



ARAB UPRISINGS

# The Saudi Counter-Revolution

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POMEPS BRIEFINGS **5**



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Late at night on Sunday, August 7, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia delivered an unusual televised rebuke to Syria's Bashar al-Asad calling on him to "stop the killing machine" and immediately begin reforms. The Saudi move against Damascus was only the latest twist in Riyadh's newly energetic foreign policy. Since March, Saudi Arabia has been in the forefront of a regional counter-offensive designed to blunt the momentum of the Arab uprisings and shape the new regional order to its liking. After a decade of a regional order defined by an alliance of "moderate" autocracies aligned with the United States and Israel against a "Resistance" axis, the Saudis have responded to an age of revolution by leading what many now call a regional counter-revolution. This has placed them at odds with the Obama administration in key theaters, disrupted long-standing alliances, and brought Riyadh to the forefront of regional diplomacy.

There were good reasons to believe that Saudi Arabia might itself be caught up in the regional storm. It has a large population of frustrated youth, high rates of unemployment or underemployment, and considerable pent-up resentment. Its religious establishment maintains rigid control over the public sphere, even as the population is thoroughly saturated by alternative messages through satellite television and the Internet. An aging and divided leadership holds out the possibility for dangerous succession struggles. It has a serious sectarian Sunni-Shi'a divide. And it has a tradition of demands for political reform from both Islamist and liberal (in a Saudi context) challengers. Nevertheless, the much-hyped #mar11 hashtagged revolution aimed at Riyadh fizzled. The Saudi regime moved quickly to shored up its home front. There King Abdullah combined ruthless repression of potential challengers with a package of sweeping subsidies and targeted financial inducements. While these might bust the budget in the long term, they succeeded for the time being in placating key sectors of potential dissent.

With the home front secure, Riyadh made Bahrain the first great battlefield of the counter-revolution. Saudi Arabia drew a line against the spread of democracy protests into the Gulf. It torpedoed an attempted political bargain between moderates in the al-Khalifa regime and the organized opposition in favor of a draconian, scorched field assault on all independent political life. On March 14, Saudi tanks rolled in to enforce the hard-line policy, at the invitation of the Bahraini monarchy, and pushed a sectarian Shi'a and Iranian face on the Bahraini democracy movement. The sharply sectarian turn, as the Sunni dynasty painted a Shi'a and Iranian face on their domestic opponents, marked the first point in the Arab uprisings when the "Cold War" of the 2000s fully imposed itself upon its successor. It would have been a delicious historical irony had the Saudi dispatch of troops to Bahrain followed the path of the Iraqi attempt to do the same in Jordan in 1958. During the original Arab cold war, Baghdad played Riyadh's part as the heart of the counter-revolution, and its effort to send troops to shore up a conservative ally ended with a bloody military coup. The Saudis were taking no such chances this time.

Saudi Arabia also sought to bolster friendly monarchies outside the Gulf against domestic challengers. It mended ties with Qatar and pushed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

forward as the premiere regional security organization. It offered significant financial assistance to Jordan and Morocco, and even tendered a somewhat baffling bid to allow the two entry into the GCC. Both monarchies offered limited reforms in an attempt to placate the moderate wings of their opposition movements. They also sought to rebuild ties with the military regime ruling Egypt. Initially furious with the loss of Mubarak — which in their view the Obama administration discarded “like a used kleenex” — they nevertheless moved quickly to cement their relationship with Egypt’s SCAF by promising significant financial assistance. It is also widely believed that they poured financial, political and media support into friendly political movements in Egypt and around the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood, salafi trends, and conservative business interests.

While many in the region now see counter-revolution anywhere, in fact this trope likely gives far too much credit to the Saudis, the SCAF, and the rest of the alleged conspiracy. They are certainly trying to shape regional politics to their liking, but the results have not been particularly impressive. The Saudi effort to broker a transition plan in Yemen has gone nowhere. The near collapse of the Yemeni state left politics gridlocked, with not even the dire wounding of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in a mysterious attack and his flight to a Saudi hospital breaking the stalemate. Its early enthusiasm for intervention in Libya, fueled in no small part by long-festering resentment over Moammar Qaddafi’s reported attempt to assassinate King Abdullah, faded. The regime long seemed baffled by the unrest in Syria, unable to decide how to respond to the turbulence. It remains to be seen whether it can sustain the level of energetic diplomacy of the last few months as a succession crisis looms and regional challenges mount. And even if it does, little in its diplomatic record over decades suggests that its approach of throwing money at problems will work.

Saudi Arabia’s alliance with the United States has thus been sorely tested by the Arab uprisings. Where the Obama administration sought to place itself on the side of history, supporting popular aspirations against autocracy, its most important Arab ally chose instead to double down on autocracy. The U.S. recognized the damage done to its policies by the crackdown in Bahrain, but declined to openly challenge the Saudi initiative. Washington and Riyadh still agree on the challenge posed by Iran, but increasingly diverge not only on the traditional Arab-Israeli front but also on the response to the Arab uprisings. This POMEPS briefing offers perspective on Saudi Arabia’s current position and suggestions as to where it might be headed.

*Marc Lynch, Director of POMEPS*

## High Anxiety

### Saudi Arabia's nervous leaders might not have a creative way to quell dissent, but at least they're consistent.

*By Toby C. Jones, March 23, 2011*

Saudi Arabia's ruling elders are anxious. Recent decisions in Riyadh, including dispatching a Saudi military contingent to help violently smash the pro-democracy protests in Bahrain, suggest that the kingdom's elites are more than a little unsettled by the unraveling of the old order in the Middle East.

They seem equally troubled by the prospect of political unrest at home. So far, the kingdom has weathered the storm that has blown across the region. But it is clear that the ruling Al Saud are not entirely comfortable, even though many observers in the West keep uttering assurances that their regime is stable and mostly invulnerable to serious shocks. In reality, Riyadh is struggling to find ways to fend off the possibility of popular dissent — while strengthening reactionary forces at home and exacerbating tensions in the region in the process.

Worried that opposition protests might materialize on March 11, the regime ordered security forces to blanket the kingdom's streets, choking off potential demonstrations and sending a clear signal that public displays would be met with a crackdown. Prince Saud al-Faisal, the kingdom's usually reserved foreign minister, warned that the regime would “cut off any finger” raised against it in protest.

Efforts to defuse alienation at home, which is considerable, have taken other forms as well. On Friday, March 18, King Abdullah took to national television to announce the blueprint for a new domestic aid program, outlining a series of financial and economic measures meant to fatten the wallets and lift the spirits of the country's subjects. The combination of the threat of violence and the promise of a more robust redistribution of oil wealth underscores the depth of the regime's uncertainty.

The one thing the kingdom's rulers have so far proved unwilling to seriously consider is political reform, which is precisely what their critics at home are asking them to do. King Abdullah, who is about as popular as an aged autocrat can be, came to power in 2005 with the reputation of a reformer, someone whom many Saudis believed would pry open a corrupt political system. He has not. Abdullah has more often than not used the language of reform to shore up his family's grip on power. Amid the current crisis, Saudi Arabia's rulers have demonstrated even greater resolve in holding on tightly to their prize. They have also demonstrated a willingness to resort to well-established political strategies to avoid parting with control.

In addition to issuing threats and doling out cash, the ruling elite are also looking to burnish its relationship with its traditional power base, the religious establishment. While many assume the Al Saud have always relied principally on the clergy for support, the truth is that the relationship has often been contentious. By the late 1970s, amid the oil boom, the clergy had been partially marginalized as a political force. Over the course of the 20th century, the Saudis' primary objective was building a strong centralized state. While the clergy had been useful to the process of imperial expansion in the first part of the century, it was seen as an obstacle later on.

Events in the late 1970s brought the clergy back to the fore. Confronted with the siege of the Mecca Grand Mosque in 1979 by a group of religious militants — a serious assault on the ruling family's political authority — Saudi Arabia's rulers sought direct help from the establishment clergy. To outmaneuver potential criticism and end the siege, they asked for and received religious sanction to use force inside the mosque and drive the rebels out. In exchange, the Saudis rewarded the religious establishment with an influx of financial and political support. The political cost

was high. The kingdom's ruling elite had to reinvent itself and restore its credibility as custodian of Islam's holy land, and it has been compelled to accommodate the clerics' interests ever since.

In recent years, King Abdullah has taken measures, such as challenging the rulings of judges, sacking prominent religious figures from their official posts, and calling for greater oversight of the judicial system, to check the scholars' power and reverse the post-1979 religiopolitical compact. But amid the current crisis, the reconfiguration of the Saudi-Wahhabi relationship has been put on hold. The clergy came out in opposition to planned protests on March 11, declaring them un-Islamic. A group of top official clerics issued a statement several days beforehand asserting that "demonstrations are forbidden in this country" and that "reform and advice should not be via demonstrations and ways that provoke strife and division, this is what the religious scholars of this country in the past and now have forbidden and warned against." It was a powerful show of support for the ruling family. And they are poised to be richly rewarded.

A significant part of the domestic aid program outlined last Friday will be directed toward the kingdom's religious establishment. Millions of dollars will be poured into the coffers of the country's religious police, an organization that has been beleaguered recently by domestic criticism. The regime also suggested that criticism of the religious establishment will no longer be tolerated, reversing a trend in recent years toward more open public discourse on the role of religion and religious values in Saudi society. It is also noteworthy that while some unofficial clergy, such as Salman al-Awda, have taken to calling for political reform; the official religious establishment has continued to insist on the legitimacy of the existing political order.

The kingdom's rulers are also stoking sectarian anxieties as a means to deflect calls for reform at home and as a way to justify their intervention in Bahrain. In the week leading up to March 11, Shiites in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province staged small protests calling for reform and the release of political prisoners. Although the protests were small and

not connected directly to the call for demonstrations on March 11, leaders in Riyadh seized on them to argue that a foreign hand was at work. (As Prince Saud put it, "We will not tolerate any interference in our internal affairs by any foreign party ... and if we find any foreign interference, we will deal with this decisively.") The regime has long claimed that its Shiite community, numbering perhaps as many as 1.5 million people, is beholden to Iranian influence. Even though Saudi Shiites insist on their loyalty to Saudi Arabia, leaders in Riyadh have found it useful to manipulate sectarianism as a wedge to break up the possibility of a unified national reform front. The Shiite protests played directly into the regime's hands, as it sought to undermine any possible uprising with the claim of Iranian meddling. In a place where anti-Shiite sentiment continues to be rampant, the sectarian framing further dampened potential mobilization.

Beyond the kingdom, claims of foreign meddling and sectarian politics have also been at the heart of the escalation of violence in Bahrain and the Saudi decision to intervene militarily there. There is no compelling evidence to claims that Iran is involved in Bahrain's internal affairs or that Bahrain's pro-democracy movement is looking to Tehran for its marching orders. (Comments by Hassan Mushaima, a key Bahraini opposition figure who was arrested in the most recent crackdown, that Saudi intervention would justify the Bahraini opposition's turn to Iran were mostly bluster, though his words provided fodder for the rulers in Manama and Riyadh.) The claim of foreign meddling serves as a convenient fiction for the Saudis and Bahrainis, who desperately hope to avoid the collapse of the Bahraini royal family or even the greater empowerment of Shiites in a reformed Bahraini state.

It would be hard to argue that Saudi Arabia's rulers have ever been inspired to think creatively in dealing with political crises. The Saudi bag of tricks has always been pretty small. But what the kingdom has lacked in imagination, it makes up for in consistency. In attempting to crush and co-opt potential restiveness, the kingdom's elites have signaled that genuine political reform is a distant possibility. It remains to be seen whether this will placate their subjects.

Equally uncertain are the potential consequences of the kingdom's sectarian gambit. Shiites in the Persian Gulf's Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, have struggled to find space in their countries' political systems and relief from various forms of discrimination. In spite of their efforts, most doors have remained closed. With the current escalation in Bahrain and authorities in Riyadh and Manama manufacturing sectarian conspiracies, claims of Iranian influence in Arab Shiite communities may eventually become self-fulfilling.

There are already signs that regional hostility is on the rise and being driven by events in Bahrain. Tensions between Iran and its Arab neighbors escalated last week, with Tehran and Manama each withdrawing key diplomats. On March 15, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi warned that Saudi intervention in Bahrain might lead "the region toward a crisis which would be followed by dangerous consequences." While relations between Saudi

Arabia, Bahrain, and Iran have long been acrimonious, the current escalation is the direct result of the situation unfolding in Manama and the Saudi-Bahraini effort to frame it as a regional sectarian plot. In manipulatively naming Iran as complicit in Bahrain's internal struggles, Riyadh and Manama are helping to create the conditions in which such an outcome might become true.

For many years, Bahraini activists have pushed their cause in the halls of power in the United States and Europe. With the United States continuing to back the Al Khalifa and Al Saud regimes, Bahrain's opposition is increasingly being left with little choice but to consider looking across the Gulf for assistance.

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## Is Saudi Arabia really counter-revolutionary?

*By F. Gregory Gause, III, August 9, 2011*

Would the monarchs of the Holy Alliance have supported a democratic uprising anywhere in Europe in 1820? Would Prince Metternich have backed nationalist movements in 1848? Of course not. But their supposed reactionary analogue in the Arab upheavals of 2011, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, has now come out, forcefully if indirectly, for a regime change in Syria. That makes the third time during this Arab spring that Saudi Arabia, the supposed champion of the status-quo, has thrown an Arab leader under the bus. Bashar al-Asad now joins Muammar al-Qaddafi and Ali Abdullah Saleh in the club of Arab leaders Saudi Arabia can do without.

The immediate reaction to the Saudi recall of its ambassador to Damascus in many news outlets (including the BBC, the New York Times and the Washington Post) emphasized the incongruity (and the hypocrisy) of an absolute monarchy that had sent troops to Bahrain to put down popular protests calling on a fellow dictator to stop oppressing his people. But that is the wrong frame in which to understand Saudi Arabia's regional policy during this time of Arab upheaval. The right frame is the regional balance of power battle between Riyadh and Tehran. In that context, the Saudi move against the Asad regime makes much more sense.



Syria is Iran's most important and longest-standing Arab ally. Under Bashar's father, Hafiz al-Asad, Damascus was able to sustain good relations with Riyadh while also cultivating the Persian connection. But the son has proven less nimble in balancing his regional relations. Syrian support for Hezbollah in Lebanon (and assumed Syrian involvement, if not directly then indirectly, in the assassination of Saudi ally Rafiq al-Hariri) alienated Riyadh. Bashar even publicly insulted the Saudi king and other Arab leaders over their stance during the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006. King Abdullah was hesitant to break fully with Damascus, as demonstrations against the regime accelerated over the past five months, given the importance of Syria in regional politics. But the escalating violence of the past week, coming at the beginning of Ramadan, seemed to seal the issue. Dealing Iran a blow in regional politics trumps the risks of greater instability.

