several different petrochemical plants, an iron-steel plant, and a Royal Saudi Naval base. Both industrial cities are administered as direct charter entities by the Royal Commission, not by provincial government authorities. The population of each industrial city exceeds 100,000.²⁸

Mecca

Mecca (*Makkah*) is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, and the center of the Islamic religion. This makes it the most sacred city for Muslims who face Mecca during their five daily prayers. Access to the city and its environs is denied to non-Muslims. Situated in the Sirat Mountains 70 km (42 mi) to the east of Jeddah, ancient Mecca was an oasis and the crossroads of ancient north-south and east-west caravan trade routes. It connected the Mediterranean world of commerce with South Arabia, East Africa, and South Asia.²⁹ Mecca's current population is approximately 1.3 million.³⁰



© Think Draw / flickr.com
View of the Kaaba in Mecca

Medina

Medina, the second holiest site for Muslims, is located in the northern Hijaz region of western Saudi Arabia about 300 km (180 mi) north of Mecca. It is named "the City of the Prophet" because Muhammad fled here after he was initially driven out of Mecca. It was in Medina where he built his initial community of believers, the *Ummah*. Today, this city is home to the Prophet's Mosque, the Prophet's burial place. The Quba Mosque, the first mosque of Islam, is also located in Medina.³¹ The city's population is 600,000.

Environmental Issues

In 1991, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region suffered serious environmental damage during the Persian Gulf War as ruptures in Kuwaiti pipelines caused a southerly flow of floating crude oil in Gulf waters. Saudi Arabia's eastern shoreline experienced what was hailed as the world's largest oil spill, estimated to be as much as eight million barrels. Coastal sediments were found to contain 7% oil.³² In addition, the fleeing Iraqi army set fire to over 600 Kuwaiti oil wells, storage tanks, and refineries on their hasty departure from Kuwait in February 1991. These fires caused substantial air pollution in neighboring Saudi Arabia.³³

²⁸ Bechtel Corporation. "Jubail Industrial City Phase II: Saudi Arabia." 2007.

<http://www.bechtel.com/spjubail.htm>

²⁹ Sacred Sites. "Places of Peace and Power: Mecca." c.1983-1006. <http://www.sacredsites.com/index.html>

³⁰ About Geography. Rosenberg, Matt. "Mecca." 2007.

<http://geography.about.com/cs/religion/a/mecca.htm>

³¹ Religion Facts. "Medina: City of the Prophet." c. 2004-2007.

<http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/places/medina.htm>

³² Country Studies. Saudi Arabia. "The Environment and the 1991 Persian Gulf War." No date.

<http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/17.htm>

³³ Climate Modeling and Diagnostic Group. Columbia University. "Atmospheric and Meteorological Data From the Kuwait Oil Fires Taken from Ground." No date.

<http://rainbow.ldeo.columbia.edu/data/NASAentries/nasa4927.html>

The northern desert regions of Saudi Arabia suffer from overgrazing, which has caused significant loss of vegetation.³⁴ Historically, the Bedouin, whose traditional way of life was based on pastoral nomadism, regulated access to pasture through the indigenous *hema* or rationed grazing system for natural resources. It was abolished in 1953 when the government allowed open grazing leading to a “tragedy of the commons.”³⁵ The effects are reflected in a decline in both quality and condition of the *badia* or rangelands, and herd composition changed from camels to sheep.

Natural Hazards

Flooding is a natural hazard in Saudi Arabia, triggered by heavy rains. In January 2005, 29 people died during the Hajj season as they were attempting to travel in the flooded valleys around Medina en route from Mecca.³⁶ Other natural hazards include frequent sand and dust storms.³⁷ Earthquakes that occur from time-to-time in the western regions are usually precipitated by the northward movement of the Arabian plate.³⁸



³⁴ UN Environmental Program. Chapter 2: Regional Perspectives. “West Asia: Major Environmental Concerns.” 1997. http://www.unep.org/geo/geo1/ch/ch2_13.htm

³⁵ This tragedy refers to the outcome when each nomad increases the size of his herd in an environment where the public resource base is finite. De Young, R. “Tragedy of the Commons.” 1999. <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung/tragedy.html>

³⁶ NASA, Earth Observatory. “Saudi Arabia: Flooding.” 24 January 2005. http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/shownh.php3?img_id=12688

³⁷ World Index. “Saudi Arabia.” No date. <http://rumbletum.org/Asia/Saudi Arabia>

³⁸ International Workshop on Disaster Reduction. “Global Blueprints for Change,” 19–22 August 2001. http://www.gadr.giees.uncc.edu/DOCS/Theme_C_sent_oct_15/1.BLUEPRINT C.1 KHALED KALHHALEH ET AL.doc

Chapter 3 History

Introduction

Except for a few isolated cities and oases that marked caravan routes, the harsh climate of the Arabian Peninsula has worked throughout ancient and modern history against the establishment of settled communities. Until recently, inhabitants have been mostly nomads whose migratory way of life and tribal affiliations were not conducive to the establishment of a settled nation-state.



© Orlando Arzelan Jr
Desert near Yanbu

The Hijaz, that geographic region running along the central eastern shores of the Red Sea, formed part of an important trade route from North Africa to the Arabian Sea, and India to the East. In the first few centuries C.E., the Roman and Persian empires were wrestling for control of the western world. Mecca at this time was a key city at the confluence of two main trade routes: the east–west and the north–south. The east–west route ran from North Africa and Egypt to points east of the Red Sea, and the north–south ran from Yemen in the south to Damascus in the north and eventually connected with the Silk Road to China.³⁹ Inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula remained largely unaffected by the political turmoil in Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley and the eastern Mediterranean. Historically, the great expanse of desert has formed a geographical barrier to military adventures.⁴⁰

Modern History

The First Saudi State

The roots of modern Saudi history extend back to the mid 18th century (c. 1750) to the Nejd⁴¹ desert town of Diriyah, just north of Riyadh. It was there that tribal chieftan, Muhammad ibn Saud, patriarch of the House of Saud and forbearer of today’s royal family, and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab joined forces. Abd al-Wahab was a Muslim reformist cleric who was committed to a literal interpretation of the Quran.⁴²

The two men, the chieftan and his protégé, swore a traditional Muslim oath promising to work together to establish an *umma* or community based on Islamic principles. Those who disagreed with them were denounced as heretics and apostates. The orthodox amalgam of Al-Saud and Abd al-Wahab, known in the western press as “Wahabism,” not

³⁹ Mid-East Web. “Saudi Arabia: A Brief History.” <http://www.mideastweb.org/arabiahistory.htm>

⁴⁰ The Saudi Club at Kansas State University. “Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” <http://www.k-state.edu/ssa/saudi/history.htm>

⁴¹ Nejd is the name of the central plateau of the Arabian Peninsula

⁴² Northfield Mount Hermon School. Thornton, Ted. “Wahhabism: The Revival Movement.” 31 July 2007. http://www.nmhschool.org/tthornton/wahhabi_movement.php

only accepted but promoted *jihad* or warfare against infidels and Muslims who disputed its teachings.⁴³

The Wahabi doctrine allowed the Al-Saud dynasty to assert and maintain authority over the nomad tribes.⁴⁴ Some accepted this brand of Islam out of conviction, others out of fear of the consequences of resisting it. Indeed, those who willingly accepted Al-Saud's brand of austere Islam were expected to show their allegiance by growing beards and embracing all of the *sunna*, or traditions of the 7th century prophet of Islam, Muhammad.⁴⁵

For 70 years the descendants of Muhammad Al-Saud racked up victories and converts as far north as Iraq and Syria. In 1802, they captured the holy Shi'ite city of Karbala, in



present-day Iraq, and destroyed the tomb of the Imam Hussain. This even occurred on the Shi'a holy day of *Ashur*, the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram. Two thousand Shi'ite worshippers were killed as they were commemorating the death of Imam Hussain.⁴⁶ After sacking Karbala, the Saudi tribesmen penetrated deeply into the western provinces of present-day Saudi Arabia where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located. The warriors from the Nejd terrorized the western Arabian villages and turned back those pilgrims who they deemed guilty of *bida'a* or "objectionable innovations" to the *sunna* (custom) of the Prophet Muhammad.

Al-Saud's insurgency angered the Ottomans, whose empire included Egypt and parts of present-day Syria, Arabia, and Iraq.⁴⁷ The Turks' ability to collect taxes from those making the pilgrimage was affected. Already in decline, the Ottoman Empire encouraged their Egyptian viceroy, Muhammad Ali, to do battle with the troublemakers. In forcing the Saudis back to Nejd, the Egyptians easily overwhelmed the Al-Saud tribesmen and restored Mecca and Medina to Ottoman rule.

The Second Saudi State

By 1824, the Al-Saud family had regained territorial control of central Arabia. Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud moved the capital to Riyadh, some 20 miles south of Diriyah, and established the Second Saud State. During his decade long rule, he succeeded in recapturing most of the lands which had been lost to the Ottomans.

⁴³ The term Wahabism is controversial, because there isn't any community, tribe, country, or nation or family by the name of "Wahab." It is therefore not applicable according to Muslim designations. But it has been widely adopted in the West to describe the Saudi variant of Islam. The article collection of Dr. M. Amir Ali, Ph.D. "Wahabism Exposed." <http://www.ilaam.net/Articles/WahabismExposed.html>

⁴⁴ Hamdard Islamicus. Küçükcan, Talip. "Some Reflections of the Wahhabiyah Movement." 1995. <http://muslim-canada.org/wahhabi.htm>

⁴⁵ *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. Aslan, Reza. "Chapter Nine: An Awakening in the East [p. 244]." New York: Random House, 2006.

