

Saudi Arabia

 Encyclopædia Britannica Article

Saudi Arabia



arid, sparsely populated kingdom of the Middle East.



Prominent escarpment of the Tuwayq Mountains, just south of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Jane Lewis/Stone

Extending across most of the northern and central Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia is a young country that is heir to a rich history. In its western highlands, along the Red Sea, lies the Hejaz, which is the cradle of Islam and the site of that religion's holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. In the country's geographic heartland is a region known as Najd ("Highland"), a vast arid zone that until recent times was a rich pastiche of warring and feuding Bedouin tribes and clans. To the east, along the Persian Gulf, are the country's abundant oil fields that, since the 1960s, have made Saudi Arabia synonymous with petroleum wealth. Those three elements—religion, tribalism, and untold wealth—have fueled the country's subsequent history.

It was only with the rise of the Sa'ud family (Al Sa'ud)—a Najdi group for which the country is named—and its eventual consolidation of power in the early 20th century that Saudi Arabia began to take on the characteristics of a modern country. The success of the Sa'uds was due, in no small part, to the motivating ideology of Wahhabism, an austere form of Islam that was embraced by early family leaders and that became the state creed. This deep religious conservatism has been accompanied by a ubiquitous tribalism—in which competing family groups vie for resources and status—that often has made Saudi society difficult for outsiders to comprehend. Enormous oil wealth has fueled huge and rapid investment in Saudi Arabia's infrastructure. Many citizens have benefited from this growth, but it also has supported lavish lifestyles for the scions of the ruling family, and religious conservatives and liberal democrats alike have accused the family of squandering and mishandling the country's wealth. In addition, civil discontent increased after the Persian Gulf War (1990-91) over the country's close ties to the West, symbolized notably by the U.S. troops stationed in Saudi Arabia until 2005.



Pilgrims on the hajj fill the Great Mosque, Mecca, Saudi Arabia. *Nabeel Turner—Stone/Getty Images*

In the mid-20th century, most of Saudi Arabia still embraced a traditional lifestyle that had changed little over thousands of years. Since then, the pace of life in Saudi Arabia has accelerated rapidly. The constant flow of pilgrims to Mecca and Medina (vast throngs arrive for the annual hajj, and more pilgrims visit throughout the year for the lesser pilgrimage, the *'umrah*) had always provided the country with outside contacts, but interaction with the outside world has expanded with innovations in transportation, technology, and organization. More recently, petroleum has wrought irreversible domestic

changes—educational and social as well as economic. Modern methods of production have been superimposed on a traditional society by the introduction of millions of foreign workers and by the employment of hundreds of thousands of Saudis in nontraditional jobs. In addition, tens of thousands of Saudi students have studied abroad, most in the United States. Television, radio, and the Internet have become common media of communication and education, and highways and airways have replaced traditional means of transportation.

Saudi Arabia, once a country of small cities and towns, has become increasingly urban; traditional centres such as Jiddah, Mecca, and Medina have grown into large cities, and the capital, Riyadh, a former oasis town, has grown into a modern metropolis. Many of the region's traditional nomads, the Bedouin, have been settled in cities or agrarian communities. The sedentary population of the country views those few Bedouin who maintain the traditional desert lifestyle with deep ambivalence. They are, at the same time, the link to the country's past and its solid foundation. In the words of Sandra Mackey, an American writer and traveler:

Psychologically, the Bedouin represents to the present-day Saudi what the Western cowboy folk hero represents to an American. And like Americans, the Saudis have created from the Bedouin, idealized as a desert warrior, a powerful prototype that influences their value system and their patterns of behavior. No matter how much the various geographic regions of Saudi Arabia may differ or how far a Saudi is removed from the desert, the Bedouin ethos is the bedrock of the culture.

Land



The country occupies about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north; by the Persian Gulf, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to the east; by a portion of Oman to the southeast; by Yemen to the south and southwest; and by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west. Long-running border disputes were nearly resolved with Yemen (2000) and Qatar (2001); the border with the United Arab Emirates remains undefined.

A territory of 2,200 square miles (5,700 square km) along the gulf coast was shared by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as a neutral zone until 1969, when a political boundary was agreed upon. Each of the two countries administers one-half of the territory, but they equally share oil production in the entire area. The controversy over the Saudi-Iraqi Neutral Zone was legally settled in 1981 by partition, yet conflict between the two countries persisted and prevented final demarcation on the ground.