While public opinion is hardly a major factor in Saudi foreign policy decisions, on the break with Syria the King was following, not leading, his people. The Saudi media and Saudi-owned pan-Arab media has been vehemently opposed to Asad's crackdown and sympathetic to the protestors. This is where the Ramadan timing comes into the picture. During the holy month religious feelings are heightened. The sectarian element of the Syrian confrontation, with an ostensibly secular and Alawite Shiite dominated regime brutally suppressing the Sunni Muslim majority, becomes a more prominent element in how the overwhelmingly Sunni Saudis, population and leadership, view events.

The sectarian factor, never absent, is now becoming a more open element in the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. The Saudi and Gulf commentary on events in Bahrain was openly sectarian. While the Saudi leaders do not explain their policies in sectarian terms and tend to view the region more in balance of power terms, they have always thought that sectarianism was their hole card in the confrontation with Iran. There are more Sunnis in the region than Shiites. They know it and the Iranians know it. But playing up the sectarian element of regional conflict will blow back on the Saudis sooner rather than later. Heightened sectarian

tension provides fertile ground for extremist salafi jihadist movements like al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to sell their anti-Shiite ideas and recruit new members. The Saudi leadership believes it has the AQAP threat under control, but their current actions could be providing a safety net for an organization that, like its parent, has suffered serious reverses in recent years.

The "sectarianization" of regional balance of power conflicts should concern the United States as well. The United States has an interest in a stable Iraq, a stable Lebanon, a Syria that does not implode into all-out civil war, and a Bahrain that overcomes the bitterness of its government's recent brutal crackdown on its citizens. Heightened sectarian feelings work against all those interests. While the Saudis are correct that there are more Sunnis than Shiites in the Muslim world, privileging sectarian identity gives the Iranian regime an entry into the politics of many Arab states. Riyadh would be better served by encouraging a common Arab identity that overcomes sectarian differences and emphasizes the foreignness of Iran in the Arab world while marginalizing sectarian extremists like al Qaeda and its sympathizers.

While the sectarian issue should be a concern for the United States, in the immediate term the Saudi move against the Asad regime places Riyadh squarely on the side of Washington yet again. Even those not particularly friendly to the Saudis call for the United States to join the kingdom in upping the pressure on Damascus. This points to the bankruptcy of another popular "Arab spring" trope -- the supposed crisis in Saudi-U.S. relations. It is certainly true that the two countries have ended up on opposite sides of some regional issues, like the fall of Hosni Mubarak and the Bahraini crackdown. A U.S. veto of a Palestinian statehood resolution in the Security Council will also highlight their differences. But on a number of issues the Saudis and the United States have lined up together -- Libya, Lebanon, containment of Iran -- and even cooperated directly as in Yemen. U.S. arms sales to and military training missions in Saudi Arabia continue apace. The Saudi-U.S. relationship is complicated and changing, but it is hardly on the brink of divorce.

So where do the Saudis stand as the Arab spring undergoes a hot summer and an uncertain fall? Saudi Arabia is against regime change in allied states. It supports its fellow monarchs both out of concern for its own domestic regime security, ideological solidarity, and balance of power politics. It might not like democracy much, and certainly not at home, but that does not mean it will oppose all democratic movements. Its support for the March 14 anti-Syrian coalition in Lebanon in the last two Lebanese elections was crucial. When leaders, even leaders with whom it has had decent relations in the past, no longer can get the job done, the Saudis will help usher them out the door. They will deal with their successors in a pragmatic way (as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt, the deponers of Saudi ally Hosni Mubarak,

quickly realized). They will oppose leaders and groups that they think are allied with Iran, whether it is Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, or Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq. Their focus is on checking and rolling back Iranian influence in the Arab world. That is what drives their policy, not some imagined notion of anti-revolutionary dictatorial solidarity. Let's understand Saudi regional policy for what it is, and let Prince Metternich rest in peace.

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## Reform or the flood in the Gulf

*By Kristin Smith Diwan, February 20, 2011*

As the GCC foreign ministers huddled in a Bahraini capital seemingly under siege, it is clear that the predicted stability of the oil states is being put to the test. Most analysts believed the Gulf would be spared the wave of rebellion spreading across the Arab World due to their relative wealth and welfare provisions for their populace. Yet Bahrain's pre-emptive promises of increased social spending and direct subsidies of \$2,700 per family did not prevent robust protests this week. Analysts also suggested that monarchies are less prone to revolutionary fervor than the Arab faux republics; legitimacy is based on religion and paternalistic care of citizenry, not on the false promise of public sovereignty in the republics. Yet it is exactly that paternalistic authority that is being called into question by political activists across the Gulf.

In fact, the demands of Gulf activists, and increasingly Gulf publics, are broadly similar to those coming from Tunisia and Egypt: We want accountable governance, free of corruption. We want popular participation and to have our say on the issues that affect us. And we want to be free to speak our minds — to assemble online and off without fear of intimidation or arrest. In short, Gulf publics, and particularly Gulf youths, want to be full citizens.

This includes a yearning to feel part of a national project. The states with the most ambitious leaders — Qatar, and Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE — are more immune to unrest, most directly due to their tremendous wealth, but also because of their dynamic campaigns for international

recognition. There is pride in their accomplishments; the whole Gulf celebrated Qatar's successful bid for the World Cup 2022 as a coming out party. But increasingly, Gulf citizens want to play a direct role in shaping the destiny of their states.

This desire for national pride attests to something deeper: a longing for national unity. Particularly in the societies with the most active opposition agendas — Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia — there is a palpable yearning to be free of the discordant politics their monarchies have rendered. Because ruling families have perfected the game of divide and rule of different interest groups competing to be the loyal opposition to the wealthy political center, Gulf publics are factionalized — by ideology, by tribe, by sect, and even by mundane issues such as business interests. Political projects of reform, then, often fall prey to societal divisions.

For these reasons, the Egyptian revolution — its unifying national rhetoric and its success — resonates powerfully in the Gulf, particularly with the youth. Only a week out from the fall of the Mubarak regime, there are significant grassroots efforts to use the momentum from Egypt to push for meaningful reform. But to succeed in their efforts, Gulf activists must follow the lead of the youthful protestors in Egypt and find a way to overcome the politics of division.

The difficulty in doing this is on full display in Bahrain, an island nation with a Shia majority ruled by a Sunni monarchy. Bahrain has one of the most active civil societies in the Gulf, being home to the first labor strike in the Gulf back in the 1930's. In the 1990's, an uprising centered in disadvantaged Shia villages forced the authoritarian monarchy to compromise: the new Emir Hamad welcomed back exiled dissidents and promised the resumption of parliamentary life, disbanded since the 1970s. But the half reforms ushered in through a strategically altered constitution failed to curb royal corruption or redress the blatant imbalances in wealth and opportunity in the small emirate. The elected parliament seemed unable to meet these challenges, hemmed in by gerrymandered districts, a royally appointed upper house, and a poisonous

sectarianism, encouraged by the ruling elite in a classic strategy of divide and rule.

Bahrain's own Facebook-organized "day of rage," then, sought to emulate the methods of Egypt's popular rebellion to break through this impasse. And as thousands of newly energized youth flooded the Pearl roundabout joining opposition members from the cross-sectarian leftist Wa'ad movement and the centrist Shia al-Wefaq, the demand for a genuine constitutional monarchy appeared to be gaining traction. The shocking violence unleashed on peaceful protestors over the last two days, then, may be a testament to just how much the potential of this new coalition shook the regime. They are certainly not alone in their panic: the statement issued by the GCC foreign ministers assembled in an extraordinary show of support for the Bahraini ruling family hinted at outside interference (read: Iran) but their fear is of their own newly empowered populations.

In Kuwait, the current government headed by Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah has been inadvertently doing its part to unify the usually fractious opposition. Back in December, it vastly overplayed its hand in sending security forces to attack an opposition gathering, resulting in the injury of several members of parliament and the arrest of a popular constitutional scholar. After narrowly surviving a vote of no confidence in the parliament over this issue, the government entered a second crisis when it was revealed that a Kuwaiti man under detention for alcohol smuggling was tortured to death at a police station. These discrete events play powerfully into a rising opposition narrative warning against a rise of authoritarianism in the normally open emirate, with greater controls on media, the jailing of a prominent critical journalist, and persistent threats to curb the power of Kuwait's spirited parliament, or to close it altogether.

In response to these threats to civil and political liberties, a group of internet savvy youth encompassing both former Muslim Brotherhood members and liberals has emerged. The group is named the "Fifth Wall" in honor of the constitution which they view as protecting the integrity of the state much as Kuwait's famed wall once protected

it from foreign invasion. Their program, communicated through Facebook and Twitter, calls for a “youth rebellion to work for freedom and respect” and certainly resonates with the broader climate of youth revolt.

The power of tweeting Kuwaitis should not be underestimated. In 2006, an Internet and SMS organized protest movement against corruption and tribal division brought down the Kuwaiti government, forcing early elections and the re-organization of Kuwait’s electoral districts: a successful campaign for electoral reform known as the “Orange Revolution.” More recently, the Fifth Wall used its 6,000-member Twitter feed to call for a protest at the National Assembly on February 8 — the date on which the Minister of Interior had been due to appear in parliament to be questioned for the torture allegations. Apparently seeking to avoid the link with the swelling protests in Egypt, the Kuwaiti government took pre-emptive action, announcing the resignation of the Interior Minister the day before the Fifth Wall protest was to take place. The group has vowed to continue their campaign for the protection of the constitution, and has set a new date of March 8th for protests to bring down the Prime Minister. The government is said to be monitoring social networking sites, prompting the opposition to call for a parliamentary discussion on new media freedoms.

These activist publics are very troubling for the heavyweight in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia. Just as revolution spread from peripheral Tunisia to the Arab heartland of Egypt, so too might discontent spread from the Gulf littoral to its center. Saudi Arabia has seen a decline in open political opposition since the emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula drew the reformist Islamist opposition closer to the state, while liberals have been reluctant to undermine the reform-minded King. Still, while real reform has been made in education, the judiciary, and in the economy, no progress has been made in political liberalization since the partial municipal council elections of 2005.

Those elections were seized upon by disaffected Shia and opposition-minded Islamists, prompting the regime to end this mild experiment in electoral representation. However, the problems fueling this discontent are real: unemployment, persistent nepotism and corruption, deteriorating public services, a sterile public sphere still hostile to public participation and debate, and for the youth, boredom. In this new protest environment a group of liberal Islamists announced the formation of the Kingdom’s first political party this week — and were promptly arrested.

There are simply not enough avenues to allow for this discontent to vent, which is not quite the same thing as containing it. And there are certainly no vehicles to convince an increasingly globally connected and educated youth that they have a part in shaping their common future. One Saudi blogger recently did the calculations and noted wryly that for a population whose average age is 19, the average age of Saudi ministers is 65 and 61 of Shura Council members. Can this perilous political environment — not to mention the inevitable upcoming leadership succession — be effectively navigated by an aged leadership without engaging its young public?

In this context, the words of *Sahwa* sheikh and now regime supporter Salman al-Awda that “throwing a few crumbs at the people” is not enough; that Arab leaders must commit to radical reform or hear calls for the fall of the regime, sounds a lot like a warning. Unless they violently turn on their own people as the Bahraini ruling family has regrettably done, the Arab Gulf states are not headed for revolution. But without some preventative infrastructure they may find themselves under water — much like the streets of Jeddah after a flash flood.

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# Yes, It Could Happen Here Why Saudi Arabia is ripe for revolution.

*By Madawi al-Rasheed, February 28, 2011*

In the age of Arab revolutions, will Saudis dare to honor Facebook calls for anti-government demonstrations on March 11? Will they protest at one of Jeddah's main roundabouts? Or will they start in Qatif, the eastern region where a substantial Shiite majority has had more experience in real protest? Will Riyadh remain cocooned in its cloak of pomp and power, hidden from public gaze in its mighty sand castles?

Saudi Arabia is ripe for change. Despite its image as a fabulously wealthy realm with a quiescent, apolitical population, it has similar economic, demographic, social, and political conditions as those prevailing in its neighboring Arab countries. There is no reason to believe Saudis are immune to the protest fever sweeping the region.

Saudi Arabia is indeed wealthy, but most of its young population cannot find jobs in either the public or private sector. The expansion of its \$430 billion economy has benefited a substantial section of the entrepreneurial elite — particularly those well connected with the ruling family — but has failed to produce jobs for thousands of college graduates every year. This same elite has resisted employing expensive Saudis and contributed to the rise in local unemployment by hiring foreign labor. Rising oil prices since 2003 and the expansion of state investment in education, infrastructure, and welfare, meanwhile, have produced an explosive economy of desires.

Like their neighbors, Saudis want jobs, houses, and education, but they also desire something else. Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003, they have expressed their political demands in their own way, through petitions that circulated and were signed by hundreds of activists and professionals, men and women, Sunnis, Shiites, and Ismailis. Reformers petitioned King Abdullah to establish an elected consultative assembly to replace the 120-member appointed Consultative Council

Saudis inherited from King Fahd. Political organizers were jailed and some banned from travel to this day. The "Riyadh spring" that many reformers anticipated upon King Abdullah's accession in 2005 was put on hold while torrential rain swept away decaying infrastructure and people in major cities. Rising unemployment pushed the youth toward antisocial behavior, marriages collapsed, the number of bachelors soared, and the number of people under the poverty line increased in one of the wealthiest states of the Arab world. Today, nearly 40 percent of Saudis ages 20 to 24 are unemployed.

Meanwhile, scandal after scandal exposed the level of corruption and nepotism in state institutions. Princes promised to establish investigative committees, yet culprits were left unpunished. Criticism of the king and top ruling princes remained taboo, and few crossed the red line surrounding the substantial sacrosanct clique that monopolizes government posts from defense to sports. The number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience swelled Saudi prisons. Under the pretext of the war on terror, the Saudi regime enjoyed a free hand. The interior minister, Prince Nayef, and his son and deputy, Prince Mohammed, rounded up peaceful activists, bloggers, lawyers, and academics and jailed them for extended periods. Saudis watched in silence while the outside world either remained oblivious to abuses of human rights or turned a blind eye in the interests of oil, arms, and investment.

"We are not Tunisia," "We are not Egypt," "We are not Libya," (and perhaps in a month's time, "We are not the Arab world") have become well-rehearsed refrains of official Saudi political rhetoric in recent weeks. There is some truth in this: carrots are often the currency of loyalty in oil-rich countries, including its wealthiest kingdom. But the Saudi royal family uses plenty of sticks, too. Public relations firms in Riyadh, Washington, and London ensure

that news of the carrots travels as far as possible, masking unpleasant realities in one of the least transparent and most authoritarian regimes in the Persian Gulf. What cannot be hidden anymore is the political, economic, and social problems that oil has so far failed to address.

When Saudis were poor and lagged behind the world in education, aspirations, and infrastructure, oil was the balm that healed all social wounds. The wave of coups d'état that swept the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s did not make much impression on Saudis, despite some agitation here and there. Few Saudis were impressed by the effervescence of Arab revolutionary or liberation movements. At the time, most Saudis lacked the education or inclination to question their government, apart from a handful of activists and agitators, including a couple of princes. By the 1970s, oil wealth was developing their taste for the consumer economy and the pleasures of cars, planes, running water, air-conditioning, and sunglasses. Political participation wasn't part of the package.