⁴⁶ The title of Imam in Sunni Islam is given to any cleric who leads prayer. In Shi'a Islam it is a more exalted title and refers to an esteemed spiritual leader.

⁴⁷ Metropolitan Museum of Art. Timeline of History. "The Greater Ottoman Empire, 1600-1800." http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/HD/grot/hd_grot.htm

Under the leadership of Turki, who was assassinated in 1834, and his son, Faisal, the Second Saud State enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. This abruptly ended in 1865 owing to a renewed campaign on the part of the Ottomans to extend their empire into the interior of the Arabian Peninsula. Factional infighting in the Saud family hindered its ability to respond.⁴⁸ Ottoman armies succeeded in capturing parts of the Saud State. With the backing of the Ottomans, the al-Rashid family of Hail embarked on a campaign effort to overthrow the Saud State.⁴⁹



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Faisal Al-Saud, 1875

Confronted with a much larger and better equipped army, Faisal's son, Abd al-Rahman bin Faisal Al-Saud, was forced to concede defeat in 1891. He sought refuge with the Bedouin tribes in the Rub' al-Khali (Empty Quarter). From there, he and his family went to Kuwait, where they took up residence. His son, the young Abdulaziz ibn Abd al-Rahman Al-Saud, hereafter referred to as Abdulaziz, but often known as just Ibn Saud (meaning "son of Saud") in the West, absorbed those lessons that his father and uncles had learned the hard way, namely how internal conflicts can impede governance. When he eventually became King, he drummed into his sons the need to put tribal loyalty first and keep family conflicts private.

Abdulaziz spent his formative years in Kuwait which was then a British colonial outpost. There he was exposed to Europeans, Christians, and Muslims who practiced different variants of Islam. In 1902, as a young man, he returned through the northern desert to Riyadh leading a contingent of tribal warriors and 40 camels. With this small force, he launched a successful assault on the Al Rashid Garrison in Riyadh. This enabled him to gain a foothold in Najd. To bolster his authority, Abdulaziz cultivated anew the historic Wahabi doctrine, and in the process established himself as the leader of the House of Saud and an exponent Wahabi orthodoxy.⁵⁰

The Third Saudi State

Abdulaziz proved himself to be a canny student of geopolitics.⁵¹ To take on the Ottomans in the Hijaz, he formed a tactical alliance with the British, who had formalized their two-decade-old occupation of Ottoman Egypt the previous year. Abdulaziz, in choosing to enter into an alliance with the British was going against the tides of history. It was a time when Egyptians and other colonial Arab subjects were advancing claims of self-determination and were embracing the new notion of Arab nationalism.

The British had no objections to Abdulaziz's conquests in central and southern Arabia and against the Ottomans, so long as his ambitions didn't extend to the British Trucial States of Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, and Oman. Although Ibn Saud had no formal

⁴⁸ Global Security. "Abdul Rahman bin Faisal Al Saud [1889-1891]."

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/abdul-rahman-bin-faisal.htm>

⁴⁹ Kansas State University. "The Saudi Club." 2007. <http://www.k-state.edu/ssa/saudi/history.htm>

⁵⁰ Library of Congress. "Profile: Saudi Arabia [p.3]." September 2006.

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Saudi_Arabia.pdf

⁵¹ *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Mamdani, Mahmood. "Chapter One: Culture Talk; Or, How Not To Talk About Islam and Politics [p. 52]." 2004. New York: Pantheon Books.

assurances or treaties with the Turks, they were aware of his presence. His non-interference in the affairs of the Hijaz, where the Arab Hashimite Prince Faisal was Protector of the Holy Sites (Mecca and Medina), was viewed by the Ottoman Turks as de facto acceptance of their presence in the Hijaz.⁵² Finally, for the British, who were interested in controlling the Persian Gulf, the Saudi-controlled Nejd area would be one of the final additions to their imperial real estate holdings.⁵³



The *al-ikhwan al-muslimun* or Muslim Brotherhood, who had been instrumental in establishing Abdulaziz's power in the late 1920s, were displeased by the alliance. The Ikhwan in Nejd consisted mostly of Egyptian zealots who migrated to Arabia as evangelists of Hassan al-Banna, the group's founder. They preached purist Islam, death to infidels, and an end to colonial regimes, and were seen by many native Nejdīs as being natural allies of Wahabism. The Ikhwan in Arabia considered Abdulaziz to be their *imam* (spiritual leader) as long as he followed the orthodoxy of Abd al-Wahab. However, by signing an agreement with the British and declaring himself King, he had in their eyes violated the spirit of Islam.

Militant Islamists with an expansionist agenda, like the Ikhwan, were viewed with suspicion by the British.⁵⁴ They warned Abdulaziz about the threat the Ikhwan movement could pose to his authority. Given the possibility that the Ikhwan might provoke a confrontation with the British, Abdulaziz decided to rein them in. This prompted the Ikhwan to revolt in 1929. Abdulaziz obtained a *fatwa* or decree from his Arabian *ulama* (religious scholarly authorities) permitting him to crush the rebellion. This proved to be a turning point for the *ulama* as well; from this point they were seen as a force for legitimating the political actions of the House of Saud.⁵⁵

Out of concern for the survival of his regime and for maintaining power, Abdulaziz vanquished the Ikhwan forces during a battle which lasted only a few hours. He then destroyed their camps and banned any type of meeting without his consent.⁵⁶ Pursuant to prewar agreements with the British, the fledgling Saudi state, now a monarchy, remained reliant on the British for protection. Consequently, they never went to war with the British-allied rival governments in Jordan and Iraq. Such military action, moreover,

⁵² Foreign Policy Research Institute. Sicherman, Harvey. "King Fahd's Saudi Arabia." 12 August 2005. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20050812.middleeast.sicherman.fahdsaudiArabia.html>

⁵³ *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*. Vitalis, Robert. "Chapter One: Introduction to the History of Firms and States [pp. 4–5]." Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

⁵⁴ The *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon* ("the Muslim Brotherhood") was founded in Egypt. During the latter half of the 20th century, it spawned a number of extremist groups.

⁵⁵ Northfield Mount Hermon School. Thornton, Ted. "History of the Middle East Database: World War I and the Early Mandate, 1914-1929." 1 June 2007. http://www.nmhschool.org/tthornton/mehistorydatabase/world_war_i_and_the_early_mandat.php#muslim%20brotherhood%20founded

⁵⁶ *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*. Fandy, Mamoun. "Concepts, Parameters, and History[p. 47]." New York: St Martin's Press, 1999.

would have been costly for a fledgling state whose limited revenues largely came from taxing pilgrims visiting Mecca and Medina.⁵⁷

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Hijaz fell to Abdulaziz in 1924–25. Along with the Nejd, it comprised the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded in 1932 as an absolute monarchy. Over the course of the next few decades, British regional influence waned, particularly after Britain took provocative measures to settle boundary disputes with the Kingdom and later sided with Israel in the Suez Crisis of 1956. In both cases, the United States sided with the Kingdom and in that way replaced the British as Saudi Arabia's big power patron.⁵⁸

Oil was discovered in the Kingdom in 1938.⁵⁹ On 14 February 1945, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz had a meeting onboard the American warship *Quincy*. They agreed the United States would henceforth protect Saudi Arabia in exchange for concessions on developing the Kingdom's oil resources.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Franklin Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz

After World War II, revenues from oil steadily grew. The increase was particularly pronounced during the 1970s, when revenues jumped from USD 4.3 billion in 1973 to USD 101.8 billion by 1980.⁶⁰ The wise allocation and disbursement of the new wealth challenged the ingenuity and skills of the royal family. The new prosperity transformed the traditional life of Saudi Arabians, affording dramatic increases in the standard of living, the construction of infrastructure, and the expansion of public education. All of these developments encouraged migration from village to city because rapid population growth left many with no means to make a living. More fundamentally, tensions emerged in the relationship between government, religion, and society.⁶¹

By the 1970s and 1980s, the Kingdom represented a clear case of authoritarian consolidation. The royal family used high oil revenues to expand its authority. The state administrative apparatus swelled, and with it the role of the security forces. The position of the religious establishment was also reinforced by making religious clerics salaried state employees.⁶²

⁵⁷ MacroHistory. "Ibn Saud, Wahhabis, and Oil, 1900 to 1945." <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch17arab.html>

⁵⁸ Saudi American Forum. Dumke, David. "A Snapshot of the U.S.-Saudi Relationship." 24 January 2003. http://saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF_Essay_04.htm

⁵⁹ Global Security. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." 26 January 2003. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2003/030126-saudi01.htm>

⁶⁰ University of Alberta Business School. St. Hiliare, Natalie. "Dutch Disease, Oil and Developing Countries." December 2004. <http://www.business.ualberta.ca/cabree/pdf/2004%20Fall%20UG%20Projects/Dutch%20disease,%20oil%20and%20developing%20countries.pdf> [p. 14]

⁶¹ Congressional Quarterly Press in Context. Wuthnow, Robert, ed. "Encyclopedia of Religion and Politics." 1998. http://www.cqpress.com/context/articles/epr_saudi.html

⁶² U.S. Congress. "Promoting Democracy and Human Rights: The Case of Saudi Arabia." 14 June 2007. <http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/110/ham061407.htm>

The reasons for asserting central authority and creating a more repressive state were mixed, but related to the viability of the Saudi state. One concern was the spread of republicanism in the Arab world as championed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, a secularist with socialist leanings. Nasser was a rival for leadership in the postcolonial Arab world. His militancy offered a challenge to the legitimacy of the Al-Saud dynasty. Another reason for asserting state authority was related to its support for the *ulama* or council of scholars who, in turn, legitimized the role of the state as the protector of Islamic holy sites. To that end, the Saudi government convened an Islamic summit in 1965 to reaffirm Islamic principles against the rising tide of modern religious ideologies.