Relief



Desert landscape
near Riyadh, Saudi
Arabia.
*W Robert Moore—
National
Geographic/Getty
Images*

The Arabian Peninsula is dominated by a plateau that rises abruptly from the Red Sea and dips gently toward the Persian Gulf. In the north, the western highlands are upward of 5,000 feet (1,500 metres) above sea level, decreasing slightly to 4,000 feet (1,200 metres) in the vicinity of Medina and increasing southeastward to more than 10,000 feet (3,000 metres). Mount Sawda', which is situated near Abha in the south, is generally considered the highest point in the country.

Estimates of its elevation range from 10,279 to 10,522 feet (3,133 to 3,207 metres). The watershed of the peninsula is only 25 miles (40 km) from the Red Sea in the north and recedes to 80 miles (130 km) near the Yemen border. The coastal plain, known as the Tihamah, is virtually nonexistent in the north, except for occasional wadi deltas, but it widens slightly toward the south. The imposing escarpment that runs parallel to the Red Sea is somewhat interrupted by a gap northwest of Mecca but becomes more clearly continuous to the south.

Toward the interior, the surface gradually descends into the broad plateau area of the Najd, which is covered with lava flows and volcanic debris as well as with occasional sand accumulations; it slopes down from an elevation of about 4,500 feet (1,370 metres) in the west to about 2,500 feet (760 metres) in the east. There the drainage is more clearly dendritic (i.e., branching) and is much more extensive than that flowing toward the Red Sea. To the east, this region is bounded by a series of long, low ridges, with steep slopes on the west and gentle slopes on the east; the area is 750 miles (1,200 km) long and curves eastward from north to south. The most prominent of the ridges are the Tuwayq Mountains (Jibal Tuwayq), which rise from the plateau at an elevation of some 2,800 feet (850 metres) above sea level and reach more than 3,500 feet (1,100 metres) southwest of Riyadh, overlooking the plateau's surface to the west by 800 feet (250 metres) and more.

The interior of the Arabian Peninsula contains extensive sand surfaces. Among them is the world's largest sand area, the Rub' al-Khali ("Empty Quarter"), which dominates the southern part of the country and covers more than 250,000 square miles (647,500 square km). It slopes from above 2,600 feet (800 metres) near the border with Yemen northeastward down almost to sea level near the Persian Gulf; individual sand mountains reach elevations of 800 feet (250 metres), especially in the eastern part. A smaller sand area of about 22,000 square miles (57,000 square km), called Al-Nafud (*nafud* designating a sandy area or desert), is in the north-central part of the country. A great arc of sand, Al-Dahna', almost 900 miles (1,450 km) long but in places only 30 miles (50 km) wide, joins Al-Nafud with the Rub' al-Khali. Eastward, as the plateau surface slopes very gradually down to the gulf, there are numerous salt flats (*sabkha*s) and marshes. The gulf coastline is irregular, and the coastal waters are very shallow.

Drainage and soils

There are virtually no permanent surface streams in the country, but wadis are numerous. Those leading to the Red Sea are short and steep, though one unusually long extension is made by Wadi Al-Hamd, which rises near Medina and flows inland to the northwest for 100 miles (160 km) before turning westward; those draining eastward are longer and more developed except in Al-Nafud and the Rub' al-Khali. Soils are poorly developed. Large areas are covered with pebbles of varying sizes. Alluvial deposits are found in wadis, basins, and oases. Salt flats are especially common in the east.

Climate

There are three climatic zones in the kingdom: (1) desert almost everywhere, (2) steppe along the western highlands, forming a strip less than 100 miles (160 km) wide in the north but becoming almost 300 miles (480 km) wide at the latitude of Mecca, and (3) a small area of humid and mild temperature conditions, with long summers, in the highlands just north of Yemen.

In winter, cyclonic weather systems generally skirt north of the Arabian Peninsula, moving eastward from the Mediterranean Sea, though sometimes they reach eastern and central Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Some weather systems move southward along the Red Sea trough and provide winter precipitation as far south as Mecca and sometimes as far as Yemen. In March and April, some precipitation, normally torrential, falls. In summer, the highlands of Asir ('Asir), southeast of Mecca, receive enough precipitation from the monsoonal winds to support a steppelike strip of land.