Today, oil remains abundant, but Saudis are different. They enjoy more consumption and liquidity than others in the Arab world, but less than those in neighboring Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Saudis are today looking for something else. They are young — youth under 30 account for two-thirds of the Saudi population — educated, connected, and articulate. Above all, they are familiar with the global discourse of democracy, freedom, entitlement, empowerment, transparency, accountability, and human rights that has exploded in the face of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world since January. They watch satellite channels like Al Jazeera and eagerly consume news from uprisings around the region.

So far young Saudis have occupied their own "Liberation Square" on a virtual map. In the 1990s their exiled Islamist opposition used the fax machine to bombard the country with messages denouncing the leadership and calling for a return to pristine Islam. Later, a wider circle of politicized and non-politicized young Saudis ventured into Internet discussion boards, chat rooms, blogs, and more recently Facebook and Twitter to express themselves, mobilize,

and share grievances. These virtual spaces have become natural homes for both dissenting voices and government propaganda. Recently the king's private secretary and chief of the royal court, Khaled al-Tuwaijri, launched his own Facebook page.

Saudis thought that they were safe in their virtual world, but the regime has been determined to trace each and every word and whisper that challenges its version of reality. Young bloggers, writers, and essayists have been jailed for asking simple questions like: Who is going to be king after Abdullah? Where is oil wealth going? Who is responsible for corruption scandals associated with arms deals? Why do the king and crown prince take turns leaving the country? Why are Abdullah's so-called reforms thwarted by his brother Prince Nayef? And who is the real ruler of Saudi Arabia? All unanswered taboo questions.

On February 23, King Abdullah, 87 and frail, having spent three months abroad undergoing two operations in New York and recuperating in Morocco, was brought back to Riyadh amid a package of welfare promises worth \$36 billion. These were for the most part a rather transparent attempt to appease the burgeoning youth population and deflect it from the lure of revolution — public-sector salary increases, unemployment benefits, and subsidies for housing, education, and culture.

In years past, such handouts have been welcomed by a population that has grown used to royal largesse, but now the economy of unmet desires is raising the bar. The king, too old and too weak, may have misread the level of disappointment among many Saudis of all political persuasions, who are voicing their complaints on the Internet. The common thread is a demand for genuine political reform. All signs suggest that Saudis are in a rush to seize this unprecedented opportunity to press for serious political change. The response to King Abdullah's handouts on Saudi Facebook sites is the refrain "Man cannot live by bread alone."

Of course, it's not just liberals who are demanding change. A couple of weeks before the king's return, a

group of Saudi academics and professionals announced the establishment of a Salafi Islamic Ummah Party and launched a web site. Reformist Salafists are calling for democracy, elections, and respect for human rights. Five of the founding members were immediately put in jail. The king's brother, Prince Talal, disenchanted and politically marginalized but extremely wealthy, went on BBC Arabic television to praise the king and criticize other powerful royal players, the so-called Sudairi Seven (including Crown Prince Sultan, the defense minister; Prince Nayef, the interior minister; and Prince Salman, the governor of Riyadh) without naming them. He revived his 1960s call for constitutional monarchy, which is now being endorsed by some Saudi activists. To date, 119 activists have signed the petition calling for constitutional monarchy. More petitions signed by a cross section of Saudi professionals, academics, and journalists are circulating on the Internet. A broad swatch of Saudi society is now demanding political change.

If Saudis do respond to calls for demonstrations and rise above the old petition syndrome, the majority will be young freethinkers who have had enough of the polarization of Saudi Arabia into two camps: a liberal and an Islamist one, with the al-Saud family presiding over the widening gap between the two. They want political representation and economic opportunities. An elected parliament is demanded by all.

So far, Saudi Shiites have remained relatively silent, with only minor protests in the Eastern Province. Having watched the February 14 massacre in Bahrain's Pearl Roundabout, they may hesitate to act alone. If they do, it would be quite easy for the regime to mobilize the Sunni majority and crush their protest, exactly as it did in 1979. In fact, the Shiites would do the regime a great favor at a critical moment when its legitimacy among the majority of Sunnis in the country cannot be taken for granted.

The Shiites may have to wait until they form solid coalitions with mainstream Saudi society to remove any sectarian dimension to their demands. The Hijazis along the western coast would be natural allies, as their

complaints about the poor infrastructure of their main city Jeddah may act as a catalyst to push for more political rights and autonomy. A liberal constituency there would be more receptive to overtures from the Shiites of the Eastern Province. If Jeddah and Qatif were to unite in their demands, Riyadh would look more isolated than at any other time. It has many supporters among its historical Najdi constituency, but even they are flirting with the global discourse of freedom. And now some Salafists, the puritanical literal interpreters of Islam, are calling for a real *shura*, in other words democracy.

It seems that the kingdom is at a crossroads. It must either formulate a serious political reform agenda that will assuage an agitated young population or face serious upheavals over the coming months. To respond to public demands, the agenda should above all start with a written constitution, limit the rule of the multiple royal circles of power within the state, regulate royal succession, inaugurate an elected parliament, and open up the political sphere to civil society organizations. Hiding behind Islamic rhetoric such as "our constitution is the Quran" is no longer a viable escape route. Many Saudis are disenchanted with both official and dissident Islam. They want a new political system that matches their aspirations, education, and abilities, while meeting their basic human, civil, and political rights.

Like other falling Arab regimes before them, the ruling Al-Saud will inevitably seek to scare the population by raising the specter of al Qaeda and warning against tribal, regional, and sectarian disintegration. They will try to thwart political change before it starts. Saudis may not believe the scaremongers. The command centers of the Arab revolutions today are not the caves of Tora Bora or Riyadh's shabby al-Suwaidi neighborhood, where jihadists shot BBC journalist Frank Gardner and his cameraman in 2004. They are the laptops of a young, connected, knowledgeable, but frustrated generation that is rising against the authoritarian public and private families that have been crushing the individual in the pursuit of illusions and control.

Yes, Egypt was key to the coming change, but when Saudis rise they will change the face of the Arab world and its relations with the West forever. Now is the time for the United States and its allies to understand that the future does not lie with the old clique that they have tolerated, supported, and indulged in return for oil, security, and investment. At a time of shifting Arabian sands, it is in the interest of America and the rest of the world to side with the future not the past.

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## **There Will Be No Uprising in Saudi Arabia Contrary to what you might have heard, the kingdom is hardly ripe for revolution.**

*By Nawaf Obaid, March 10, 2011*

The past few months have seen unprecedented turbulence in the Middle East. Leaders in Tunisia and Egypt have been forced from power by popular uprisings, Libya is careening toward civil war, and widespread unrest has rattled Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq, Iran — and to a lesser extent, Jordan, Algeria, Oman, and other countries in the region. Yet at the geographic center of all this chaos is Saudi Arabia, a country untouched by turmoil. This fact has led some pundits to the conclusion that the kingdom has only temporarily muffled the latent discontent of its people and that ultimately the domino of dissatisfaction and regime change will fall in Riyadh. These analysts, however, are highly likely to be proved wrong, as they fundamentally misunderstand the unique strengths of the Saudi monarchy and the current system of governance.

What their assessments fail to take into account is that though the kingdom shares several characteristics with the Middle Eastern countries listed above, it has a number of features that render it exceptional. Saudi Arabia is not ripe for revolution. Not even close.

Unlike many of the regional governments currently facing unrest, the kingdom has a strong record of fiscal responsibility. Revenues from energy exports and the more than \$500 billion in foreign reserves (the third-largest in the world) amassed during King Abdullah's rule have been tapped to fund development projects that benefit the kingdom's surging population. In fact, the Saudi government has spent tens of billions in the last several years alone to build universities, schools, hospitals, rail links, and housing developments. King Abdullah recently announced a financial amelioration package, which had been in development since December 2010, to coincide with his return from abroad. These include \$29.5 billion in extra expenditures that will benefit the poor, aid the unemployed, provide housing assistance, and support a real estate fund and bank of credit. Another program will raise the salaries of public employees and military personnel and give part-time public-sector employees full employment and benefits. Another aims to help those impacted by inflation. All these programs will be augmented by a further series of initiatives that will be announced later this year and included in the 2012 budget,



with a focus on social security, unemployment, and housing. It is precisely these types of programs that were lacking in those countries that have witnessed revolution or are now facing unrest.

In addition to its social spending, the kingdom has invested extensively to shore up the defenses of its energy infrastructure, including several billion dollars for its 35,000-strong Facilities Security Force, and has spent a similar amount on its various armed services to protect its borders. Finally, the Saudi government has made considerable investments in internal security to root out al Qaeda from the kingdom; domestic safety and stability has been a key pillar of support from the general population.

Of course, the kingdom is not immune to economic problems. Greater efforts at fighting poverty and youth unemployment, as well as investing in infrastructure and public services, are still drastically needed. All Saudis receive housing assistance and free health care and education; the kingdom has a GDP per capita of about \$18,500; and relatively few live in extreme poverty. Nonetheless, there is a widespread acknowledgement that the standard of living is not commensurate with a country as resource rich as Saudi Arabia. For this reason, the leadership has undertaken various economic reforms. A plan is in development to raise the minimum salary for civil servants to about \$1,500 per month. The bureaucracy is being streamlined to improve the delivery of health care and other services. And several years ago, the government launched an office with the mandate of reducing the number who live under the poverty level (\$1,015 per month) from 13.3 percent in 2010 to 2.2 percent in 2020. Another initiative will successfully reduce to zero the 1.63 percent of Saudis living in “extreme poverty” (less than \$450 per month) by the end of this year. Compared with the world poverty line of \$1.25 per day, the kingdom is doing very well. But because Saudi Arabia is no ordinary country, such numbers are an embarrassment and have been met with large-scale government action.

Although there are some cultural similarities between Saudi Arabia and some of the states that are currently

experiencing unrest, the dissimilarities are more important. First, no Arab country possesses a culture so rooted in change-resistant conservatism, which is in many ways derived from the kingdom’s unique role in Islam and the Arab world. Not only is it the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed and the home of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, but it is also the largest provider of Muslim charitable contributions worldwide. And the fact that the Saudi monarchy has acted as a responsible custodian of the two holy sites gives it enormous legitimacy, both at home and abroad.

The conservatism of the Saudi population also explains the lack of any true “liberal” movement in the kingdom, with just a few groups that attract little support among the general populace. In addition, Salafism, the conservative strain of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, forbids opposition to earthly rulers, which is why Islamist reform movements led by radical clerics are also small and fragmented. Five recent petitions by such groups, which organizers hoped would attract millions of signatories, have come nowhere close: only a few thousand have signed. And so far protests organized on Facebook and other websites have yielded only a handful of individuals: Last Friday, March 4, a group called the “March 4th Youth Revolutionary Movement” brought out 12 demonstrators to a Riyadh mosque, despite inflammatory media coverage in the West of Saudi protest pages on various social networks. Shiites in Qatif and Hasa staged three protests together and brought out about 500 protesters combined.

As for the most serious threat to the leadership in the past decade — al Qaeda — it has lost whatever public support it may have had after a series of horrific bombings in the kingdom in 2003. Indeed, after a coordinated counterterrorism campaign, fully supported by the population, the al Qaeda network in Saudi Arabia has been decimated.

Most of these factors that make Saudi Arabia unique in the Arab world are relatively well known. But an equally important element is less often discussed, especially in the West: the prevalence of a robust nationalism that has been

nurtured by and is firmly linked to the monarchy. Over the past decades, Saudis' allegiance to region and tribe has been largely superseded by a commitment and attachment to an emerging nation-state, thus greatly reducing the possibility of revolt.

The two main drivers of this rising nationalist sentiment have been external threats (most importantly Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) and internal crises (especially the fallout from the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the 2003 al Qaeda bombings in Saudi Arabia). Another important factor is the rise of Iran and its anti-Arab policies, to which Saudis have responded with growing national solidarity. The leadership has also been aggressively pursuing domestic policies to unify the population (including the 1.5 million Shiites in the kingdom, who have long-held legitimate grievances over discrimination and lack of opportunity). For instance, the Saudi school system increasingly encourages students from the outlying tribal areas to attend urban schools, thereby shifting their allegiance from the local to the national level. Saudi Arabia also runs the world's largest foreign scholarship program, which provides full college tuition to over 110,000 students from all classes and regions to study abroad, and these foreign-trained students overwhelmingly return to the kingdom with feelings of dedication to the emerging nation-state, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of the first batch of returning students sought work in the public sector.

Restrictions against freedom of expression have been loosened, and vibrant debates and government criticism are now common in the local press (as was seen in the recent coverage of the disastrous Jeddah floods and the government's initial inept response). Further, the military has drastically expanded its recruitment scope to include eligible young men and women from across all regions for the armed forces, security services, and National Guard. As a result of these opening and unifying factors, there has been an increase in public expressions of supratribal Saudi nationalism among the people, something unseen in the country until recently. For instance, during the last Saudi National Day on Sept. 23,

huge celebrations erupted across the country, whereas in the past, conservative religious authorities had opposed any expressions of fidelity to the state and regional and tribal allegiances trumped national fervor.

Just as important, however, is the widespread view that King Abdullah is a deeply popular leader at the head of a monarchy seen as legitimate by the vast majority of Saudi citizens. For example, a visiting Shiite delegation from Qatif headed by a highly esteemed Shiite cleric and judge came to pay their respects to the king this week and used this occasion to reaffirm their loyalty to the kingdom by thanking God for the king's safe return. "You have been in the hearts of your people since you left," they said, "and we do not want anything other than your presence, which protects the kingdom's security and safety."

Many analysts worry, however, about what will happen to Saudi Arabia in the event that the king passes away. They shouldn't. The kingdom recently set up a group called the Allegiance Commission to deal with all succession issues. It is composed of the living sons and one grandson of every dead son of King Abdulaziz, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, and its mandate is to choose a ruler (from among his sons and grandsons) who has the best qualities to lead. The process is designed to ensure that any upcoming transition of power will be smooth and result in another leader who garners widespread legitimacy and respect. So, while other governments in the area reap the bitter harvest of irresponsible fiscal policies, social disharmony, and unpopular leadership, the Saudi monarchy is very likely to continue for many more decades in its role as the bulwark of regional stability and security — as well as a responsible steward of the largest oil reserves in the world.

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# The costs of counter-revolution in the GCC

*By Steffen Hertog, May 31, 2011*

The reaction in the GCC monarchies to the uprisings coursing through the Arab world has leaned heavily toward the politics of patronage. Saudi Arabia, Oman, and even Bahrain have met political challenges in part with lavish financial inducements to key sectors of society. Such soft counter-revolutionary strategies seem astute in the short run, as they buy allegiance instead of breeding resentment, and allow regimes to avoid the international opprobrium which comes with undue violence. In the long run, however, they threaten to undermine not only the fiscal sustainability of GCC regimes, but also their strategies to integrate their national populations into a diversifying economy.

Saudi Arabia has a history of throwing money at its most severe domestic problems. The kingdom has seen two severe political crises in the last four decades: the occupation of the Grand Mosque in 1979 by the Juhayman group, and the domestic backlash to the presence of 500,000 U.S. troops in the wake of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In both cases, the al-Saud reacted to political instability with increased subsidies, reductions in government fees and other patronage measures. But those past giveaways, although substantial, pale in comparison with the welfare decrees issued in February and March 2011.