The belief that followers of Wahabi teaching in Saudi Arabia were alone in endorsing orthodoxy and fanaticism in the Islamic world is erroneous. The chief architect of fundamentalist thinking in the modern Arab and Islamic world was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian who had visited and studied in the United States in the late 1940s. His books, which indict western governments, Jews, and Christians, have been translated into many languages.⁶³ A member of the Ikhwan in Cairo, Sayyid was eventually killed in prison during the latter days of President Nasser. Years later, Osama bin Laden was introduced to the writings of Sayyid Qutb by Qutb's younger brother who was Osama's teacher at the King Saud University of Riyadh.



The Royal Family

In contrast to other monarchies, the crown in Saudi Arabia does not automatically pass from father to eldest son, but to the one deemed by the family most suitable to rule. Those with extreme political views or born to mothers of low stature are passed over. The heir chosen to succeed the reigning king is given the title of "crown prince." He holds the position of first deputy prime minister in the King's Cabinet.

Since Abdulaziz's death in 1953, five of his sons have ruled the nation in succession. The eldest, Saud, passed the crown to Faisal in 1964, who was assassinated by a nephew in 1975. Illness reduced Faisal's successor, Khalid, to a puppet ruler. The real power was wielded behind-the-scenes by Crown Prince Fahad until Khalid's death in 1982, when Fahad became king. Fahad opened succession up to Abdulaziz's grandsons, but when the selection of a crown prince from the next generation will occur is unknown.⁶⁴ Abdullah became king in 2005, though he had served in that capacity since 1995 when Fahad had a stroke.

The Saudi royal family is larger, wealthier and more powerful within its own land than any other royal family. Estimates of the total number of members vary, but there are said

⁶³ The Guardian Unlimited. "Is this the man who inspired Bin Laden?" 1 November 2001. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,584478,00.html>

⁶⁴ Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy. Henderson, Simon. "New Saudi Rules on Succession: Will They Fix the Problem?" 25 October 2006. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2526>

to be more than 5,000 princes. In addition, the extended clan includes princesses as well as those who have married out. They could number over 25,000.⁶⁵

Most of the male descendants have no realistic chance of becoming king. Yet their sheer numbers have created a problem: the need to provide salaries and a comfortable standard of living for the princes has proved to be a drain on Saudi public finances.

Over the years, the profligate ruling family has evoked the anger of its most devout subjects. To many, the increasing opulence of the princes' lifestyle and the Kingdom's openness to dealing with the permissive consumer culture of the West represents a corruption of Islam's rigid strictures.⁶⁶ In a situation where information is controlled, rumors can take on a life of their own. Tales abound of Saudi princes taking extravagant vacations in exotic locales and buying top-of-the-line consumer goods. Wild palace parties at which alcohol is served and prostitutes are present are assumed to constitute a regular part of privileged royal entertainment.⁶⁷

Internal Dissent

In 1979, a group of some 500 aggrieved Sunni Muslims seized control of the Grand Mosque at Mecca, one of the holiest sites in Islam. This shattered the belief that fundamentalism did not command a following in the Kingdom.⁶⁸ The dissidents justified their actions on the grounds that the Al-Saud monarchy had forfeited its legitimacy owing to corruption and its close ties to Western nations. Initially paralyzed by this action, it took many weeks before the Saudi military cleared the mosque. More than 200 troops and dissidents were killed during the conflict, and more than 60 dissidents were later publicly beheaded.

Two weeks later riots in the eastern province erupted. This time the rebellion was led by Shi'a Muslims who had received their inspiration from Ayatollah Khomeini's ascendance to power in Iran. In response, the government dispatched 20,000 troops to the region. Several protesters were killed and arrests reportedly ran in the hundreds. After order was restored, the government rolled out an economic development program aimed at improving the standard of living in Shi'a areas.⁶⁹

In 1991, during the first Gulf War to expel Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait, a group of exiled Saudi dissidents calling themselves Al-Qaeda took the original Wahab ideology and turned it against the ruling family. The exiles denounced them as decadent rulers who

⁶⁵ Hudson Institute. Henderson, Simon. "The Saudi Royal Family: What is Going ON?" No date. <http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Henderson%20--%20Saudi%20Royal%20Family.pdf>

⁶⁶ Although Saudi law calls for beheading drug traffickers, the government has protected a prince indicted in the United States for using his private jet to move two tons of cocaine. ABC News. Ross, Brian and Jill Rackmill. "Secrets of the Saudi Royal Family." 15 October 2004. <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/News/story?id=169246&page=1>

⁶⁷ Institute for Global Engagement. Shelly, Dane. "A Saudi House of Cards." 30 April 2004. <http://www.globalengage.org/media/article.aspx?id=3100>

⁶⁸ Global Security. "Mecca." 27 July 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/mecca.htm>

⁶⁹ PBS Frontline. "Saudi Arabia." 2005.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/etc/cron.html>

had sold the country out to foreign interests. The sinful actions of the princes, in the view of Al-Qaeda adherents, made them targets for holy war. Moreover, it was not just the royal family that Al-Qaeda has targeted. All Muslims who professed allegiance to variants of Islam other than Wahabism were its enemies. In effect, like the 1979 dissidents to whom it has been linked, Al-Qaeda adopted the same mindset and style of discourse as the Saudi regime.⁷⁰

Recent Developments

While there is widespread agreement that Saudi Arabia's political system needs to assume the form of a modern state, there is little agreement within the Kingdom on the model it should evolve toward. The Saudi monarchy straddles a society that includes only a small Western educated elite.⁷¹ The much more influential religious establishment upholds its interpretation as representing the golden age of Islam. The clerics, in short, view any type of arrangement which gives a political voice to non-Wahabis as akin to allowing infidels access to power.



This has played into divisions within the royal family, in particular between Princes Abdullah, who became king in 2005, and Nayef, the Minister of the Interior and chief of domestic intelligence services. The former is considered a friend to the West with a reformist bent.⁷² The latter has at various times encouraged jihad as reflected in his tacit support for Al-Qaeda. In November 2002, for example, he exonerated the Saudi national hijackers of responsibility for the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. In an interview published in Saudi Arabia, he opined that Al-Qaeda could not possibly be responsible for an operation of such logistical magnitude. Instead, it could only have been an Israeli plot intended to arouse intense hostility toward Muslims. Openly expressing such an opinion sent a clear message to Saudi law enforcement authorities that tracking down Al-Qaeda operatives should not be a priority.⁷³

Against this backdrop has been an upsurge in fundamentalist violence. It has been carried out by the global network of hardened Islamists who operate under the name of "Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula" (QAP). Western and, in particular, U.S. interests, have been targeted. In early November 2003, a car bombing attack on a residential compound

⁷⁰ *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. Aslan, Reza. "Chapter Nine: An Awakening in the East [p. 247]." New York: Random House, 2006.

⁷¹ Nahed Taher is a female Saudi national who received a Doctorate in Economics in the UK in 2001. Upon graduation she decided to return to Saudi Arabia to pursue a career in commercial banking rather than accepting a position with the International Monetary Fund. Lancaster University Management School. "Nahed Taher." <http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/alumprofiles/phd/8674/>

⁷² Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Political Developments in Saudi Arabia: A Panel Discussion." 22 November 2005. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=832&&prog=zgp&proj=zdr1,zme>

⁷³ Foreign Affairs. Doran, Michael Scott. "The Saudi Paradox." January/February 2004. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040101faessay83105/michael-scott-doran/the-saudi-paradox.html>

in Riyadh was carried out by men in Saudi security force military uniform.⁷⁴ The casualties included 17 killed and 122 wounded. In the years since, the major cities in Saudi Arabia have seen several such attacks.⁷⁵

Large-scale terrorist operations and locally organized violence against Westerners have undermined the long-standing sense of personal security among foreign residents, prompting an unknown number to take up residence in fortified compounds. Attacking members of the expatriate community is intended to strike at the weak links in the Saudi economic system, where heavy reliance on the expertise of foreign nationals is necessary to pump oil.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, despite highly visible attacks like the Oasis Compound attack in Al-Khobar in June 2004, the militants appear to have suffered setbacks which weakened and marginalized them.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ ZNet. Fisk, Robert. "Taking the Saudi out of Arabia." 12 November 2003.

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=4492>

⁷⁵ For worldwide reaction see, Global Security. "Riyadh Bombing 'Blind Fanaticism' Behind 'Heinous Act' Condemned." 14 November 2003.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/news/2003/11/www31114.htm>

⁷⁶ *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*. Bradley, John R. "Expatriate Life (and Death) [p. 107]." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

⁷⁷ International Crisis Group. "Saudi Arabian Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?" 21 September 2004. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3021>

Saudi Arabia Time Line

570 – The Prophet Muhammed is born in Mecca.

632 – Muhammad dies in 632 in his early 60s without identifying a successor.