With a total estimated volume of \$130 billion, the new spending measures are larger than the total annual government budget was as recently as 2007. They include the creation of 60,000 new jobs in the Ministry of Interior — an agency that is already said to employ almost as many nationals as the whole Saudi private sector — building of 500,000 houses, setting of a minimum wage of 3,000 Saudi Riyals (\$800) in the public sector, one-time bonus payments for incumbent civil servants, creation of a general unemployment assistance scheme, budget increases for various public credit agencies, as well as supplementary funds for a number of religious

organizations. Some of the spending is immediate, while other components will be rolled out during the coming years.

Many Saudis see the extra cash for religious institutions, including the religious police, as a reward for their vocal public stance against potential anti-regime demonstrations. Amendments to the Saudi media law announced in late April made it a crime to publish any material that insults the kingdom's grand mufti, members of the Council of Senior Ulama, and government officials. Dissidents feel that the regime is circling the wagons, and is underwriting its strategy with targeted patronage measures.

The plan to build new houses is arguably the most economically rational component of the spending packages: although it could cause short-term inflation due to bottlenecks in the construction sector, the shortage of housing for middle and lower class Saudis is a pressing social issue. Home ownership is out of the financial reach of most young nationals, many of whom live with their parents into their late twenties. The inability to pay for their own abode, and the concomitant inability to start a family, has fueled much of the frustration of young protesters all across the Arab world.

In the face of high youth unemployment, the envisaged unemployment assistance scheme also appears a timely move, although the monthly benefit level of 2000 SR announced in March struck local observers as high: the private sector, which remains dominated by foreign employees, provides some 8 million jobs in total, but only about half a million of those pay more than 3000 SR per month. The average wage is closer to 1000 SR.

The provision of more public jobs is a more problematic trend: already now, an estimated 45 percent of the government's total outlays are for salaries, an exceptionally high share in global comparison. The kingdom has stepped

up the creation of public jobs since 2008. But if the aim is to soak up all or most of the young Saudis who will enter the job market in the coming years, the government faces a losing battle. Some 400,000 men and women enter working age every year, a volume that even the most generous bureaucracy cannot absorb. Together with the new minimum wage of 3000 SR in the public sector, however, the renewed drive to create state jobs is likely to drive young Saudis out of the private labor market and into the waiting loop for a government position.

Saudi Arabia is calm for the time being. Its opposition is ideologically polarized and badly organized, King Abdullah is popular among important parts of the population, and the regime continues to command wide-ranging patronage networks. It can also afford to be more honest about what it is — a conservative, kin-based monarchy without democratic pretensions — than the hypocritical and corrupt republican dynasties that have fallen or are trembling now. In the long run, however, the patronage formula that the regime relies on could come under increasing stress. Already now, the oil price at which the Saudi budget breaks even lies above \$80 per barrel. It was closer to \$20 just a decade ago. The kingdom's current overseas reserves are large, but so are its budgetary needs.

Bahrain and Oman are the two GCC countries that have witnessed serious oppositional mobilization in recent months, and their fiscal reaction to the crisis closely resembles the Saudi one. In addition to a massive housing program, the Bahraini government has promised 20,000 new jobs in its own Ministry of Interior, a huge number relative to a national population of less than 600,000. In Oman, the government has announced increases in subsidies for commodities, higher welfare and pension payments as well as the creation of 50,000 new jobs, of which 35,000 are to be provided by the public sector.

In the wake of demonstrations and strikes in Bahrain and Oman, their richer GCC neighbors have recently promised \$20 billion to support development in the two countries — a good share of which will have to be coughed up by Saudi Arabia. In the mid-term, relatively resource-poor Oman

and Bahrain run the danger of becoming a fiscal ward of their better endowed neighbors. Bahrain's sovereign ratings have already been downgraded in March, while Oman is on review for potential downgrades.

The revolutionary wave has largely spared the high-rent GCC monarchies with small national populations: Qatar, Kuwait, and UAE. Pressures to throw around money have hence been less acute. The UAE government has nonetheless committed to spending \$1.6 billion on infrastructure in the poorer and potentially restless northern emirates, raised military pensions by 70 percent, and started subsidizing bread and rice.

The politics of patronage do not only put rising pressure on national budgets, but also undermine strategies to increase national participation in private labor markets — a *sine qua non* of long-term economic sustainability. Easy and well-paid public sector jobs lift nationals' wage expectations and thereby price them out of the private market, weaken incentives to acquire education that is relevant in the private economy, and reinforces an entitlement mentality that can be politically explosive when the going gets tough. Expectations are easy to raise but difficult to curb, creating a ratchet effect that demands ever larger outlays during every political crisis. Almost all past attempts to reduce entitlements of GCC populations — public jobs, subsidies, cheap utilities etc. — have come to naught.

It is a lot nicer to be thrown money at than to be shot at and tortured, but neither strategy of containing political challenges appears sustainable. The demography of the GCC's national populations is similar to that of the rest of the region: the ranks of the young are swelling and their aspirations rising. Expectations of lucrative and low-effort public jobs are bound to be disappointed one day. By shifting precious resources toward a bloated bureaucracy, the regimes are kicking the employment problem down the road — and making it worse, as incipient private job creation for nationals is undermined.

The chances that the GCC's long-term socio-economic challenges of demographic growth and youth

unemployment will be solved now look a good deal worse than just a few months ago. For the high-rent countries, the issue will remain largely academic for decades to come. But depending on oil price developments, it could become an existential worry for Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia before the end of the decade. The breakeven oil prices for GCC budgets have increased significantly in the past few months. Bahrain probably already needs a per barrel price

above \$100, while the Institute of International Finance predicts a Saudi breakeven price of \$110 for 2015. These should be sobering numbers for those who believe that the GCC can always buy its way out of trouble.

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## Saudi Islamists and the potential for protest

*By Stéphane Lacroix, June 2, 2011*

Saudi Arabia has remained fairly quiet during the recent months of Arab uprisings. A few demonstrations did take place, mostly in the Eastern Province, but never gathered more than a couple of thousands. As for the Facebook calls for a "Saudi revolution" on March 11, they had no real impact on the ground. Some observers found this surprising, given the fact that many of the causes of revolutions elsewhere in the region exist in Saudi Arabia. There is corruption, repression, and despite the country's wealth, socioeconomic problems that particularly affect the youth — it is said that at least 25 percent of Saudis below age 30 are unemployed.

Some observers argued that nothing had happened, or even could happen, in Saudi Arabia because the kingdom possesses two extraordinary resources in huge quantities. This first is a symbolic resource, religion, through the regime's alliance with the official Wahhabi religious establishment, while the second resource is a material one, oil. These resources, however, have their limits. The real reason that Saudi Arabia has not seen major protests is that the Saudi regime has effectively co-opted the Sahwa, the powerful Islamist network which would have to play a major role in any sustained mobilization of protests.

Neither Islam nor oil wealth necessarily shield the Saudi state from criticism. Religion can be, and has been, contested by opponents of the state, particularly by Islamists. The Wahhabi religious establishment is currently led by relatively weak figures. The current mufti Abd al-Aziz Al al-Shaykh lacks the strong credentials of his predecessor, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz. Oil money, however abundant, inevitably creates frustrations because its distribution follows established networks of patronage that favor some over others. This is especially notable at the regional level, where Najd receives much more of the state's largesse than does the kingdom's periphery. What is more, the announcement on March 18 by King Abdullah of a \$100 billion aid package wasn't only met by cheers as some expected. It also provoked angry reactions in some intellectual circles, which saw this as an insult to the Saudis' "dignity."

Saudi Arabia has more of a history of political mobilization than many realize. A pro-democracy current has evolved over the last 10 years. Its core component has historically been the dozens of intellectuals, Sunnis and Shiites, of Islamist and liberal backgrounds who have come together since 2003 to repeatedly demand, through increasingly

provocative petitions, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in the kingdom. Among the latest, and boldest, moves made by members of this group have been the creation in October 2009 of the kingdom's first fully independent human rights organization, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and the establishment in February of the kingdom's first political party, Hizb al-Umma. Although members of this group have been repressed, many have pledged to continue their activism.

In addition to those older and more experienced intellectuals, a new generation of young political activists is gaining increasing influence. They are connected through social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, and count among their "friends" numerous young Egyptian and Yemeni activists, whose revolutionary "know-hows" they have been sharing in the last few months. They are idealistic and bold, and they do not feel bound by old political allegiances. Many have subscribed to the demands for a constitutional monarchy of the older intellectuals, providing them with the young base that they were lacking. In a way, the profile of these young activists is very similar to that of some in the April 6 movement in Egypt. And like the April 6, they could well act as a trigger for change.

But if these young people resemble the April 6 movement, then there exists in Saudi Arabia a group that shares the same characteristics and occupies a similar position in the system as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: the Sahwa (or al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Awakening) is an Islamist group whose ideology is based on a mix between Wahhabi ideas in religion and the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas in politics.

Like the Brotherhood in Egypt, the Sahwa in Saudi Arabia is by far the largest and best organized non-state group, with arguably hundreds of thousands of members. Its mobilizing capacity is huge, far ahead of any other group, including the tribes which have for the last few decades lost a lot of their political relevance. An illustration of this was the 2005 municipal elections, which provided observers with an unprecedented opportunity to measure the ability of Saudi political actors to mobilize their supporters. In

most districts of the major cities, Sahwa-backed candidates won with impressive scores.

It is therefore unlikely that any popular movement would take hold without the Sahwa's support because generating a sustained political challenge to the state requires organized and committed activists, solid mobilizing structures, and networks — things that can't simply be obtained through Facebook and that only the Sahwa can provide. Again, Sahwis are like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: they may not start the protest, but it won't succeed without them.

This is where the Saudi case is different from others. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood may have long ceased being a confrontational force when the January 25 revolution started, but it still represented a clear opposition to the Egyptian state. The Sahwa, however, has a different track record. Although its members may be very critical of the Saudi state in private, they have generally remained loyal to it. There is an organic, almost incestuous, relationship that exists between the Sahwa and the Saudi state. While Islamist movements in most countries developed on the margins of the state and against it, the Sahwa was the product of the co-optation of foreign members of the Muslim Brotherhood into the Saudi state in the 1950s and 1960s. It developed and spread from the state, heavily benefiting from the state's structures and resources. The fear of losing this very favorable position that the Sahwa occupies has, until now, represented a key obstacle to its transformation into a real opposition movement.

This explains why the majority of Sahwis have generally remained loyal throughout the recent months. For instance, when calls for demonstrations in the kingdom were issued, most Sahwi religious figures came out to denounce them. Some even went so far as to explain that demonstrations were not a legitimate means of asking for change. Aware of the Sahwa's crucial importance, the state has also done all it could to reinforce the relationship: in the \$100 billion aid package announced by King Abdullah, there is money for religious institutions, including some known to be Sahwa strongholds.

This does not necessarily mean that there is no potential for protest, however. The Sahwa's history shows that it behaves as a strategic actor. For instance, in the early 1990s, in the wake of the Gulf War, when Islamist figures launched an opposition campaign against the regime, the Sahwa first supported the movement because it thought it could succeed — before eventually withdrawing its support when understanding the risks. This means that in the future, if the Sahwa sees clearly favorable opportunities, it may decide to switch sides and support a protest.

There are already signs that some in the Sahwa may be willing to adopt a more critical posture. Late February, for instance, a petition came out called “Towards a State of Rights and Institutions” asking for democratic change (although expressed in a very conservative language) and signed by a few notable figures associated with the Sahwa, including Salman al-Awda. Also, in late April, a number of

other key Sahwa figures, including Nasir al-Umar, signed a text calling for the release of or a fair trial for the country's thousands of “political prisoners,” many of whom were arrested on terrorism charges after 2003.

Despite these relatively isolated moves, however, it is unlikely that in the current context the Sahwa would be willing to sacrifice its relations with the regime. There is potential for Islamist protest in Saudi Arabia, but not in the near term. And without the Islamists' participation, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will be the scene of the kinds of sustained mobilization that have rocked much of the rest of the Arab world.

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## **Trouble Down South** **For Saudi Arabia, Yemen's implosion is a nightmare.**

*By Ellen Knickmeyer, July 5, 2011*

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Border buffer zone aside, it can be hard, in some ways, to figure out where the Saudi state ends and the Yemeni state begins. Ordinary Yemenis, for example, still make the journey north to the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah to attend the *majalis*, or councils, of King Abdullah. There the Yemenis petition the Saudi monarch for favors and cash handouts, with the blessings of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. “Go try your luck,” Saleh, ever pragmatic, is quoted as once telling his people on their cross-border begging missions.

In many ways, Saleh and Saudi Arabia allowed the Yemeni state and its elites to go on the Saudi dole as well. Since

the 1980s at least, wealthy Saudi Arabia, with its habit of dispensing largesse to soothe troubles and cement loyalties, has routinely dispensed up to several billion dollars annually to thousands of Yemeni tribal leaders, security officials, and other Yemeni elites, as well as to Yemen's government. But by all accounts, the flow of Saudi patronage has narrowed to far fewer tribal leaders amid Yemen's present upheaval.

These days, in a further blurring of frontiers, Saleh presides not from his outwardly nondescript walled compound in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa, but from a hospital bed in the Saudi capital of Riyadh. Saleh, medicated for pain,



is recovering from a June 3 assassination attempt. Aides acting in his name issue birthday greetings to fellow world leaders to try to show the Yemeni president still feebly in charge. After five months of state collapse in Yemen and his own near death, however, the president is no longer politically capable of wielding power, but remains temperamentally incapable of yielding it. Saudis urge Saleh to quit while he still has “honor, rather than leave with danger and harassment,” said Prince Turki bin Mohammed bin Saud al-Kabeer, the Foreign Ministry’s undersecretary for multilateral relations, but the badly burned Yemeni leader still refuses to sign a Saudi-backed deal for his resignation.

For Yemenis, suffering under worsening shortages of food, water, gasoline, and electricity in a country adrift, the answer to the question of what comes next in the stalemate lies partly with Saleh, partly with themselves, and partly with Saudi Arabia.

Critics for decades have accused Saudi Arabia of purposefully fostering a Yemeni government too immature to ever pose a state threat to Saudis. “Keep Yemen weak,” King Abdul Aziz is supposed to have told his sons on his deathbed, in one of two such warnings the founder of the modern Saudi state handed down to his sons and grandsons.

In interviews, Saudi officials and their supporters insist that even if Saudi Arabia once favored a Yemen that was neither too stable nor unstable, its position has changed: Saudi Arabia now wants a Yemeni government strong enough to quell the country’s internal chaos.

“Saudis more than anyone else don’t like chaos. Change they can deal with; they don’t like chaos.... For the Saudis, Yemen is a problem to manage. It’s not a problem to be fixed,” said a Western diplomat.

The kingdom’s supporters maintain that Saudi Arabia deserves credit for pushing a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plan that would force out Saleh — a longtime Saudi ally, though an unreliable one — and bring new elections in Yemen.

But can Saudi Arabia, among the most risk-adverse of states, tolerate the kind of unruly transition to democracy that demonstrators in Yemen’s streets have been demanding for the past five months?

Even in Saudi Arabia, many doubt it.

“The government has always used this money to control people, silence them. It worked for a long time,” Mazin Mutabagani, a scholar and Yemen expert at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, told me. “If they could give Ali Abdullah Saleh a new life, they would give [it to] him, to go back. They are fond of dictators.”

Under Saleh, whose rise to the presidency in 1978 was supported by Riyadh, Saudi Arabia has denied Yemen the monopoly of power and integrity of borders that are the basics of statehood, through payments that blur the allegiances of Yemeni tribes and others, and through cross-border security operations, argues Abdullah Hamidaddin, a political analyst in Jeddah.

“Increasing the autonomy of the tribe always degrades the authority of the central government,” Hamidaddin told me, adding, “In what other countries do citizens receive a salary from a foreign government?”

As a result, in Yemen “the state is never seen as a state. It’s seen as another tribe, and one that is competing with other tribes for resources,” Hamidaddin says. “This is the devastating concept that has happened to Yemen in the last 20 years.”

Hamidaddin, at 42, approaches the Yemen question from a different background from most. He is the grandson of the last in a line of imams that ruled north Yemen off and on for 1,100 years, until a republican military regime that preceded Saleh’s overthrew the Yemeni imamate in 1962.

The eight-year republican-royalist war that followed between Hamidaddin’s uncles and the republican Yemeni military commanders show how hard a slog warfare is in Yemen’s mountains and caves, and how unpredictable



its outcome. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalist regime intervened on behalf of Yemen's republican coup leaders, thinking that they could defeat the Yemeni royalists in a few weeks with a battalion of Egyptian special forces and some aircraft. But in a Cold War dog pile of strange alliances, the United States, the Saudi and Jordanian monarchies, the Shah of Iran, and by many accounts even Israel gave financing, training, and arms to the Yemeni royalists and Yemeni tribes against the Egypt- and Soviet-backed Yemeni officers. The royalists lost — after nearly a decade of fighting that killed more than 20,000 Egyptian troops. Arab regimes emerged shaken by the difficulty of fighting in rugged Yemen.

Saudi Arabia learned the lesson again in a 2009 military operation against Yemeni Shiite Houthi rebels, in which friendly fire is said to have claimed some Saudi troops. With Yemen now showing itself increasingly unable or unwilling to control al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other extremists forces, Saudi Arabia is stepping up its preparation of special forces able to operate across the border in Yemen's rough terrain, according to analyst Nawaf Obaid and other Saudis.

Saudi Arabia's strategic direction on Yemen has been in flux, and not just because Saleh's government has imploded. Part of it is due to changing power dynamics within the monarchy: Saudi Crown Prince Sultan, who long dispensed the patronage payments to Yemen through the kingdom's special committee for Yemen affairs, has been ill for years and is reported to be under medical care in New York. Prince Nayef, already much involved in Yemeni affairs as interior minister and as the father of Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism chief, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, has assumed much more control of the Yemen portfolio, according to many longtime observers. Prince Nayef is regarded as heavily focused on security, which means Saudi Arabia, like the United States, may be seeing Yemen ever more narrowly through a counterterrorism prism. With Prince Sultan in poor health, Prince Nayef is now seen as King Abdullah's most likely successor.

Prince Turki, the foreign affairs undersecretary, confirmed to me that Saudi payments through Prince Sultan's old Yemen committee were suspended this spring.

Saudi payments, however, have since resumed to some Yemeni tribal leaders, Hamidaddin said. Jamal Khashoggi, a political analyst close to the royal family, told me that Yemenis still getting Saudi financial support include the powerful al-Ahmar family, which leads the Hashid tribal confederation in Yemen. The al-Ahmars have been principals in fighting the Shiite Houthi rebels in northern Yemen, in supporting dissent against Saleh, and in fighting loyalist Saleh forces in Yemen's capital.

Saudis variously describe the payments to Yemenis as both an effort to secure stewards of Saudi Arabia's interests in Yemen and an effort to channel aid to Yemen, by far the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula, in a way that can't be skimmed off by Saleh's notoriously corrupt regime.

The stipends "are a way to help them, Yemenis at large and the central government," Prince Turki told me. "We're not bribing them. Bribes don't bring you stability."

Saudi leaders fear massive refugee flows and even greater trafficking of arms and extremists into the peninsula if Yemen keeps collapsing. In Yemen, "a strong government is essential for us," the prince said.

"Let's call them friends of Saudi Arabia," Khashoggi said of those receiving patronage. "Saudi Arabia pays them money handsomely for various services such as influence, protection, stability. That's what matters in Saudi Arabia."

In fact, said Barbara Bodine, former U.S. ambassador to Yemen, "the Saudis have really gotten very little for their money, but have a dilemma in that they can't cut it off entirely. Yemen needs the money, and without it, it would probably implode."

Saleh himself likewise governed through his own patronage system, divvying out Yemen's wealth and

influence to elites to keep them on his side and blocking development of state institutions in the process.

The lack of focus on government-building, including the failure to build a functioning tax system, means that whoever succeeds Saleh “is going to need Saudi 110 percent,” said Fernando Carvajal, an expert on Saudi-Yemeni relations at Britain’s University of Exeter. Yemen will need Saudi Arabia’s money “for restructuring and to pay a new patronage network.”

As a result, rival candidates for power seem to be pitching a line that they think will hook the conservative Saudis — with members of the official coalition of opposition parties telling reporters that democracy is an adventure that Yemen’s not quite ready for, Carvajal noted.

Saudi Arabia, other Gulf countries, and countries around the world that have pledged aid to Yemen say they will open the taps for development and aid in Yemen after the GCC deal clears.

For now, though, all wait for Saleh to quit, if he ever does. From his hospital bed, Saleh promised King Abdullah in a phone call last month that he would sign the GCC deal, according to Prince Turki. (Saleh has reneged on the same

promise to others at least three times. The Yemen leader will try to go back to Yemen, one official predicted, if he has to roll himself there “in a wheelchair.”)

If Saleh signs, Saleh’s son and nephews, who have refused to yield up the presidential palace or their loyalist forces in Saleh’s absence, will be no problem, Prince Turki predicted. He made a shooing gesture: “Boys, go on.”

Beyond that, the al-Saud family has no desire to immerse itself in Yemen, the prince maintained. He cited the second cautionary tale on Yemen from the late King Abdul Aziz: In the 1930s, the king’s sons Saud and Faisal entered Yemen in a dispute with the then-ruling Yemeni imams. Faisal, in his youthful enthusiasm, raced with his troops far down the Yemeni coast and urged his father to take advantage of his military advance.

No, pull back to the border, King Abdul Aziz is supposed to have directed his headstrong son. “That is Yemen. You don’t stay in Yemen.”

*Ellen Knickmeyer is a former Washington Post Middle East bureau chief and Associated Press Africa bureau chief. The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting contributed to the costs of reporting this article.*



## Hands off the wheel

*By Cameron Abadi, May 26, 2011*

If this year’s Arab freedom movements had a soundtrack, it’d be an eclectic assortment, from the densely operatic story line that saw the deposing of Hosni Mubarak, to the thunderous mortars and bomb blasts of Libya, to the staccato work of government snipers in Syria. The most recent track would likely prove to be among the more modest: the car horns currently being honked across Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has largely been immune to the uprisings and revolutions sweeping the region: Minor rumblings by the Shiite minority in the Eastern Province were quickly quieted, and the government handed out billions of dollars to citizens in a pre-emptive measure to quell any would-be dissent. But a campaign by Saudi women claiming the right to drive — the conservative Gulf monarchy is the

only country in the world that forbids women to operate automobiles — threatens to shake up the status quo.

As in neighboring countries, the protests are relying on civil disobedience: One of the organizers of the movement, Manal al-Sharif, was arrested by Saudi authorities on Sunday, May 22, after twice filming herself driving a car in her hometown of Dammam and posting the videos to YouTube. Despite the demonstrative arrest, the movement shows little sign of slowing down: A lively Twitter campaign named Women2Drive is calling for women across Saudi Arabia to take to the streets (in automobiles) on June 17.

The stakes may not seem as high as those that have toppled dictators elsewhere in the region, but the Saudi monarchy is quickly moving to extinguish the threat to its absolute rule. And that includes offering a blanket defense of the status quo, women-free roads included. From Riyadh's perspective, there are apparently plenty of good reasons — theological, sociological, biological — that women shouldn't be allowed to get behind the wheel. The Saudi monarchy has seen fit in recent months to trot each out for a spin in the national media (exclusively owned, natch, by Saudis close to the royal family).

All in all, it's an impressive display of pseudo-intellectual apologetics. Judges for the Saudi Pulitzers have no doubt already taken note, but here's a digest for the rest of us.

### **You're not oppressed, you're a princess!**

In *Arab News*, Rima al-Mukhtar argues that Saudi women don't really want to drive to begin with. "To them," she writes, "driving is a hassle and not appropriate for Saudi Arabia" because Saudi women usually hire drivers to chauffeur them wherever they need to go. "Usually, only the rich and famous have their own chauffeur," she adds, "but in Saudi Arabia almost everyone has one." She quotes several Saudi women who are loath to assume the tiresome responsibility of having to steer their own vehicles. "When I travel to a country where I can drive," says Zaina al-Salem, a 29-year-old banker, "I'm usually burdened about the

part when I get to park my car and walk all the way to the store." (Walking's bad enough, but when you throw in the humidity? Forget about it!) Shahad Ibrahim adds, "I feel like a princess where my driver takes me everywhere I want without complaint."

### **You steer, I leer.**

In the newspaper *Asharq Alawsat*, Salem Salman reviews a play titled "Profit Becomes a Loss," performed at Riyadh's Disabled Children's Association Theater. (Off-off Broadway, then?) Drawing on the great classics of the stage, the play "deals mainly with the issue of female driving," dramatizing the plight of women who mistakenly associate freedom of movement with true liberation. Far from being ennobled by their ability to drive automobiles, the characters in the play realize they've been diminished by their exposure to the broader culture — in essence, driving meant being harassed by constant catcalls. Apparently, the playwright felt so strongly about the point that, by play's end, he abandoned all pretense of subtlety and went straight to the CliffsNotes version. The concluding words, spoken by a forlorn woman driver, read: "Help me, people, I'm afraid to drive.... We do not want this civilization.... So write this down; forget about driving." Bravo?

### **The king knows best.**

Abdul Rahman al-Rashed, in *Asharq Alawsat*, eschews a defense of the ban in favor of attacking the methods used by the organizers of the movement. The campaign, you see, is operating under the mistaken assumption that Saudi Arabia is a *democracy*. By compiling petitions and the like, the activists are trying "to take a shortcut with regards to convincing the government to change its position on the issue." Of course, it's the government's job to make policy on the basis of what the "overwhelming majority" — as opposed to a shortsighted, if democratically legitimate "slim majority" — of Saudi society wants. "An overwhelming majority is beneficial in this case as it would allow the idea to become reality with only a little official push," he notes. "A slim majority on the other hand would result in bitter social and political division."

Al-Rashed further suggests that Saudi activists take the government's word that it's correctly divining the public will — not least because objective measures of public opinion are unavailable. Why's that? Because they're illegal, of course! "Is there truly public support towards ending the ban on women driving? Nobody knows," he writes. That's your classic straight-talking al-Rashed: holding the Saudi public accountable for the ignorance that's been forcibly imposed on it by the government.

The editor in chief of *Asharq Alawsat*, Tariq Alhomayed, takes a similar tack, warning against unnecessarily politicizing the issue. Taking the technocratic route, he suggests the "formation of a committee to study the issue" and the creation of a pilot program that would allow Saudi women "of a certain age" to begin driving in certain cities. That said, this is a terrible idea: We presume Alhomayed has never been to Boca Raton.

#### **God says women drivers are evil and deserve to die.**

And then there's this. The Saudi-owned Elaph.com website reports on the meditations of Saudi cleric Shaykh Abd-al-Rahman al-Barrak against women who wish to drive cars. "What they are intending to do is forbidden and they

thus become the keys to evil in this country," he writes, calling them "westernized women seeking to westernize this country." Name-calling aside, al-Barrak is drawing on an extremist Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, according to which God forbids any mixed-gender mingling outside the family. Giving women the freedom to move around on their own would be to tempt God's wrath.

In fact, al-Barrak predicts the activists will be struck dead: "They will die, God willing, and will not enjoy this." The reporter for Elaph.com, with an impressive degree of restraint, refers to this as "biting criticism." (Al-Barrak seems to enjoy something of a contrarian reputation among the Wahhabi chattering classes: Earlier this year, he endorsed a fatwa that calls for the demolition and subsequent redesigning of Mecca's Kaaba — Islam's holiest site — so as to avoid gender mixing. Biting!)

At least no one offered up the old saw that women aren't any good at driving. Probably because on that score Saudi women are painfully aware that their male counterparts aren't in any position to judge.

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## **Saudi Arabia Strikes Back**

### **The House of Saud's intervention in Bahrain is a slap in the face of the United States, and a setback for peace on the island.**

*By Jean-François Seznec, March 14, 2011*

One thousand "lightly armed" Saudi troops and an unspecified number of troops from the United Arab Emirates entered Bahrain on the morning of March 14, in a bid to end the country's month-long political crisis. They were reportedly heading for the town of Riffa, the stronghold of the ruling Khalifa family. The troops' task,

apparently, was to protect the oil installations and basic infrastructure from the demonstrators.

The Arab intervention marks a dramatic escalation of Bahrain's political crisis, which has pitted the country's disgruntled Shi'ite majority against the Sunni ruling family

— and has also been exacerbated by quarrels between hard-liners and liberals within the Khalifa clan. The clashes between protesters and government forces worsened over the weekend, when the security services beat back demonstrators trying to block the highway to the capital of Manama’s Financial Harbor. The protesters’ disruption of the harbor, which was reportedly purchased by the conservative Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa for one dinar, was an important symbolic gesture by the opposition.

For the United States, the intervention is a slap in the face. On Saturday, March 12, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited Bahrain, where he called for real reforms to the country’s political system and criticized “baby steps,” which he said would be insufficient to defuse the crisis. The Saudis were called in within a few hours of Gates’s departure, however, showing their disdain for his efforts to reach a negotiated solution. By acting so soon after his visit, Saudi Arabia made the United States look at best irrelevant to events in Bahrain, and from the Shiite opposition’s point of view, even complicit in the Saudi military intervention.

The number of foreign troop is so far very small and should not make one iota of difference in Bahrain’s balance of power. The Bahraini military already total 30,000 troops, all of whom are Sunnis. They are under control of Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa and supposedly fully faithful to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. Bahrain also has a similar number of police and general security forces, mainly mercenaries from Baluchistan, Yemen, and Syria, reputed to be controlled by the prime minister and his followers in the family.

At this time, therefore, the Saudi intervention is largely a symbolic maneuver. It is so far not an effort to quell the unrest, but intended to scare the more extreme Shiite groups into allowing negotiations to go forward. The crown prince recently laid out six main issues to be discussed in talks, including the establishment of an elected parliament empowered to affect government policy, fairly demarcated electoral constituencies, steps

to combat financial and administrative corruption, and moves to limit sectarian polarization. He notably failed to mention one of the opposition’s primary demands — the prime minister’s resignation.