680 – Hussein, grandson of Muhammad dies on 10 Muharram of this year, becoming the first Martyr of Shi'a Islam.

1744 – Pact signed between the ancestral head of the Al Saud family and Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab, a religious leader promoting an austere version of Islam.

1891 – The Al-Saud family seeks exile in Kuwait after losing control of their *emirate*.

1902 – Abdulaziz Al Saud returns with loyal retinue from exile in Kuwait, storms fortress in Riyadh and regains control of city.

1928-30 – The Ikhwan (Wahabi Brotherhood) revolt against Abdulaziz after he forms alliance with Britain and declares himself King. Their forces are defeated by Abdulaziz.

1932 – The areas controlled by Abdulaziz are declared a nation-state, henceforth known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1933 – King Abdulaziz's eldest son, Saud, is named Crown Prince.

1938 – Commercial quantities of oil are discovered. The U.S.-controlled ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) begins production under a profit-sharing arrangement with the Saudi government.

1953 – King Abdulaziz dies; he is succeeded by the Crown Prince, Saud. The new King's brother, Faisal, is named Crown Prince.

1960 – Saudi Arabia becomes a founding member of OPEC (Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries).

1964 – King Saud abdicates in favor of his brother, Crown Prince Faisal. Faisal is declared king.

1975 – King Faisal is assassinated by a nephew. He is succeeded by his brother, Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

1980 – Saudi Arabia assumes full ownership of ARAMCO.

1982 – King Khalid dies of a heart attack while en route to Taif mountain palace and is succeeded by his brother, Crown Prince Fahd.

1986 – King Fahd adds a new title, “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,” to his portfolio.

1990 – Saudi Arabia condemns Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and asks for U.S. intervention, allowing Washington to station troops inside the Kingdom.

2003 – Suicide attack carried out by suspected Al-Qaeda militants in Riyadh leaves 17 dead and scores injured.

2003 – King Fahd grants wider powers to Consultative Council (*majlis as-shura*), empowering it to propose legislation without obtaining his permission first.

2005 – Nationwide municipal elections are held for the first time. Voting is open to males only.

2005 – King Fahd dies and is succeeded by Crown Prince Abdullah.

2006 – Saudi government formalizes succession protocol to prevent family infighting.

2007 – Religious police (*mutawwa’een*) are prohibited from detaining suspects owing to recent deaths of those in custody.

Chapter 4 Economy

Introduction

Prior to the discovery of oil, the Arabian Peninsula lacked a regional economy. The territory represented by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was composed of scattered pockets of self-contained commercial activity. Inhabitants of the Hijaz, for example, relied on subsistence agriculture, some on long-distance trade, and some on offering travel-related services to pilgrims on the annual visit to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. By contrast, a plantation economy which produced cash crops such as dates dominated the landscape of the Eastern Province.⁷⁸



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Saudi Aramco headquarters in Dhahran

Today, Saudi Arabia's oil reserves are the largest in the world. The Kingdom is the world's leading oil producer and exporter. Petroleum and petrochemical products account for more than 90% of the country's exports and nearly 75% of government revenues. Proven reserves are estimated to be 263 billion barrels, about one-quarter of known oil reserves in the world. Given its relatively small domestic needs, Saudi Arabia's disproportionate influence over international crude oil markets is unlikely to be challenged in the future by another country.⁷⁹

Resources

Oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in the late 1930s by American geologists after King Abdulaziz granted a concession to Standard Oil giving them the right to explore for oil in the Kingdom's eastern province. The joint enterprise eventually became known as the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco). The company granted a loan of about USD 2.3 million in 2005 prices, all in gold, to the Saudi government in addition to other assorted rental fees and royalty payments.⁸⁰ In exchange, Aramco received exclusive rights to drill, produce and export oil from the eastern part of the country, free of Saudi taxes and duties.⁸¹ Commercial quantities of oil, close to the surface and therefore inexpensive to extract, were discovered in 1938. Large-scale production, however, did not begin until after World War II.

Walt Rostow, presidential advisor to John F. Kennedy, described Aramco as "America's single largest private enterprise."⁸² A profit-sharing agreement was implemented that, over the years, has been modified. In 1950, Saudi Arabia and Aramco settled on a 50-50 profit-sharing arrangement. A subsequent series of agreements between 1973 and 1980

⁷⁸ Library of Congress. "Saudi Arabia: The Economy." <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/34.htm>

⁷⁹ Library of Congress. "Saudi Arabia." <http://www.country-studies.com/saudi-arabia/oil-industry.html>

⁸⁰ *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Frontier*. Vitalis, Robert. Chapter Two. "Arabian Frontiers [p. 32]." Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

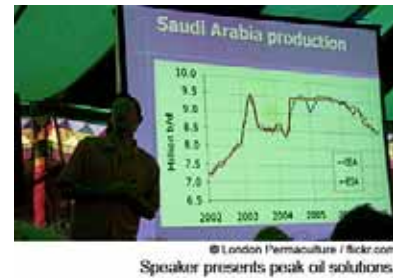
⁸¹ Public Broadcasting Service. "Saudi Time Bomb?" 2005. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/etc/cron.html>

⁸² San Francisco Chronicle. Mason, Ian Garrick. "Review of *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Frontier*." 31 December 2006. <http://www3.sympatico.ca/ian.g.mason/Vitalis.htm>

resulted in the Saudis gaining full control of the company. In 1988, King Fahd issued a royal decree establishing the Saudi Arabian Oil Company, known as Saudi Aramco, to replace Aramco.

Saudi Aramco also exemplified the trend toward the phenomenon known as “Saudization” in which the Kingdom’s government set benchmarks for the number of Saudis to be hired and promoted into management positions. As this occurred, the need for large numbers of expatriate staff was reduced. Yet, in the process, skill gaps in the Saudi workforce became glaringly evident.⁸³ The lack of competent candidates for positions requiring technical expertise, coupled with Saudi disdain for manual labor and menial jobs, has meant the country remains reliant on foreign labor.⁸⁴

Local ownership of Saudi Aramco has made it difficult to assess future pumping prospects. The Saudi government releases no official data on how the Kingdom’s aging fields are holding up, or what new exploration efforts have yielded. Published production data is viewed with skepticism. There is widespread agreement on the part of outside experts that these numbers have been inflated for political reasons related to OPEC production quotas and therefore bear little relation to reality. In sum, for oil industry experts Saudi Arabia’s production capability involves guesswork, not analysis.⁸⁵ Determining when Saudi oil has reached peak production is also highly problematic.⁸⁶



International Organizations

Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The origins of OPEC lie in a response to the United States imposition of import quotas on oil. In 1959, Washington established the Mandatory Oil Import Quota Program (MOIP), restricting the amount of crude oil (and refined products) that could be imported into the United States. Oil imports from Mexico and Canada were given preferential treatment. As a result, the market barrier to the United States depressed the price of oil from Persian Gulf producers. This is reflected by the fact that oil prices paid to the selling nations by the major oil companies fell between February 1959 and August 1960. In response to this market mechanism, four Persian Gulf nations (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) and Venezuela formed OPEC in September 1960. The purpose of coordinating production and pricing policy was to obtain higher prices for crude oil.

⁸³ Naval Postgraduate School, Center for Contemporary Conflict. Looney, Robert. “Saudization and Sound Economic Reforms: Are the Two Compatible?” February 2004.

<http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/feb/looneyFeb04.asp>

⁸⁴ *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Al-Rasheed, Madawi. Chapter Five. “From Affluence to Austerity [p. 152.]” New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁸⁵ Washington Monthly. Drum, Kevin. “Crude Awakening.” June 2005.

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2005/0506.drum.html>

⁸⁶ The Globalist. Simmons, Matthew. “Saudi Arabia –An Oil Bust?” 04 May 2006.

<http://www.theglobalist.com/printStoryId.aspx?StoryId=5275>

The members were spectacularly unsuccessful in the first decade, and the existence of the organization barely caused a ripple in the international community. Over time, however, OPEC proved proven its ability to influence the world's oil market prices. This is something the Saudis are uniquely placed to affect through their immense reserve capacity, which can be tapped or shut off.⁸⁷ In contrast to smaller producers, the Saudis can survive a downturn in price. In fact, the Kingdom has incentives in place that prevent oil prices from spiking too high, thus spurring efforts that would replace fossil fuel with renewable energy. Such a change would render the Saudi's reserves worthless, and plunge the country into economic turmoil.⁸⁸

Trade

Over the period of a year, beginning in 1973, the world price of oil quadrupled. This set in motion the largest and most rapid redistribution of wealth during the 20th century.⁸⁹ Saudi Arabia was the principal beneficiary. Commodity-fueled wealth has enabled the Saudis to import a variety of goods such as food. Saudi Arabia is the largest importer of barley, and a major purchaser of rice, most of which comes from Asia.⁹⁰ Other imports include automobiles and military hardware. In the case of machinery, when repair expertise is lacking, an entire item is simply replaced.

Reliance on sales of a natural resource in the international marketplace has the effect of stifling local manufacturing capability, which can't compete with state-of-the-art goods from abroad. As a result, Saudi Arabia has almost no indigenous industry producing locally made goods, which could be a source of jobs. The country will remain an importer for some time to come.⁹¹

Industry

During the 1980s, the government undertook a program to create a modern industrial sector. The industrialization process had two goals: first, to make use of the Kingdom's enormous gas production as industrial inputs to produce chemicals and petrochemicals for export; second, the construction of energy-intensive industries, some for import-substitution purposes and others to meet infrastructural needs. The government also developed industrial cities and facilities to support its industrial program, including those at Jubail and Yanbu.⁹² In addition to crude oil production and petroleum, the industrial

⁸⁷ Stratfor. "Saudi Arabia: Expanding Surplus, Falling Oil Prices and Riyadh's Sway." 7 November 2008. http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081107_saudi_arabia_expanding_surplus_falling_oil_prices_and_riyadh_sway

⁸⁸ Suite101.com. Workman, Daniel. "Saudi Arabian Exports & Imports." 16 June 2008. http://import-export.suite101.com/article.cfm/saudi_arabian_exports_imports

⁸⁹ *The Price of Wealth: Economics and Institutions in the Middle East*. Chaudry, Karim Aziz. "Chapter One: Oil and Labor Exporters in the International Economy [p. 1]." 1997. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=OjFhOQMek4oC&dq=the+price+of+wealth&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result#PPA1,M1

⁹⁰ Stratfor. "Saudi Arabia: Buying Food Security With Petrodollars." 16 June 2008. http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/saudi_arabia_buying_food_security_petrodollars

⁹¹ W.P. Carey School of Economics and Public Policy, Arizona State University. "The Bear is Back: Rising Oil Prices Raise Russia's Global Influence." 16 July 2008. <http://knowledge.wpcarey.asu.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1642>

⁹² Library of Congress. "Non-Oil Industrial Sector." <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/42.htm>

sector consists of basic petrochemicals, ammonia, industrial gases, sodium hydroxide (caustic soda), cement, fertilizer, and plastics; metals, commercial ship repair, commercial aircraft repair, and construction.⁹³

Transportation

The Ministry of Transport, which regulates surface transport in the Kingdom, oversees 111,770 km (67,062 mi) of paved, mostly four-lane roadways. Work on an extension of the 1,390 km (836 mi) Jubail-Dammam-Riyadh rail line to Jeddah in the west is scheduled to begin in 2008. The Kingdom has eleven maritime ports of which Dammam Port in the East and Jeddah Port on the Red Sea are the largest. SAPTCO, the domestic bus service, operates more than 2,000 air-conditioned motor coaches in a network that connects all major urban centers. The Ministry of Civil Aviation controls air transport in and out of more than 200 airports of which 30 have runways greater than 3,047 m (10,000 ft) in length.⁹⁴ In addition, it regulates the operation of the country's flag carrier, Saudi Arabian Airlines, whose active fleet comprises 206 aircraft. This makes it the largest commercial carrier fleet in the world.⁹⁵



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Saudi Arabian Airlines Boeing 777

Standard of Living

The modernization process, which evolved over the course of several centuries in the West, has been compressed into a few decades in Saudi Arabia. This is evident in the lifestyle of the Kingdom's urban residents. Cities feature brand name American coffee and fast food outlets, for example, and shopping malls replete with designer clothing stores.⁹⁶ Yet, the sexes remain strictly segregated in accordance with Saudi social mores.⁹⁷



© Patrick Metzger
Saudi religion and culture at American restaurant

At the same time, rapid population growth has eroded the standard of living afforded by petro dollars. The capital-intensive petroleum industry creates few jobs for locals. This problem is further exacerbated by the skill mismatch between graduates of an educational system that emphasizes religion and the requirements of professional employment.⁹⁸

⁹³ CIA The World Factbook. "Saudi Arabia." 20 September 2007.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/sa.html>

⁹⁴ SAMEX Saudi Arabian Market Explorer. "Transport." September 2007. <http://saudinf.com/main/g1.htm>

⁹⁵ Airfleets.net. "Saudi Arabia Airfleet." 2007. [http://www.airfleets.net/flottecie/Saudi Arabian Airlines.htm](http://www.airfleets.net/flottecie/Saudi%20Arabian%20Airlines.htm)

⁹⁶ Saint Petersburg Times, A Special Report. Martin, Susan. "Hanging Out at a Mall, Saudi Style." 24 July 2002. <http://www.sptimes.com/2002/webspecials02/saudiarabia/day4/story2.shtml>

⁹⁷ Los Angeles Times. Stack, Megan. "In Saudi Arabia, A View From Behind the Veil." 6 June 2007.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-women6jun06,0,5491632,full.story>

⁹⁸ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Saudi Arabia." February 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm>

Tourism

The tourist industry in Saudi Arabia is primarily geared toward domestic travel. Saudi families vacation along the Red Sea coast, hike in Asir National Park, and enjoy visits to mountain resorts. Although the government officially promotes tourism, it does not offer tourist visas. Non-Muslim visitors are only eligible for business visas which require a sponsor. Muslims can be granted visas to enter Saudi Arabia to perform the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which occurs annually between the eighth and thirteenth days of the last month of the Muslim year. Muslims may also be given a visa to perform *umrah*, sometimes called the small pilgrimage because it can be performed in one hour at any time of the year.

Banking

Two commercial banks are owned entirely by the Saudi government: Riyadh Bank and National Commercial Bank. By law, all foreign banks chartered to operate in the Kingdom must be joint ventures with the Saudi government. This includes: Saudi American Bank (SAMBA), Saudi British Bank, Saudi Hollandi Bank, and the Saudi Fransi Bank. Saudi Arabia's recent bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), however, requires the government to level the playing field so that foreign banks are given equal access to all business opportunities within the Saudi financial sector. This means Saudi banks will face competitive pressure from regional and international banks.⁹⁹

The Saudi government's plans to build an international financial center that will rival financial centers in other parts of the world have met with skepticism. For one reason, the Saudis would find it difficult to compete against nearby Bahrain or Dubai, which are more open to Western influences, and have established a market presence and a tradition of market trust over the past three decades.¹⁰⁰

Money Changers

In Saudi Arabia, money changing is the business of one bank, the Rajhi Bank, chartered to operate walk-in currency conversion centers. Since 9/11, the Saudi government has come under pressure to regulate the alternative, informal *hawala* parallel remittance system. This system allows an expatriate worker from Asia, e.g., India or Bangladesh, to deposit money with an in-country representative, to be collected in the home country by a designated relative.¹⁰¹ Such transfers are difficult to track because the money changers operate through personal networks rather than through a state banking system that would collect a transaction fee.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Arab News. "Saudi Banking: A Time for Mergers?" 21 May 2007.

<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=6§ion=0&article=96468&d=21&m=5&y=2007>

¹⁰⁰ New York Times. Timmons, Heather. "International Business; (sic) Saudis Plan Middle East Financial Center." 10 May 2006.

<http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F10C11F93D5A0C738DDDAC0894DE404482>

¹⁰¹ Interpol. Interpol General Secretariat, Lyon. "The *hawala* alternative remittance system and its role in money laundering." January 2000.

<http://www.interpol.int/Public/FinancialCrime/MoneyLaundering/hawala/default.asp>

¹⁰² Alternative institutional arrangements are a means to reduce transaction costs. G-24 Technical Meeting. Kapur, Devesh. "Remittances: The New Development Mantra? [p. 1]." 25 August 2003.

<http://www.g24.org/dkapugva.pdf>

Chapter 5: Society

Ethnicity

Saudi Arabians, as Muslims, are members of a world community (*ummah*) in which issues of race, ethnicity, and national origin pale by comparison and do not offer the basis for social action, political behavior, and economic organization. Their collective identity as Muslims transcends all sub-ethnic distinctions.

Socially, however, the concept of origin (*asl*) has resonance among many Saudi Arabians. Some Saudis, mainly those who inhabit parts of the Hijaz region, identify themselves on the basis of tribal belonging as descendants of Muhammad (*Ashraf*). Others claim patrilineal descent from ancient tribes who inhabited the present-day Kingdom. Still others emphasize their indigenous Arabian origins, but without reference to a particular tribal ancestry. In short, considerations of origin can reflect social stratification patterns and influence social interaction, including the selection of marriage partners. In some cases, tribal origin translates directly into economic or power differentials within society since, in practice, not all tribes are equal.¹⁰³

Religion

Most Saudis adhere to the Sunni faith. However, the Eastern Province is home to a Shi'a minority. The schism between the two branches dates back since the beginnings of Islam when, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, a dispute arose concerning leadership succession. The Sunnis decided the most exemplary in faith and leadership among them would succeed Muhammad. He was known as the Caliph. The Shi'a, however, rejected this method of selection. Instead they believed that the Prophet had a spiritual charisma that was passed down the bloodline through the male descendents of his daughter, Fatima, and her husband, Ali. They looked to the Holy Imams, Muhammad's progeny, as the true leaders of Islam. Historically, the Shi'a have a long history of religious prosecution. Their saints were killed, and most important among them was the Prophet's grandson, Hussein, at Karbala. The brutal circumstances of his murder guaranteed him martyrdom which is akin to the crucifixion of Christ.¹⁰⁴

Traditional Dress

Regardless of profession or social status, all Saudi men wear a traditional dress shirt, *thobe*, suitable for a desert climate. There is a lightweight summer version made of cotton and a darker, heavier, winter one made of wool. On formal occasions men may wear a *bisht*, or *mishlah*, on top. These are white, brown, or black floor-length over-cloaks with a gold trim.¹⁰⁵ The male headdress is comprised of three parts: the *taiga*, a small white



© Curtis Palmer
Meeting with Prince Nawaf Faisal Fahd Abdulaziz

¹⁰³ Every Culture. "Culture of Saudi Arabia." 2007. <http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Saudi-Arabia.html>

¹⁰⁴ Religion and Ethics Newsweekly. Abernathy, Bob, and Lucky Severson, Dr. Vali Nasr. "Shia/Sunni Conflict." 29 September 2006. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1005/cover.html>

¹⁰⁵ Expatsinsaudiarabia.com. "What to wear in Saudi Arabia." 2001. <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~chern/saudi/clothes.html>

disadvantage in qualifying for skilled positions, forcing the government to continue to rely on expatriate expertise.