The Saudi move, however, risks backfiring. It is extremely unlikely that the Saudi troops’ presence will entice moderate Shiite and Sunni opposition figures to come to the table — the intervention will force them to harden their position for fear of being seen as Saudi stooges. The demands of the more extreme groups, such as the Shiite al-Haq party, are also likely to increase prior to negotiations. These elements, having seen job opportunities go to foreign workers and political power dominated by the ruling family for decades, have grown steadily disenchanted with prospects of talks.

The crown prince is well aware that the Saudi intervention only makes a negotiated solution to this crisis more challenging, so it is difficult to imagine that he invited the Saudis into Bahrain. The more liberal Khalifas, such as the crown prince, know very well that the only way out of the crisis is to obtain the resignation of the prime minister and some of the more extreme Sunni ministers.

However, the prime minister — with whom Gates did not meet during his weekend visit — does not appear to have any intention of resigning and is the most likely figure behind the invitation to the Saudis to intervene. Although details are still sketchy, he is likely joining with the Saudi king to pass the message to the United States that he is in charge and no one can tell him what to do. Furthermore, it signals that the Saudis agree with Bahrain’s conservatives that the Shiite must be reined in rather than negotiated with, even at the cost of telling the United States to kiss off.

The Saudi intervention may also have been precipitated by the deepening rift between the extreme Sunni elements and the liberal Khalifas. If the Saudis are indeed heading to Riffa, it is possible they are tasked with defending the Khalifa stronghold not so much against the Shiite rabble but against the Bahraini military, which is under the command of the crown prince. The Saudi intervention

would therefore be an effort by the prime minister and the Saudis to pressure the crown prince into not giving in to the protesters' demands and to fall in line with their plans to secure Bahrain as the personal fiefdom of the Khalifas and their tribal allies.

Whatever the case, the future appears bleak. The Saudi intervention will no doubt provoke a reaction from Iran, which will argue that their Shiite brothers are being systematically oppressed. Any troubles caused by Bahraini Shiites will only provoke further Saudi intervention. Ultimately, the island risks falling under de facto, if not de jure, Saudi control.

The Saudi intervention, however small, is therefore a major step backward for the region. It represents a major slap in the face to the United States, a defeat for the liberal Shiite and Sunni elements in Bahrain, and ultimately a

catastrophe for the entire Khalifa family, both the liberal and conservative wings, who may have just surrendered their power to the giant next door.

Ultimately, this may also be a defeat for Saudi Arabia as well. The Saudis have long tried to avoid overt interventions in their neighbors' affairs. They intervened once during the 1994 upheavals in Bahrain and in the past two years have been active on the Yemeni border — but under King Abdullah they have tried to arbitrate, rather than dominate, events on the Arabian Peninsula. Their decision to intervene directly in Bahrain's affairs suggests a weakness in the Saudi leadership and Riyadh's surrender to the more conservative elements in the country.

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## The Bahrain crisis and its regional dangers

*Posted By Salman Shaikh, March 23, 2011*

While U.S. and international attention is focused largely elsewhere in the region, especially Libya, the violent crackdown against protestors in the tiny island kingdom of Bahrain may well pose a bigger threat to the entire region's stability. The Bahrain situation is exposing long simmering tensions and rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran and carries the danger that it will trigger the next regional war. Such a scenario would likely draw in the United States at a time when its relationships with key allies in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, are under strain. Urgent action is therefore needed to de-escalate the situation in Bahrain and create the trust necessary for the government and opposition to start a much delayed national dialogue that charts the future of the country.

Worryingly, a senior unidentified Saudi official has described the mission of Saudi and other GCC troops to support the Bahraini security forces as "open-ended." A three month state of emergency has led to a campaign of house raids and arrests that have included the leaders of the main opposition parties, as well as human rights activists and other dissidents. There are also mounting concerns that these combined security forces are using disproportionate force and committing serious violations of international law and humanitarian law. The space for dialogue seems to be rapidly closing.

In the days ahead, we are likely to see a deepening of the culture of resistance in Bahrain. In particular, calls

for dialogue to establish a constitutional monarchy may be swept away by more radical groups and the combative youth who increasingly supports them. Further radicalization of Bahrainis seems inevitable the longer the current impasse lasts, carrying with it the real danger that the country will be mired in a full blown civil war.

King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa's invitation of the GCC forces has also posed new dilemmas and real dangers for the Gulf and the wider Middle East. It is a crisis which is assuming worrying regional and sectarian dimensions. If the Tunisian revolt was the springboard for the revolution in Egypt and its catalytic effect on the peoples of the region, the crisis in Bahrain signals the first battle in the shaping of the new Middle East. Instead of the focus being on the people's revolts for dignity, justice, and greater democratic representation that are transforming the region, we are slipping back into the old narratives that so dominated the region over the past two decades.

These decades were defined by three main narratives: the struggle between western-backed "moderates" and Iranian and Syrian backed "militants" such as Hamas and Hezbollah; the fight against Islamic extremism, particularly al Qaeda and the "war on terror" following September 11; and the growing mistrust between Shiites and Sunnis, especially following the ouster of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. On top of these dynamics, the total failure of Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts and concern for Iran's nuclear ambitions have led many to predict that the region is heading toward war.

In the midst of the Arab peoples' awakenings of 2011, the Bahrain crisis has once again raised these specters. The result may be the transformation of the existing Saudi-Iranian "Cold War" to direct confrontations and the intensification of "proxy conflicts," already prevalent in the region.

For its part, the Iranian regime has responded swiftly to events in Bahrain, calling the GCC move an "occupation" and an "invasion" even as it continues to crush its own people's Green Revolution. As the situation in Bahrain

deteriorates, Iran may seek creative ways to interfere, perhaps by using its proxies in Lebanon or Iraq. Iraq, Lebanon, and Hamas-led Gaza provide examples of Iran's ability to capitalize on chaos and conflict to further its interests in the region.

Worryingly, on Saturday, the Basij militia was reported to have attacked the Saudi consulate in the northern Iranian town of Mashhad. The Hezbollah chief also weighed in on Saturday by likening the Khalifa family to the Mubarak or Gaddafi families and called on his Bahrain "brothers to resist in defending your rights." He also added for good measure that "your blood and wounds will defeat the tyrants." The Bahrain government reacted angrily, called Nasrallah's speech a "terrorist speech" and warned the Lebanese government that it would hold it responsible for such statements "which would undoubtedly impact on bilateral relations."

The situation in Bahrain may well be providing Iran the opportunity to influence the emerging new regional order, which it has not been instrumental in creating or shaping until now.

The Bahrain crisis is also showing the limits of U.S. influence and power in a region vital to U.S. interests. The Obama administration's calls to speed up political reforms and its more recent condemnation of the crackdown have fallen on deaf ears in Manama. Instead, King Hamad has sought counsel or been influenced by Bahrain's big brother, Saudi Arabia. For their part, the Saudis, increasingly upset with Washington, have warned both the United States and Iran not to interfere in Bahrain's affairs. We really are in uncharted territory.

Bahrain represents the clearest indication of a rupture in Saudi-U.S. relations. As both struggle to manage the sweeping changes in the region, they seem to be on starkly different paths. Saudi Arabia, in particular, may have already determined that the United States, especially President Obama, cannot be relied upon to safeguard well-established mutual interests in the region, including the protection of the Kingdom and the House of Saud itself.

If this is the case, U.S. influence on Saudi Arabia may be nose-diving at a time when it is most needed. As the region enters a period of prolonged instability, increasingly sharp disagreements between the United States and Saudi Arabia may well be the biggest casualty of the Bahrain crisis.

This could result in Saudi ambivalence about raising its own output to keeping oil prices down — something which would have a direct effect on gas prices in the United States and internationally. More notably, Saudi leadership may make the GCC less reliant on U.S. leadership and diminish further U.S. influence and power in the region. Nevertheless, the United States, Europe, and others in the region must not falter in their calls to end the crackdown and pursue a political solution to the Bahrain crisis. Only a political solution can halt Bahrain's slide to civil war and avert greater regional fallout.

The path to such a solution can be achieved in two steps: firstly by establishing a truce based on the ending of opposition protests, the release of all opposition leaders

and activists, and the withdrawal from Bahrain of all GCC forces. Secondly, a time-bound national dialogue of two months should be possible based on the principles of enhancing political representation and accountability and the sharing of power. This dialogue should also serve as the basis for talks aimed at achieving the far-reaching goal of a “constitutional or parliamentary monarchy” in the country. It is a goal that King Hamad has previously set and which the mainstream opposition parties are demanding. It is now time to put aside sectarian concerns and deep seated existential fears and get on with the job of achieving this for the future of Bahrain, the Gulf region, and the entire Middle East.

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## The GCC shows its true colors

*Posted By Mohammed Ayoob, Wednesday, March 16, 2011*

Two-thousand Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) troops, most of them from Saudi Arabia, entered Bahrain on Monday — ostensibly to provide security to government installations “threatened” by protestors. In fact, such a show of force, with more troops on the way, is an attempt by the Saudi-led GCC to stiffen the resolve of the ruling house in Bahrain to put down the democracy protests if need be with force. The violence unleashed by the Bahraini army and police against peaceful protestors on Tuesday was the direct outcome of the Saudi/GCC military intervention.

Various interpretations have been put forward as to the reasons behind the Saudi-led military intervention. These include pre-empting the emergence of a pro-Iranian, Shia-dominated government in Bahrain and tilting the balance in favor of the hard-line faction among the al-Khalifa and against the more moderate faction allegedly led by the crown prince.

What is missing from these explanations is a discussion of the essential nature of the GCC that has propelled it to intervene in the internal affairs of a member country.



The Gulf Cooperation Council was established in 1981 in the wake of the Iranian revolution, ostensibly to promote economic cooperation and defend its members against external threats. However, it quickly became clear that given the similar nature of oil producing rentier economies in the Gulf, talk about increasing economic exchange was merely a façade. So was the argument that the Gulf monarchies needed an organization to coordinate their external security policies. The only act of major security cooperation they engaged in was to supply billions of dollars to the Saddam regime in Iraq, first to help it invade Iran in 1980 and then to stave off an Iranian victory that seemed imminent between 1982 and 1984.

Their lack of capacity to protect themselves against external threats was clearly demonstrated in 1990 when Iraq occupied Kuwait. Despite the billions spent by Saudi Arabia in particular to acquire state of the art weaponry from the United States, the kingdom had to invite in a half million American troops to defend itself and eventually force Iraq out of Kuwait. It was clear that the Gulf monarchies, above all Saudi Arabia, the largest and most powerful among them, were incapable of defending themselves against external threats, actual or presumed, without American boots on the ground.

The real reason for the establishment of the GCC in 1981 was not defense against external enemies threatening the security of GCC states but cooperation against domestic challenges to authoritarian regimes. Its main task was and continues to be coordination of internal security measures, including sharing of intelligence, aimed at controlling and suppressing the populations of member states in order to provide security to the autocratic monarchies of the Persian Gulf. The establishment of the GCC was in large measure a reaction on the part of the Gulf monarchies to

the Iranian revolution of 1979 in which people's power toppled the strongest autocracy in the neighborhood. The Arab autocracies of the Gulf did not want to share the Shah's fate.

That ensuring the security of autocratic regimes was the principal reason for the existence of GCC has become crystal clear with the military intervention by Saudi-led forces in Bahrain to put down the democracy movement and prevent the freedom contagion from spreading to other parts of the Gulf. It is true that the Saudis are apprehensive of the Shia majority coming to power in Bahrain because of the impact it could have on its own restive Shia minority in the oil-rich east of the country. Riyadh is also worried about the impact of a change in regime in Bahrain on the balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the region. (One can, however, argue that Saudi military intervention in Bahrain's affairs will in fact redound to Iran's benefit in the long run by further delegitimizing the al-Khalifa rule in Bahrain).

But these are secondary explanations. The primary concern of the Arab autocracies in the Gulf is the suppression of democratic movements regardless of the sectarian character of the populations engaging in democratic struggles. They are worried that if any of the autocracies fall or even reach a substantial compromise with democratic movements it will have a domino effect in the entire Gulf region consigning all of them to the dustbin of history. The GCC was established as an instrument to protect and prolong autocratic rule on the Arabian littoral of the Gulf. Its military operation in Bahrain has clearly shown this true colors.

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## How Saudi Arabia and Qatar Became Friends Again And why their rapprochement could mean an early end for the Arab Spring.

By Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, July 21, 2011

In the spring of 2006, Qatar's then energy minister broke his silence on a stalled, multibillion-dollar project to supply Qatari gas to Kuwait. "We have received no clearance from Saudi Arabia" he said. "Hence it is not feasible." Fast-forward five years and things couldn't look more different.

The gas-supply project is emblematic of the hot-cold relationship between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The deal was initially proposed by the Qataris in 2001, denied permission by the Saudis, then approved in 2003, and then denied once again in 2006. The roller-coaster-like diplomatic relations between the two energy-rich neighbors dates back to 1992, when a border clash caused the death of two guards. Relations went downhill from there.

Riyadh's vocal objections to Doha's plans stretched to a proposed bridge between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as a bilateral gas pipeline now in operation, which according to Reuters prompted the kingdom to send official letters in 2006 to the pipeline's minority partners, France's Total and the United States' Occidental Petroleum Corp., questioning its proposed route.

Saudi Arabia's then crown prince, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, boycotted a summit of Islamic states in Qatar in 2000 to protest the presence of the Israeli trade office in Doha. Riyadh then withdrew its ambassador to Qatar in 2002 following controversial comments made by Saudi dissidents on Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite channel.

The dispute took a personal tone when lawyers for Qatar's first lady, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Missned, argued in a libel case she won against a London-based Arabic newspaper in 2005 that the paper was, as *Dawn* reported, "controlled by Saudi intelligence paymasters who used the newspaper as a mouthpiece for a propaganda campaign

against Qatar and its leadership." In April 2008, the London-based, Saudi-owned Arabic daily *Asharq Al-Awsat* apologized for printing three "wholly untrue" articles back in 2006 alleging that Qatar's prime minister had visited Israel in secret.

During its decade of cold relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar warmed up to Syria, the leader of the so-called resistance axis in Arab politics. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani were frequent visitors to each other's countries, and Qatari investors poured billions of dollars into the struggling Syrian economy. Both states, along with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, were seen as a regional counterbalance to the pro-Western axis of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. (The Saudis made their displeasure with Qatar's maverick policies clear on a number of occasions. Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt, refused to attend a January 2009 summit in Qatar supported by Syria and Hamas and instead held another summit in Riyadh just one day before.)

Wishing to put an end to the bad blood, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani, widely seen as the architect of Qatar's foreign policy, accompanied the emir on a surprise visit to Riyadh in September 2007. Relations quickly improved following that visit, with the Saudi monarch attending the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Doha that December. By next March, the new Saudi crown prince, Sultan, had paid a three-day visit to Doha, the first since 2002. In July 2008, the Saudis played host to a high-level summit in Jeddah that saw the two neighbors demarcate their border and set up a joint council to be chaired by both states' crown princes — who are more than 50 years apart in age — to strengthen political, security, financial, economic, commercial, investment, cultural, and media relations.