Status of Women

In Saudi Arabia, discrimination against women has been codified into law. Periodically, efforts to seek redress make international headlines. For example in 1990, 45 women violated the prohibition on women driving when they defiantly drove their cars into central Riyadh. There is speculation that they were emboldened by the presence of half a million U.S. troops and hundreds of reporters covering the story of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This unprecedented number of foreigners may have led the protesters to believe the government would be more likely to lift the ban.¹¹² It did not. Women may own cars, and can now buy them from all-female auto dealerships. Yet women in the Kingdom remain barred from driving.¹¹³



The status of women has figured into larger debates such as the appropriate role of foreign labor in the Saudi work force. In the 1980s, when the price of oil dropped, the prospect of women accepting paid employment outside the home meant Saudi Arabia could reduce its reliance on foreign labor. During this period, women did take jobs in female-owned shops, bank branches which served female clients, and beauty salons. This had little impact on the need for foreign labor, however, which is overwhelmingly concentrated in positions requiring educational expertise and menial service jobs.

Though it is difficult to confirm whether the law is followed, female genital mutilation has been forbidden by the government of Saudi Arabia.¹¹⁴

Arts

Saudis take seriously the Quran's injunction on accurate artistic depictions of human and animal likeness.¹¹⁵ There is very little painting and no sculpture. Still photography and video film are generally acceptable, but there is no indigenous film industry and there are no cinemas. Folk music is popular and there are several popular recording artists like Muhammad Abdu, Talal Madah, Abadi al-Johor, and Khalid Abdel Rahman whose recordings are well-known throughout the Arab world.¹¹⁶ Music, however, forms no part of Islamic religious services. Poetry writing and recitation, story telling, or chanting are yet other popular art forms. Bedouin chanting is accompanied by a *rebaba* or a one-

¹¹² *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Al-Rasheed, Madawi. "Chapter Six: The Gulf War and Its Aftermath, 1990-2000 [p. 163]." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹¹³ ABC News. Abu-Nasr, Donna. "Saudi Women Can Sell – Not – Drive Cars." 3 December 2006. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=2697181>

¹¹⁴ Middle Eastern Quarterly. von der Osten-Sacken, Thomas and Thomas Unwer. "Is Female Genital Mutilation an Islamic Problem?" Winter 2007. <http://www.meforum.org/article/1629>

¹¹⁵ This is reflected in the do and don't walk icons on traffic lights. Humans are rendered in block form. Personal interview with Miles Witt.

¹¹⁶ Where@Lebanon.com. "Entertainment. Music. Gulf Artists." c.1995–2003. <http://www.lebanon.com/where/entertainment/gulfartist.htm>

stringed instrument and by drums. Yet musical festivities occur. Female musician groups, comprised of itinerant women of Yemeni and African background, perform at female-only festivals.¹¹⁷ Graphic artists in Saudi Arabia use their skills to create architecture, textiles, and jewelry, as well as, decorative calligraphy and engravings.¹¹⁸

Dance

The national dance of Saudi Arabia is the men's sword dance, *ardha*. Performances include singing swordsmen, and a poet or narrator. The storyline evolves as men, carrying swords, line up shoulder-to-shoulder while a poet, who is standing within the group, begins to chant a tale with drummer accompaniment.



© E.M. and E.M. / flickr.com
Dancers at Janadriya festival in Riyadh

Calligraphy

Arabic calligraphy dates back some 1,400 years to the very beginnings of Islam. Characterized as the quintessential Islamic art form, particularly in light of the absence of most other forms of graphic art, calligraphy is revered by Saudi Arabians. Museums collect and mount rare manuscripts for exhibitions.¹¹⁹ Initially, the emphasis of calligraphy was on illustrating the Quran. Over time, calligraphers adorned metal work, ceramics, glass, and textiles. Elegantly rendered inscriptions can be found on the interior walls of mosques, as well as, in public office buildings and private homes.

Folktales

Bedouin folklore relates a tale of a tribe that found new pasture by releasing a crow, a partridge, and a dove to scout for available land. The three birds flew off together, but the crow returned quickly. He reported that as far as he could fly, he found only desert with not a blade of grass in sight. When the other two birds returned, they gave the nomadic herders the opposite story. They had found fields with lush grass and plenty of water. Not knowing which of the two reports was correct; the tribe moved their herd to the place the partridge and dove had described. There they discovered the conditions were exactly as the birds had reported. As a punishment, the crow was painted black for lying. The partridge and the dove, by contrast, were rewarded. The dove's feet were painted with festive red *henna*, while the eyes of the partridge were lined with *kohl*.¹²⁰ This, according to the folklore, explains their distinct physical features.

¹¹⁷ Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Urkevich, Lisa. "Women's Days at the Saudi Janadriya Festival with Musical Musings." 31 October 2006.

<http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/ecmes/feature/janadriya>

¹¹⁸ Citizen and Immigration Canada. "Cultural Profiles Project: Saudi Arabia." No date. <http://www.cpc.ca/english/abaria/arts.html>

¹¹⁹ Saudi ArabianGenWeb. "Culture of Saudi Arabia." 8 November 2001.

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~sauwggw/Culture.htm>

¹²⁰ Suite101. Hasan, Aida. "Arabic Folktales and Story Telling." 8 October 1999.

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/abab_culture_and_identity/26784/2

Recreation

In addition to sports such as soccer, which is played around the world, Saudi Arabia has several indigenous sporting traditions involving animals—in particular, camel and horse racing.

Horses and camels preceded the motor vehicle as means of transportation across the desert terrain. Nomads relied on them for transport when there was no other method of crossing the sand. In fact, a person's life could literally depend on the stamina and speed of his animal. Naturally, owners of superior animals were very proud of them and out of this developed the need to discern who owned the best one. Racing camels and horses is a means of determining that.¹²¹

Camel Racing

The Bedouin have turned camel racing into a particularly complex rite. Large numbers of camels compete across vast stretches of desert. Spectators, often riding in four-wheel-drive vehicles, cheer on the camels as they approach the finish line in what is a test of endurance. The winner's owner receives a cash prize and the sought-after status of camel trainer. Before a race, the camels are placed in pens where they are sorted by age and gender. Owners and trainers will have exercised the camels every day for weeks before a race to ensure they are in top condition. Racing camels are fed a special rich diet to build up their muscle. In the days prior to the race, however, they are given little food, because it is believed that they will perform better on an empty stomach. The practice of using underage boys, kidnapped from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, as jockeys has brought camel races in Gulf countries into some disrepute. International human rights agencies have documented human trafficking of boys as young as three years of age who are routinely kept in private jails in Saudi Arabia and used for camel racing.¹²²

The annual King's Camel Race in the Riyadh suburb of Janandriyah, initiated in 1974, has become one of the world's largest events of this kind. More than 2,000 camels and their riders compete in the event. There are between 20,000 and 30,000 spectators in attendance.¹²³ Camel owner rivalry is intense and the competition can draw camels from other Gulf countries. In the winter months, camel races are regularly held at the King Fahd International Stadium. No betting is allowed because it is prohibited by Islam.

Falconry

Falconry (*qans*) is another sport with a long history. Saudi Arabia falls into the falcon's winter migratory path. They were caught and trained to hunt as a way to supplement the meager diet of the desert dwelling nomads. Traditionally, they were released at the end of the season because little hunting goes on during the long summer. Training a falcon is a labor intensive endeavor. First the falcon, which is always referred to as a female, must

¹²¹ Explore Saudi Arabia. "Sports: Traditional and Modern." No date.

<http://www.exploresaudiArabia.com/factfile/sports.htm>

¹²² Ansar Burney Welfare Trust. An International Human and Civil Rights Organization. Prisoners Aid Society-Bureau of Missing and Kidnapped Persons. 2004. <http://www.ansarburney.com/news1.htm>

¹²³ A Virtual Tour of Saudi Arabia. "The Riyadh Camel Races." No date.

<http://www.toursaudiArabia.com/races.html>

be tamed. To accomplish this, the falconer keeps the bird with him at all times for approximately two or three weeks.



Falconer at a festival in Riyadh

The falconer's training equipment is referred to as furniture. It consists of jesses (*subuq*) which are attached to the bird's ankles, a perch (*wakir*) on which the falcon sits, and a hood (*burqa*) which is placed over her eyes when she is not being trained to keep her calm. To train the falcon, the falconer swings a lure (*tilwah*), consisting of a bundle of feathers, which the bird is trained to fly to. Each time the falcon lands on it she is rewarded with a piece of meat. The falcon quickly learns to return to the lure each time she is released. The falconer wears a glove (*dass*) over his wrist to prevent the bird's sharp claws from hurting him. Falcons can fetch up to USD 100,000 making it a rich man's hobby. The sport is a tradition that is deeply embedded in Saudi culture. "How a man handles the falcon tells us much of his passion and character," says a falcon master.¹²⁴

Horse Racing

The Arabian horse is closely associated with this region. It has been bred to cope with the inhospitable, desert environment. In addition to equestrian jumping, endurance racing is an activity which brings international competitors to the Kingdom. Conducted on a carefully monitored course up to 80 km (50 mi) in length, the endurance race can take as long as 10 hours to complete.

¹²⁴ International Herald Tribune. Copetas, Craig. "In Saudi Arabia, ancient and modern converge." 12 June 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/06/12/africa/letter.php>

Chapter 6 National Security

The Cold War History of U.S.–Saudi Arabian Relations

Although the U.S. and Saudi societies are structurally very different, strategic U.S. interests over the past four decades have dictated close bilateral relations regardless of which party was in power in Washington, DC. During the Cold War, when the enemy was perceived to be a godless ideology, Islamic governments such as that of Saudi Arabia played an obvious role in forming a front against the southward expansion of communism.¹²⁵ Indeed, King Abdulaziz was steadfast in his insistence that “he would never abandon his people to communism.”¹²⁶ His religion, as well as, his rule of a country containing Islam’s two holiest mosques, dictated a strong anti-Soviet stance and made the Kingdom a natural ally of the United States.¹²⁷

During the Truman administration (1945–1953), the United States and Saudi Arabia concluded a series of military agreements which provided for U.S. training of Saudi forces. This training program continues in a slightly altered form to this day. In return, Saudi Arabia provided access to a military airstrip and staging area on the Kingdom’s eastern shores. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the airfield was a critical link in the emerging ring of American strategic air commands built to contain the Soviet Union. The agreements of the day also provided a defensive shield protecting Saudi Arabia’s nearby oil fields from adventurism on the part of any third party.



The Palestinian issue has been a consistent source of disagreement between Washington, DC and Riyadh. From 1948 on, King Abdulaziz and his successors had to operate with the knowledge that both Saudi Arabia and Israel shared the same big power backer. The monarchy’s detractors, both inside and outside the Kingdom, made propaganda use of the fact. In 1948, the U.S. legation in Jeddah observed that the King was “under heavy attack in the Arab world for what is regarded already as his excessive leniency toward U.S. interests, in view of what is regarded as our hostility to [the] Arab world by our Palestine policy.”¹²⁸ Whenever the opportunity presented itself, the King attempted to present his regional critics with evidence that there was some distance between his government and Washington, DC. While the issue has remained a persistent irritant at the bilateral level, it was never allowed to come between the two governments.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. Abukhalil, As’Ad. Chapter One: “The Paradoxes of Saudi Arabia [p. 29].” 2004. New York: Seven Stories Press.

¹²⁶ *Thicker than Oil: America’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Bronson, Rachel. Chapter One: “Oil, God and Real Estate [p. 26].” 2006. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹²⁷ Library of Congress. “Relations with the United States.” 1992. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/59.htm>

¹²⁸ *Thicker than Oil: America’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Bronson, Rachel. Chapter Two: “Dropping Anchor in the Middle East [p. 47].” 2006. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹²⁹ For Truman’s response, see University of California at Santa Barbara, The American Presidency Project. “Harry S. Truman: Message to the King of Saudi Arabia Concerning Palestine.” 28 October 1946. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12536>

By 1953, when Truman left office, the tracks on which future U.S.–Saudi relations would run had been laid. Eight years earlier, in early 1945, President Roosevelt on his return trip from Yalta met King Abdulaziz. In a shipboard meeting near the Suez Canal, Roosevelt and the King set a positive tone for future relations. In 1943, Roosevelt already had proclaimed that the Kingdom’s defense was a vital American interest and dispatched the first U.S. military mission to Saudi Arabia. He also approved a lend-lease program which provided much needed financial assistance to the cash-strapped Saudi government. Under Truman, the bilateral relationship was institutionally deepened to include military training programs and access to the Dhahran airfield in the Eastern Province.

The Kennedy administration came to office with an agenda that emphasized supporting the modernization of post-colonial states such as India, Indonesia, and Egypt that were also members of the Non-Aligned Movement.¹³⁰ By the end of Kennedy’s tenure in office, however, his administration found itself unexpectedly backing Saudi Arabia in its war against Yemen and its major supporter, President Nasser of Egypt.

Subsequent administrations were constrained from making radical departures from the historical Saudi partnership due to the U.S. dependence on Saudi oil exports.

Border Disputes

The territorial disputes in which the Kingdom has been involved over the years emerge from the largely undefined Arabian borders of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, and the British Trucial coast states of the lower Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for example, reached a border agreement in 1965 that involved an exchange of small areas of territory. This exchange gave Jordan sovereignty over the territory which surrounded its sole port, Al-Aqaba. Reaching agreement on the border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, on the other hand, assumed importance only after oil was discovered in the area in the early 1990s. Saudi Arabia raised objections to commercial exploration by multinational companies which had negotiated contracts with Yemen. In 2000, the Treaty of Jeddah which fixed the frontier between the two states, settled that dispute. The border now runs west to east along a line just south of the city of Najran.



There had been earlier border treaties that held for several generations. In 1922, King Abdulaziz-Al Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, and British officials, acting on behalf of their interests in Iraq, signed the Treaty of Mohammara. This treaty settled the boundary between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The Al Uqair Convention, signed later that same year, drew up a diamond-shaped Iraq–Saudi Arabia Neutral Zone of approximately 7,000 sq km (2,702 sq mi), abutting the western part of Kuwait. The two signatories agreed neither would build permanent dwellings nor installations in order to protect the

¹³⁰ This is covered by Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era (New Cold War History)*. 2000. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

water use rights of Bedouin nomads who were residents of both countries. In May 1938, Iraq and Saudi Arabia signed a supplementary agreement specifying the administration of the zone. The final agreement was signed in 1981, when Saudi Arabia and Iraq agreed on a formal border. This provided for the dissolution of the neutral buffer zone. It is the border that now exists between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The boundary between Saudi Arabia and the British protectorate of Kuwait was initially addressed in the Al Uqair Convention in 1922. In an effort to avoid territorial disputes, another diamond-shaped buffer zone of 5,790 sq km (2,235 sq mi) directly south of Kuwait was established. In 1938, oil was discovered in the Burqan area of the British protectorate of Kuwait. Both governments negotiated with foreign oil companies to perform exploration work in the undefined border zone. After years of extended discussions and subsequent to the independence of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait concluded an agreement in 1965 which divided the zone in two. Since then each country has administered its own half.

Saudi Arabia and Oman concluded a border agreement in 1990 which made provision for shared grazing rights and water usage. Agreement on a common border, south of the Al Buraymi Oasis, located near the frontier intersection of Oman, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia, was only achieved after protracted negotiation between the three governments. A 1975 bilateral agreement awarded Abu Dhabi jurisdiction over half a dozen settlements in the Al Buraymi Oasis, as well as, joint ownership of the rich Zararah oil field.¹³¹

The Saudi Armed Forces

Under the authority of the King, the Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA) exercises authority over four of the five branches of service: Royal Saudi Land Forces (Army), the Royal Saudi Naval Forces, the Royal Saudi Air Force, and the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces.



Similar to the organization of staff sections in American military commands, the Saudi military has four major staff sections: personnel (G-1), intelligence (G-2), operations and training (G-3), and logistics (G-4). The four section chiefs of each service are the principal advisers to the chief of staff, who is a former army officer. Saudi armed forces personnel are divided into nine area commands corresponding to geographic administrative districts. Their mission is to defend national sovereignty and to protect the country against outside encroachments or foreign invasion. During incidents of internal rebellion, the armed forces provide assistance in restoring public order.

The fifth service is the National Guard or *harras al-watani* (guardian of the homeland) which has a command structure entirely separate from that of the Saudi armed forces. It is tasked with maintaining internal security, including the protection of the Kingdom's oil fields in the Eastern Province. It is also expected to assist the regular armed forces in

¹³¹ Library of Congress, Federal Research Division. "Country Studies: Saudi Arabia." No date. http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/saudi-arabia/all.html

defending the Kingdom's borders when necessary. This did occur during the first Persian Gulf War (1991) after Saddam Hussein ordered an invasion of Kuwait.¹³² The current King, Abdullah, was commander of the National Guard for several decades. This is a typical length of service for commander positions which are invariably filled by members of the royal family.¹³³ However, having an armed force under a separate chain of command offers its commander the means of staging a coup.

Weapons Procurement

MODA is responsible for weapons procurement and the operation of the national airline, Saudi Arabian Airlines. MODA handles some of the largest purchases made by the Kingdom.¹³⁴ A commission structure on weapons or aircraft purchases has enabled members of the royal family to benefit and create patronage networks. Saudi Arabia is Britain's largest buyer of weapons.



Although the United States does not have a formal defense treaty with Saudi Arabia, the informal bilateral security relationship between the two countries is extensive. The Kingdom continues to be a major customer for American manufactured weapons systems as well as training, including some that are stateside, and maintenance contracts. The Saudi's U.S. purchases, which some claim are more than they are able to utilize, have enabled them to acquire the equipment necessary to deter hostile action from neighboring states short of nuclear capability. They have also ensured a high degree of standardization with U.S. forces which allows Saudi Arabia to be a coalition partner in the Gulf.¹³⁵

The Prospects for Political Reform

Dissidents are found at both ends of the political spectrum. Among the so-called new Islamists are those who have witnessed liberalization in other parts of the world, including the Kingdom's Arab Gulf neighbors, with envy. With the goal of political reform, they have sought to assemble the broadest possible coalition. One rallying point is that the opportunity for ordinary Saudi citizens to accumulate wealth is contingent upon enjoying a personal relationship with the royal family.¹³⁶ In extending the coalition across religious and educational achievement levels, it also encompasses Shi'ites whose principal complaint is that they face institutionalized discrimination.¹³⁷

¹³² Global Security. "Minister of Defense and Aviation MOFA." 1992.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/rsmoda.htm>

¹³³ Promotion and retention of senior officers is based more on loyalty than performance.