It was perhaps that last aspect of the pact that drew the most attention. The *New York Times* reported in 2008 that the Qatari emir had taken the chairman and general manager of Al Jazeera with him to Riyadh in September 2007. One Al Jazeera employee claimed in an email message to the *Times* that “Orders were given not to tackle any Saudi issue without referring to the higher management” and that subsequently “All dissident voices disappeared from our screens.” Al Jazeera is now accused of rarely taking on sensitive topics involving its larger neighbor.

Relations hit a high in May 2010 when the Qatari emir pardoned — upon King Abdullah’s request — an undisclosed number of Saudis who were accused by Doha of taking part in a 1996 coup led by loyalists of Sheikh Hamad’s ousted father. Upon arriving in Saudi Arabia, the released prisoners were received by the crown prince in his palace in Jeddah.

Despite the rapprochement, not all was smooth sailing between the two countries, especially when it concerned Syria. In 2008, the Saudi foreign minister, according to Syrian government-controlled newspaper *Teshreen*, expressed objections to Qatar’s attempts to resolve the political crisis in Lebanon, which traditionally falls under Saudi-Syrian influence. On another occasion in 2009, Kuwait’s *Al Rai* newspaper quoted a Qatari official saying that Damascus had rejected Qatari efforts to resolve yet another Lebanese cabinet formation crisis by interceding with the Saudis.

Despite the rapprochement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the two states have reacted differently to the Arab Spring. While Qatar’s support for this year’s Egyptian revolution was evident in Al Jazeera’s coverage, Saudi Arabia continued expressing support for President Hosni Mubarak until the very end. And despite the cold relations between Libya and Saudi Arabia due to an alleged 2003 assassination attempt against then Crown Prince Abdullah, the Saudis never called on Muammar al-Qaddafi to step down. Yet not only did Qatar call on the Libyan leader to go, but it was also the first Arab country to commit to the NATO-led military effort in the North African state.

At first, Doha and Riyadh appeared to see eye to eye on Syria. On April 2, shortly after the protests erupted in Syria, Qatar’s emir dispatched his prime minister to Damascus to deliver a message of “support for Syria in the face of efforts to undermine the country’s security and stability,” as reported by Syrian state media. However, relations between Qatar and Syria had deteriorated so much by July 18 that Qatar suspended operations at its embassy in Damascus and withdrew its ambassador in yet another major surprise of the Arab Spring, especially considering the close relations of both states.

In the intervening months, Al Jazeera had noticeably amped up its coverage of the Syrian protest movement, privileging YouTube clips and eyewitness accounts over government claims that the protests were a foreign-backed Islamist conspiracy. Syrian channels retaliated by blaming Qatar for the unrest, at one point even showing bags of drugs with the Al Jazeera label, and by intimating that some \$6 billion in Qatari investments were at risk. A senior Qatari official said his country might resort to international law to sue Syria while the Qatari press said that Syrian channels devoted hours every day to “portray Qatar in a bad light.”

What can explain this dramatic shift in Qatar-Syria relations? As early as March 25, Egyptian-born Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a popular religious scholar who for many years maintained a weekly show on Al Jazeera and who is a longtime member of the Muslim Brotherhood, declared his full and emphatic support for the Syrian revolution in a Friday sermon. “Winds of change [are] not far from Syria,” Qaradawi declared, citing the “historical ... political bond” between Egypt and Syria, and proceeded to condemn Syria’s “suppressive regime” and its “atrocities.” Bouthaina Shaaban, an advisor to the Syrian president, immediately singled out Qaradawi for what she claimed was inciting a sectarian uprising.

Perhaps Qaradawi’s influence and presence in Qatar, where he has lived since 1961, explains why Doha was willing to publicly break with Assad while Saudi Arabia has maintained some level of support. The Syrian revolt, like

Egypt's, has been partially led by the country's outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, which regularly meets with liberals and other opposition factions to plan for a post-Assad Syria. Qatar, which like Saudi Arabia officially practices a Wahhabi version of Islam, evidently feels more comfortable with the Brotherhood sharing power than do the Saudis. Saudi Arabia may also be concerned for the stability of Lebanon, which would inevitably be affected by a regime collapse in Syria.

Another interesting twist will be how Iran reacts to Qatar's now-frozen relations with Assad. Iran and Qatar share control of the world's largest gas field, obliging Doha to maintain cordial relations with Tehran — yet Iran is deeply invested in Assad's survival, to the point of allegedly sending trainers and billions of dollars worth of cash to help him contain the revolt.

Meanwhile, Qatari and Saudi ties grow ever warmer. In the past few weeks, the number of weekly flights Qatar Airways has been allowed to operate to Saudi Arabia increased from 35 to 60. In September, a delegation of 100 Saudi businessmen will visit Qatar to discuss joint business opportunities, including the establishment of a Saudi-

Qatari bank and joint industrial zone. Al Jazeera, long banned in the kingdom, has also been given the green light to set up a Saudi bureau.

The friendly relations are likely to continue — at least until 2022, when Doha plays host to the FIFA World Cup, a marquis global event for which it has earmarked anywhere between \$65 billion and \$100 billion and invested considerable political capital. For the tournament to go as smoothly as possible, a pragmatic Qatar will need the full cooperation of its largest and only land neighbor. Saudi firms will doubtless win lucrative infrastructure contracts or supply essential raw materials to Qatar over the coming decade, and we will likely see Doha's freewheeling foreign policy stay within the bounds of Riyadh's interests. Above all, Qatar will spare no effort to make certain that nothing stands in the way of its global coming-out party.

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## The maybe greater GCC

*By Jane Kinninmont, May 16, 2011*

The Arab Spring has brought a newfound sense of purpose to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a six-member club of mostly Sunni oil-exporting Arab monarchies. Despite regular declarations of brotherly love at expensive summits, the GCC's plans for further integration have been hampered for years by political tensions between the member states. As recently as January, tensions flared between Oman and the UAE after the discovery

of an alleged Emirati spy ring infiltrating the Omani government. Despite a shared fear of Iranian power, the GCC rarely seemed an effective or cohesive foreign policy player.

Now, however, the GCC is making a marked display of unity and is seeking to project itself as a regional actor in four very different initiatives. A GCC mediation effort

in Yemen seeks to bring about an orderly transition from the challenged Presidency of Ali Abdullah Saleh. GCC backing for the NATO-led intervention in Libya has offered an unprecedented Arab cover to Western intervention in the internal affairs of an Arab state. The deployment of “Peninsula Shield” forces in Bahrain, where the government has used force to put down a major uprising, activates a mutual security pact in the GCC’s charter, although questions have been raised about whether this was ever supposed to cover internal uprisings. Finally, the GCC is also taking a newly expansionary stance, announcing that it would accept membership bids from Jordan and Morocco, a move that would take it beyond a sub regional bloc into an international alliance of like-minded regimes resisting the regional moves towards greater democracy. Can the GCC sustain this newfound activism and invent a new regional role?

The GCC is 30-years-old this year — a relatively lengthy history given that most of the Gulf states have been independent for just 40 years. It is an alliance that has always been shaped by shared threat perceptions. Although initial efforts to promote intra-Gulf co-operation in the 1970s had little effect, the GCC came together as a bloc in 1981, after the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year, and the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in 1980, all of which created shared security challenges for the Gulf. The GCC’s founding first charter largely focused on economic and cultural co-operation, but in 1984, it moved to set up a joint defense force, the Peninsula Shield. In reality the GCC countries have always remained dependent on U.S. security guarantees, as was highlighted in the 1990-91 Gulf war, and the institution has been as busy with internal squabbling as with cooperation.

In recent years, the GCC project has focused mainly on economic integration. It makes sense: the combined GDP of the six countries would be close to \$1 trillion, one-fifth the size of China, a far more attractive market than any of the individual economies would be on their own. The six members — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar — are all relatively wealthy, oil-dependent

monarchies with similar economic development priorities and could benefit from greater economic co-operation and co-ordination. The six set up a customs union in 2002. A common market was declared in 2007 but is yet to become a reality. The bloc has been negotiating a free-trade deal with the EU for more than a decade. And there have been longstanding talks about launching a single currency.

The latter should be economically straightforward — five of the member states already peg their currencies to the dollar, while Kuwait uses a currency basket that is dominated by the dollar — but has proven politically difficult. This is partly because the smaller GCC states have traditionally been wary of the potential for Saudi Arabia, by far the largest of the six, to dominate their joint efforts. Indeed, the UAE pulled out of the single-currency project in 2009 after Abu Dhabi’s bid to host a Gulf monetary council was rebuffed in favor of Riyadh. Such experiences have led to a general cynicism about GCC integration plans.

Three factors have prompted this year’s apparently renewed sense of unity in the face of common threat perceptions. One is the unrest across the Arab world, which has emboldened oppositionists and prompted protests in the Gulf too, most dramatically in Bahrain. (The GCC has announced a \$20 billion fund for economic assistance to Bahrain and Oman over the next 10 years.) Another is the belief among some Gulf policymakers that Iran is meddling in Bahrain, although this seems to be stoked more by loud voices in the Iranian media than by hard evidence. The third is an underlying concern, in some quarters at least, about the long-term future of Western alliances with the Gulf, given the West’s withdrawal of support from former Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, once the strength of popular opposition in Egypt had become clear. Mr. Mubarak was a regular visitor to the Gulf, where personal relationships are profoundly important in politics, and the prospect of him being tried and possibly even executed has outraged his friends in the Gulf, even if many young Gulf nationals watched the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings with enthusiasm. There is also a marked difference of opinion between Western

countries and the Gulf states over Bahrain; while Bahrain has blamed this year's uprising on a foreign plot, the U.S. and UK believe it is driven by domestic factors, and have said as much.

Given all this, it is likely that over the long term, the GCC states will be looking to gradually reduce their dependence on the U.S. security umbrella in the Gulf, both by building new alliances and by trying to strengthen their own security forces. Recent signs of this include this year's deployment of 130 South Korean special forces to train their Emirati counterparts, as well as the news that the crown prince of Abu Dhabi has hired Erik Prince\* — the former owner of Blackwater, the private U.S. security firm that changed its name to Xe Services after some of its staff were prosecuted for shooting Iraqi civilians — to establish a 800-strong contingent of foreign fighters.

That said, recent differences between the Gulf and the West shouldn't be exaggerated, and it is likely that the U.S. will remain the Gulf's main external security backer for the foreseeable future, given its interest in ensuring the free flow of oil. Indeed, Bahrain's brutal repression of a largely peaceful opposition movements appears to have had little effect on the strong diplomatic, financial, economic, military and security relations between the U.S. and UK on one hand and the Gulf on the other. This partly reflects the strength of GCC backing — led by Saudi Arabia — for Bahrain's rulers, which sends the West the message that taking on the government of Bahrain would also mean taking on the world's largest oil exporter, as the GCC is presenting a united front.

But how real is this apparent unity? Each of the GCC countries has responded differently to the Arab uprisings — and each has a different relationship with Iran. Qatar is perhaps the most confident that domestic unrest is unlikely to be a factor, as its tiny population has benefitted from dramatic economic growth and state welfare initiatives since the current emir came to power. It has thus been happy to allow the broadcaster it finances, *Al Jazeera*, to take a positive view of the uprisings in most of the rest of the region, with the glaring exception of Bahrain. Qatar

has gone further than any of the other five countries in supporting the Libyan opposition, with news emerging that Qatari military advisors are training opposition fighters on the ground in Libya, while the country is also facilitating oil exports and fuel imports for the opposition (prompting Libya's state oil company to complain to OPEC). And it was the first GCC state to pull out of the Yemen mediation effort in frustration.

The UAE would also seem to have little to fear in terms of domestic protests, as its citizenry is only a little larger and a little less rich than Qatar's. Yet it clearly feels jumpy; four citizens have recently been arrested after calling for a democratic parliament. Its recent mending of fences with Saudi Arabia — after tensions over borders and customs issues in the past few years — is a key driving force behind this more united GCC. Saudi Arabia is probably the most concerned about Iranian expansionism, closely followed by the UAE, which has to strike a balance between Abu Dhabi's hawkish attitude to a country that occupies three islands claimed by the UAE and Dubai's strong trading relationship with Iran. By contrast, Oman and Qatar have sought to balance their Arab alliances with relatively good relations with Iran.

It is clear that the GCC deployment in Bahrain is a Saudi-led initiative, with the UAE and later Qatar joining in to provide a degree of GCC legitimacy. Kuwait's stance has been affected by its uniquely strong parliament and its desire to maintain harmonious relations between its Sunni majority and its relatively well-integrated Shia minority, reckoned at around a third of the population. It has therefore opted only to send naval vessels, in line with the Peninsula Shield's stated commitment to protect GCC members against external threats, after (mostly Shia) Kuwaiti MPs objected to sending troops to assist a government suppressing an internal uprising. For its part, Oman is not directly involved in the deployment; it has been busy working out a very different response to its own protests, by changing many key ministers and promising political reforms.

Finally, the discussion about including Jordan and Morocco is likely to upset the GCC's Arab Gulf neighbors, Yemen

and Iraq, who are natural economic partners for the GCC states given their need for capital and their abundance of labor, but don't fall into the Sunni monarchy camp. Others may be more enthusiastic; the Palestinian ambassador to the UAE has already volunteered Palestinian membership. The talk of expansion should be treated with skepticism given the history of progress on GCC initiatives. It may just be a symbolic message. Moreover, the EU experience shows that expansion makes for a more attractive economic bloc — but an even harder time coming up with a coherent foreign policy. Over the next few years, the GCC countries are likely to respond quite differently to

internal pressures for political reform. This suggests they will struggle to find a unified policy toward an Arab region that seems set for further dramatic changes.

\*Correction: A previous version of this sentence stated that Xe Services was hired by the UAE. In fact, it is Erik Prince, who no longer works for the private security company, who was hired.

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## What Saudis really think about Iran

*By F. Gregory Gause III, May 6, 2010*

There is not much public debate in Saudi Arabia on foreign-policy issues. Even with the greater media openness of the last five years or so, critiques of Saudi foreign policy from within the country are rare. But there is a new level of public debate about foreign policy in Saudi Arabia, not so much in the media as in discussion groups and private conversations. The dominant public discourse on foreign policy continues to be very Arab-Israeli focused, very Arab nationalist/pro-Palestinian in nature, and not very interesting. We have yet to see anything approaching a public discussion on whether Saudi Arabia should go nuclear if Iran does the same. But another taboo in the Saudi public sphere — a real critique of the country's foreign policy — is being confronted. The mood of these new critics seems to be broadly realist, focused on power, nationalist, and impatient for a more assertive Saudi foreign policy.

What I heard during my recent stay in Saudi Arabia (from January to April of this year) is captured in an interesting

article by Saud Abd al-Aziz Kabili in the May 2 edition of the Saudi newspaper *al-Watan*. The author, who regularly comments on foreign-policy issues in *al-Watan*, takes as his starting point an interview that former ambassador to the United States and former head of foreign intelligence Prince Turki al-Faisal, had with two well-known Saudi journalists — Jamal Khashoggi and Mishari al-Dhiyadi. Kabili was less interested in what Prince Turki said and more interested in the questions that the two journalists pressed on him, which Kabili saw as based on an emerging critique within the country of the rather cautious and reactive Saudi foreign-policy tradition.

Kabili identifies this critique with a group of young, American-educated writers and thinkers who have rejected both the Arab nationalist and the Islamist frameworks for understanding regional politics. This group, in Kabili's view, is both very nationalist, in that they make Saudi interests the cornerstone of their foreign-policy analysis, and very "realist" in international relations theory terms, in that they



view the region on the basis of state actors and balances of power. Kabili says that this group believes that Saudi foreign policy has been too passive in the regional arena, unwilling to take the initiative and use Saudi power to achieve national goals. Although he does not identify Iran specifically, my past reading of both Khashogji and Dhiyadi and their pretty harsh critiques of what they see as Iranian expansionist aims leads me to think that Kabili is talking mostly about a critique of Saudi efforts to deal with Iran.

Kabili calls this new groups he identifies “Saudi neoconservatives,” probably to get attention. He claims to see in them many of the same characteristics he sees in the American neocons: ambitious, activist, willing to use power, nationalist. To my ears, this sounds more like traditional realist notions of national interest and balance of power, without the idealistic edge of reforming the domestic politics of the Middle East. While he views them as proponents of “creative destruction” on the American neocon model, I do not see in them the same desire to change the regimes of Middle Eastern states. But a number of Saudis with whom I spoke said that they wanted the kingdom to take a more active stance, particularly in Iraq, to check Iranian ambitions. They were mildly critical of the kingdom’s relatively passive stance on Iraq and enthusiastic backers of the use of the Saudi military in Yemen earlier this year against the Houthis, whom they saw as Iranian allies if not Iranian agents.

This nascent Saudi debate on the country’s foreign policy, implicitly or explicitly focusing on how to deal with the rise of Iran’s power in the region, uses much of the same language the American debate does — “containment” and “rollback” of Iranian power, whether it is better to directly confront the Iranians or try to engage them — but, in my reading, it is based on a very different understanding of Iranian power and regional dynamics.

The American debate is very militarized. We wonder about whether to use military force against Iran on the nuclear question, seeing a possible nuclear Iran as a new level of military threat. The recent *Foreign Affairs* article by James Lindsay and Ray Takeyh emphasizes the military element

of containing Iran and warns that the United States must be ready to use force to implement a containment policy. Substantial majorities in both houses of Congress seem to be chomping at the bit to confront Iran. Even Barack Obama’s administration seemed to see its policy of engagement with Tehran as a “last chance” before more forceful measures, and those of its supporters in Congress who had been willing to stand against majority sentiment and support engagement last year seem perfectly happy with that.

The Saudi debate, as I experienced it, does not stress the military element. The Saudis see Iranian power in more political than military terms. It is Iranian political influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Palestine that worries them, not the prospect of the use of Iranian military force. They see the Iranian threat to the Gulf states as centered in Iran’s power to mobilize support among Shiite sympathizers in those states, not in the prospect of an Iranian missile attack or amphibious landing on the Arab shore of the Gulf. (The revelation by the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Qabas* a few days ago of the arrest in Kuwait of an alleged Iranian “terrorist” cell is the kind of evidence Saudis point to of the nature of the Iranian threat.) They do not worry that much about a nuclear Iran as a military threat, but rather worry that nuclear acquisition will make Tehran more ambitious in terms of pushing for political influence in the region and that nuclear weapons will make Iran seem a more attractive and powerful ally for substate groups throughout the Arab world.

I think that the Saudi perspective on Iranian regional power is much more accurate than ours. It is not Iranian military power that gives Iran regional influence, but rather Iran’s political links to powerful actors in states where the central government is weak. Those links are based on a mixture of shared ideology, sectarian affiliation, common antipathy toward the United States and Israel, and short-term self-interests, in different degrees in different cases. But none of those relations are based on Iranian military power. I doubt that nuclear weapons will make that much difference, one way or another, in Iran’s regional influence because nuclear weapons will not change the nature of Iran’s relations with its substate allies in the Arab world.



The nascent Saudi debate on this question has not generated much in the way of answers to how to deal with Iranian power. There is something of a consensus that Riyadh has forfeited the chance to play a greater role in Iraq through passivity, and one can see the beginnings of a more active Saudi policy there now (backing Ayad Allawi, receiving a delegation from the Sadrist movement since the election). Although King Abdallah has a real personal antipathy toward dealing with Nouri al-Maliki, it is possible that even that obstacle will be overcome as the current maneuverings over the creation of a new Iraqi government continue. But American policymakers should be aware that, though Riyadh shares their perspective that Iran needs to be contained, the Saudis are taking a very different view of the nature of the Iranian challenge than is ascendant in Washington.

So, what does this mean for the American debate on Iran? First, it is not clear just what position the Saudi

government would take on an U.S. military attack on Iran. It is likely that Riyadh would want the benefits of such an attack — setting back the Iranian nuclear program, however briefly — without taking any public responsibility for the American action. Washington should not count on any Saudi cooperation on such a plan that might become public. And American policymakers should know that a more active Saudi policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict, if it were influenced by these Saudi “neoconservatives,” might not be completely supportive of American efforts to enlist Arab states in “confidence-building measures” toward Israel. Saudi Arabia will judge those kinds of suggestions from a hardheaded “realist” perspective.

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## The What Cooperation Council?

*By Marc Lynch, May 11, 2011*

The Gulf Cooperation Council surprised virtually everyone yesterday by announcing that it would begin membership talks with Jordan and Morocco. While actual membership is likely a long way off, the announcement signals a new alliance in the region that conspicuously omits Egypt, along with more obvious candidates for GCC membership such as Yemen and Iraq. This expanded GCC would of course no longer really be an organization of states in the Gulf. Nor would it be a club for small, rich oil producing states. Instead, it seems to be evolving into a club for Sunni Arab monarchs — the institutional home of the counter-revolution, directed against not only Iran but also against the forces for

change in the region. Where the United States fits in that new conception remains distinctly unclear.

There has been widespread disbelief and a lot of jokes since the news broke of the invitations to Jordan and Morocco. It isn't only that Jordan and Morocco are rather conspicuously not in the Gulf. It's also that they don't fit the profile of rich petro-states, which has defined the identity of the GCC. If they actually do become members — which is far from a certainty, given the wide gap between an invitation to apply and acceptance — it would profoundly change the character of the organization. Jordan and Morocco have virtually nothing in common economically,

culturally, or (of course) geographically with the GCC states. They have different security challenges, different demographics, and different domestic problems. Their inclusion would significantly erode the major commonalities that have kept the GCC together over the years.

The two things that Jordan and Morocco do have in common with the GCC states, of course, are a Sunni monarchy and a pro-Western alignment. The creation of a Sunni King's club would bring the region back even more viscerally than before into the classical Arab Cold War of the 1950s and 1960, when conservative monarchies faced off against pan-Arabist republics. Neither Jordan nor Morocco really face the same sectarian Sunni-Shi'a issues as do most of the Gulf states, however, despite King Abdullah of Jordan's "Shi'a Crescent" rambblings of the mid-2000s and his enthusiasm to be part of any pro-United States and anti-Iranian alliance available. Iran simply doesn't loom as large for Morocco as it does for, say, Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. The real point here would seem to be a promise of GCC, or more specifically Saudi, assistance to those non-Gulf monarchies in order to prevent them from going too far in meeting popular demands for reform. Such a Sunni King's Club would be a counter-revolutionary institution, one which would work directly against hopes for change in the Arab world.

The exclusions are in many ways more important than the inclusions. Yemen has been left standing at the doorstep of the GCC for many years, despite the advantage of actually being a Gulf state. The GCC initiative to transition Ali Abdullah Saleh from power has stalled, and most Yemenis seem to be pretty suspicious of Saudi intentions in that regard anyway. It isn't clear whether a post-Saleh Yemen would be considered for an expanded GCC, but it doesn't seem likely.

The two more important exclusions are Iraq and Egypt. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has been mooted as a possible candidate for inclusion in the GCC. It's a wealthy oil producer in the Gulf region, so there is a surface plausibility. GCC membership, by this argument,

might embed Iraq in an institutional structure, which firmly rooted it in a pro-United States and anti-Iranian camp, while dramatically increasing the size and power of the GCC alliance. But its exclusion from this round isn't that surprising. The Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, remain deeply hostile toward and suspicious of the Shi'a dominated Iraqi government in general and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki specifically. They have never been comfortable with its new democratic forms. And an Iraq inside the GCC would pose a real challenge to Saudi expectations of dominating the alliance. So the GCC not inviting Iraq to apply is hardly a surprise — but not inviting it while inviting other, less plausible candidates will only further drive a wedge between Baghdad and the Arab Gulf states with potentially dangerous results.

And then there's Egypt. Saudi anger at the fall of Hosni Mubarak has been palpable. It has clearly been furious over the new Egypt's softer line on Iran, and high-level Saudis were conspicuously absent from the Hamas-Fatah signing ceremony in Cairo. Obviously, there is no rational economic or cultural reason to invite Egypt to join the GCC...but neither is there any such logic to inviting Jordan and Morocco. The exclusion feels pointed and direct: the new revolutionary Egypt is not part of the Sunni King's Club, while the expanded GCC will directly compete with the Arab League even if it gets a new Egyptian Secretary-General. This is a dangerous message at a time when Egypt's foreign policy orientation is very much a work in progress. The new Egypt is likely to be far more responsive to public opinion, as has already been evident in its decisions to open the border with Gaza and broker Palestinian reconciliation. If it comes to identify Saudi Arabia as an adversary, rather than as a slightly less close ally, then this will have major repercussions for regional politics and for the U.S. alliance structure.

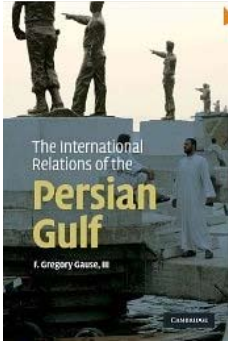
It is far too soon to expect anything tangible to emerge from this proposed GCC expansion. It may very well go the way of other short-lived alliances — remember the Damascus Declaration? And it is hard to see how Jordan or Morocco would fit into any kind of economic integration schemes such as those the GCC has

intermittently discussed. But as a signal of emerging trends in regional politics, even the declaration of intent is quite significant. It could push Iraq and Egypt in other directions. It could intensify the lines of regional conflict both between revolution and counter-revolution, and between Sunni and Shi'a, while inhibiting serious efforts at reform, which might ameliorate either. And it could put the new GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia, into ever more open conflict with the United States over the future of Arab reforms and priorities.

## Recommended Books

Gregory Gause, III

### “The International Relations of the Persian Gulf”



Gregory Gause’s masterful book is the first to offer a comprehensive account of the international politics in the Persian Gulf across nearly four decades. The story begins in 1971 when Great Britain ended its protectorate relations with the smaller states of the lower Gulf. It traces developments in the region from the oil ‘revolution’ of 1973–74 through the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war of 1990–91 to the toppling of Saddam Hussein in the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, bringing the story of Gulf regional politics up to 2008. The book highlights transnational identity issues, regime security and the politics of the world oil market, and charts the changing mix of interests and ambitions driving American policy. The author brings his experience as a scholar and commentator on the Gulf to this riveting account of one of the most politically volatile regions on earth.

[http://www.amazon.com/International-Relations-Persian-Gulf/dp/0521137306/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312832439&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/International-Relations-Persian-Gulf/dp/0521137306/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312832439&sr=1-1)

Thomas Hegghammer

### “Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979”



Saudi Arabia, homeland of Osama bin Laden and many 9/11 hijackers, is widely considered to be the heartland of radical Islamism. For decades, the conservative and oil-rich kingdom contributed recruits, ideologues and money to jihadi groups worldwide. Yet Islamism within Saudi Arabia itself remains poorly understood. In *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, Thomas Hegghammer presents the first ever history of Saudi jihadism based on extensive fieldwork in the kingdom and primary sources in Arabic. He offers a powerful explanation for the rise of Islamist militancy in Saudi Arabia and sheds crucial new light on the history of the global jihadist movement.

[http://www.amazon.com/Jihad-Saudi-Arabia-Pan-Islamism-Cambridge/dp/0521732360/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312831165&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Jihad-Saudi-Arabia-Pan-Islamism-Cambridge/dp/0521732360/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312831165&sr=1-1)

Steffen Hertog

### “Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia”



In *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*, the most thorough treatment of the political economy of Saudi Arabia to date, Steffen Hertog uncovers an untold history of how the elite rivalries and whims of half a century ago have shaped today’s Saudi state and are reflected in its policies. Starting in the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia embarked on an ambitious reform campaign to remedy its long-term economic stagnation. The kingdom has witnessed a bewildering mélange of thorough failures and surprising successes. Hertog argues that it is traits peculiar to the Saudi state that make sense of its uneven capacities. Case studies of foreign investment reform, labor market nationalization and WTO accession reveal how this oil-funded apparatus enables swift and successful policy-making in some policy areas, but produces coordination and regulation failures in others.

[http://www.amazon.com/Princes-Brokers-Bureaucrats-State-Arabia/dp/0801477514/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834675&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Princes-Brokers-Bureaucrats-State-Arabia/dp/0801477514/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834675&sr=1-1)

Toby Craig Jones

## “Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia”

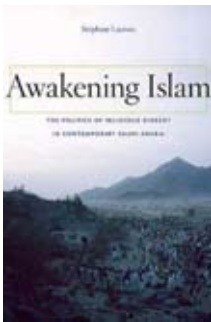


Saudi Arabia is traditionally viewed through the lenses of Islam, tribe, and the economics of oil. In *Desert Kingdom*, Toby Craig Jones now provides an alternative history of environmental power and the making of the modern Saudi state. He demonstrates how vital the exploitation of nature and the roles of science and global experts were to the consolidation of political authority in the desert.

[http://www.amazon.com/Desert-Kingdom-Forged-Modern-Arabia/dp/0674049853/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834077&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Desert-Kingdom-Forged-Modern-Arabia/dp/0674049853/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834077&sr=1-1)

Stéphane Lacroix

## “Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia”



Amidst the roil of war and instability across the Middle East, the West is still searching for ways to understand the Islamic world. Stéphane Lacroix has now given us a penetrating look at the political dynamics of Saudi Arabia, one of the most opaque of Muslim countries and the place that gave birth to Osama bin Laden. Lacroix shows how thousands of Islamist militants from Egypt, Syria, and other Middle Eastern countries, starting in the 1950s, escaped persecution and found refuge in Saudi Arabia, where they were integrated into the core of key state institutions and society. The transformative result was the Sahwa, or “Islamic Awakening,” an indigenous social movement that blended political activism with local religious ideas.

[http://www.amazon.com/Awakening-Islam-Politics-Religious-Contemporary/dp/0674049640/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834866&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Awakening-Islam-Politics-Religious-Contemporary/dp/0674049640/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312834866&sr=1-1)