¹³⁴ Economist. "Saudi Arabia: Will a row over a British arms deal affect Saudi politics?" 11 June 2007.

http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=9323168

¹³⁵ *Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century: The Military and International Security Dimensions*. Cordesman, Anthony. Chapter Two: "Saudi Military Leadership, Organization and Manpower [p. 47]." 2003. New York: Praeger Publishers. <http://books.google.com/books?id=-8JV06Rx8C&pg=PA115&lpg=PA115&dq=saudi+arabia+weapons+purchases&source=web&ots=b1Jgi4zDtf&sig=67zldrUEgHqbLP6y62wyUZwE1Nk#PPA115,M1>

¹³⁶ HEC Montreal. Lam, Ricky and Leonard Wantchekon. "Political Dutch Disease [p. 6]." 10 April 2003.

http://neumann.hec.ca/neudc2004/fp/wantchekon_leonard_avril_16.pdf

¹³⁷ The Wahabi clerical establishment has done its best to torpedo such an alliance. This is reflected in the postings on religious sites that repeat three accusations: the Shi'ites are mere puppets of Iran; they are allies

More recently, the new Islamists enlisted elements of the more conservative, but highly popular *sahwa*, or rebirth movement. This group of religious leaders, professors, and students came to prominence a decade earlier by denouncing the government's failure to conform to Islamic values, widespread corruption, and subservience to the United States. They petitioned the government for political and social liberalization, but could offer no roadmap for reform.¹³⁸ Yet, their ability to build a diverse coalition prompted the government, whose initial response had been conciliatory, to arrest key members. This underscored the narrow parameters of its tolerance toward unofficial social movements.



On the other hand, declarations of *jihad* against the Saudi dynastic government have sometimes been supported by rogue clerics. In 2003, three prominent reactionary religious figures who had previously issued *fatwa* (religious judgments) sanctioning armed rebellion against the Saudi government, publicly recanted their stance and issued a condemnation of violence in the Kingdom. This was a case of the religious establishment reining in its own.¹³⁹

An alternative point of view to explain the nature of dissent in Saudi Arabia is drawn from *rentier* state theory. This refers to a government that does not tax its citizens, instead relying on revenues from natural resource extraction. Owing to this, citizens who pay no taxes cannot express their opposition to official policies through means such as mobilizing trade unions or groups of workers to disrupt production. Since the government's source of revenue is independent of taxation, opposition takes the form of challenging the theological basis for rule.¹⁴⁰

Law Enforcement

The ubiquitous “religious police” (*mutawwa'in*), known formally as the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, are an intimidating street presence. It is their responsibility to ensure residents and foreign visitors to adhere to proper dress code, observe public segregation by gender regulations at all times, and that businesses close during prayer times.¹⁴¹ They have the authority to make arrests which can include abusive interrogation practices.

of the U.S.; and they are closely associated with Jews. Foreign Affairs. Doran, Michael Scott. “The Saudi Paradox.” January/February 2004. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040101faessay83105/michael-scott-doran/the-saudi-paradox.html>

¹³⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “Political Developments in Saudi Arabia: A Panel Discussion.” 22 November 2005. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=832&&prog=zgp&proj=zdr1,zme>

¹³⁹ Naval Postgraduate School, Center for Contemporary Conflict. Gause, Gregory. “Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads? Notes from a Recent Visit.” February 2004. <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/feb/gauseFeb04.asp>

¹⁴⁰ Saudi Debate.com. Craze, Joshua. “Saudi Arabia: a state for ‘rent’?” 13 May 2006. http://www.saudi Debate.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=87&Itemid=127

¹⁴¹ Los Angeles Times. Stack, Megan. “In Saudi Arabia, a view from behind the veil.” 6 June 2007. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/la-fg-women6jun06,1,1868599.story>

The Director of General Investigations (*al-mubahith al-'amma*), which falls under the Ministry of the Interior, monitors those suspected of dissident activity, an activity it has the power to define. It is empowered to make arrests, hold suspects indefinitely and incommunicado, and use harsh methods to extract information.¹⁴²

Terrorist Groups

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States changed in 1990 after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the Kingdom acceded to the request of the United States to deploy American troops there. This decision focused unwanted attention onto the bilateral relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia in the Arab world. One of the avowed reasons for Al Qaeda's terrorist agenda was the stationing of American troops in the holiest part of the Muslim world.¹⁴³



Recent terrorist incidents including attacks on expatriate housing complexes have been motivated by groups that claim the Saudi royal family has not lived up to its reputation as keepers of the Wahabi flame. With close to 75% of the Saudi population below the age of 30 and an unemployment rate for young males as high as 30%, there's a ready pool of disaffected youth; fertile ground where dissident ideas and extremist ideologies may easily grow.¹⁴⁴

What's Ahead

The events of 11 September 2001 caused a strain in the bilateral relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁵ The discovery that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals led to a renewed focus on the nature of the society and political system which nurtured these individuals.¹⁴⁶ Since then Washington, DC has pushed Riyadh to address issues related to Islamic extremism. Toward this end, the Kingdom has announced and, in some cases, undertaken various types of domestic reforms spurred in part by the May 2003 Riyadh bombings in which westerners were killed.¹⁴⁷ Within Saudi Arabia,

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch. "Human Rights in Saudi Arabia: A Deafening Silence." December 2001. <http://www.hrw.org/backgroundner/mena/saudi/>

¹⁴³ US Institute of Peace. McMillan, Joseph. "Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry." January 2006. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr157.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Christina Science Monitor. Moss, Dana and Zvika Krieger. "A Tipping Point in Saudi Arabia." 15 August 2007. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0815/p09s02-coop.html>

¹⁴⁵ Yale Herald. Heldman, Heather and Daniel Gottlieb. "To win U.S. security, invest in Saudi education." 20 April 2007. <http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article=5547>

¹⁴⁶ Foreign Affairs. Telhami, Shibley and Fiona Hill. "Does Saudi Arabia Still Matter? Differing Perspectives on the Kingdom and Its Oil." November/December 2002. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20021101faresponse10002/shibley-telhami-fiona-hill/does-saudi-arabia-still-matter-differing-perspectives-on-the-kingdom-and-its-oil.html>

¹⁴⁷ Middle Eastern Quarterly. "Does Saudi Arabia Fund Terrorism?" March 2006. <http://www.meforum.org/article/934>

however, the perception is that the government is subservient to the United States.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the government cannot afford to alienate the religious establishment upon which its legitimacy depends.

The Saudi government restricted the use of American bases inside its borders during the U.S.-led regime-change efforts in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). By September 2003, all U.S. combat forces had been withdrawn from the Kingdom.¹⁴⁹ The toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq has complicated the U.S. bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia. The 2005 Iraqi elections, which ushered in some measure of democratic governance, enabled the Iraqi Shi'a-majority to gain power. Iraqi Sunni Muslims, the Saudis' religious brethren, by contrast, lost the privileged position they had enjoyed under Saddam and became an embittered minority.

The Saudis, concerned about a close relationship between Baghdad and Tehran, as well as, the prospect of their own Shi'a minority demanding changes in its second-class status, have provided assistance to the Sunni resistance.¹⁵⁰ About half of all expatriate insurgents in Iraq are citizens of Saudi Arabia.¹⁵¹ This has created an awkward situation in which U.S. forces find themselves engaging an enemy whose best source of foreign national fighters is a key U.S. ally.¹⁵²

Debate surrounds the question of whether Saudi Arabia will be able to serve as a counterweight to its arch nemesis, Iran.¹⁵³ One demographic advantage is in the Kingdom's favor. It is the fact that Saudis are Sunni Arabs, whereas the Iranians are proud Shi'a Persians. This limits their ability to influence events in the Arab world. Still, the Kingdom's leaders remain alarmed by the prospect of a Shi'a crescent of influence stretching from Tehran through Baghdad, and Damascus to Lebanon.

¹⁴⁸ International Crisis Group. "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself: Executive Summary and Recommendations." 14 July 2004. <http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/cansaudiarabiareform.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ Washington Post. "Country Guides: Saudi Arabia." <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/countries/saudi-arabia.html>

¹⁵⁰ University of California, Davis, International Affairs Journal. Yang, Mai. "Saudi Arabia and Stability in Iraq." 30 May 2007. <http://davisiaj.com/content/view/403/81/>

¹⁵¹ Iraq Update. "Majority of insurgents/U.S. prisoners in Iraq are Saudis." 16 July 2007. <http://iraqupdate.wordpress.com/2007/07/16/majority-of-insurgentsus-prisoners-in-iraq-are-saudis/>

¹⁵² Los Angeles Times. Parker, Ned. "Saudis' Role in Iraqi Insurgency Outlined." 15 July 2007. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-saudi15jul15,0,3132262.story?page=1&coll=la-home-center>

¹⁵³ The Atlantic. "Poll: Saudi Arabia's Rise?" July 2007. <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200707/saudi-poll>