Winters, from December to February, are cool, and frost and snow may occur in the southern highlands. Average temperatures for the coolest months, December through February, are 74 °F (23 °C) at Jiddah, 58 °F (14 °C) at Riyadh, and 63 °F (17 °C) at Al-Dammam. Summers, from June to August, are hot, with daytime temperatures in the shade exceeding 100 °F (38 °C) in

almost all of the country. Temperatures in the desert frequently rise as high as 130 °F (55 °C) in the summer. Humidity is low, except along the coasts, where it can be high and very oppressive. The level of precipitation is also low throughout the country, amounting to about 2.5 inches (65 mm) at Jiddah, a little more than 3 inches (75 mm) at Riyadh, and 3 inches at Al-Dammam. These figures, however, represent mean annual precipitation, and large variations are normal. In the highlands of Asir, more than 19 inches (480 mm) a year may be received, falling mostly between May and October when the summer monsoon winds prevail. In the Rub' al-Khali, a decade may pass with no precipitation at all.

Plant and animal life

Much of Saudi Arabia's vegetation belongs to the North African-Indian desert region. Plants are xerophytic (requiring little water) and are mostly small herbs and shrubs that are useful as forage. There are a few small areas of grass and trees in southern Asir. Although the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is widespread, about one-third of the date palms grown are in Al-Sharqiyyah province.

Animal life includes wolves, hyenas, foxes, honey badgers, mongooses, porcupines, baboons, hedgehogs, hares, sand rats, and jerboas. Larger animals such as gazelles, oryx, leopards, and mountain goats were relatively numerous until about 1950, when hunting from motor vehicles reduced these animals almost to extinction. Birds include falcons (which are caught and trained for hunting), eagles, hawks, vultures, owls, ravens, flamingos, egrets, pelicans, doves, and quail, as well as sand grouse and bulbuls. There are several species of snakes, many of which are poisonous, and numerous types of lizards. There is a wide variety of marine life in the gulf. Domesticated animals include camels, fat-tailed sheep, long-eared goats, salukis, donkeys, and chickens.

People

Ethnic groups



Bedouin woman with Arabian camels (dromedaries) near Mada'in ...

Lynn Abercrombie

Although the country's tribes are often considered “pure” Arabs—certainly they are the descendants of the peninsula's original ethnic stock—a certain degree of ethnic heterogeneity is evident among both the sedentary and nomadic populations of Saudi Arabia. Variations have developed because of a long history of regionalism and tribal autonomy and because some localities have been subjected to important outside influences. Thus, the proximity of sub-Saharan Africa along the Red Sea littoral and the constant historical influx of peoples from Iran, Pakistan, and India along the Persian Gulf coast have left traces of the physical types characteristic of those peoples among the native population. Likewise, the hajj to Mecca has long brought hundreds of thousands of people annually from various ethnic groups to the country. About half of all pilgrims travel from Arab countries and half from African and Asian countries. A small number of such visitors have settled in and around the holy cities throughout the years, either out of religious devotion or because penury prevented their return home.

Since the 1960s, an increasing number of outsiders have entered and left Saudi Arabia. By the early 21st century, the estimated number of foreign workers was between one-fourth and one-fifth of the country's total population, despite efforts by the Saudi authorities to encourage citizens to occupy positions typically held by foreigners. At first, most expatriated workers were Arab, such as Yemenis, Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, and Iraqis. Increasing numbers of non-Arab Muslims such as Pakistanis have been employed, as have large numbers of non-Muslim Koreans and Filipinos, who have been hired under group contracts for specified periods. Most specialized technical workers are Europeans and Americans.

Languages

Arabic is a Semitic language of numerous vernacular dialects that originated on the Arabian Peninsula. There are three main dialect groups in Saudi Arabia—in the eastern, central, and western parts of the country—though these are not always clearly discernible from one another because of the pervasiveness of local variations. There are various degrees of mutual intelligibility among dialect groups, but some differences are quite pronounced. The written language, Modern Standard Arabic, is derived from Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, and is used as a literary koine within the kingdom and throughout the broader Arab world. Various dialects of Arabic from other regions are also spoken by expatriate workers, as are numerous other non-Arabic languages such as Persian, Urdu, Pashto, Tagalog, and Korean. English is widely understood.

Religion



The Prophet's
Mosque, Medina,
Saudi Arabia.

AP

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, and most of its natives are adherents of the majority Sunni branch. In modern times, the Wahhabi interpretation of Sunni Islam has been especially influential, and Muslim scholars espousing that sect's views have been a major social and political force. Wahhabism, as it is called in the West (members refer to themselves as *muwahhidun*, “unitarians”), is a strict interpretation of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence and is named for Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92), a religious scholar whose alliance with Ibn Sa'ud led to the establishment of the first Sa'udi state. The current government of Saudi Arabia (i.e., the Sa'ud family) has largely relied on religion—including its close and continuing ties to Wahhabism and its status as the custodian of Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities of Islam—to establish its political legitimacy. The king is supposed to uphold Islam and apply its precepts and, in turn, is subject to its constraints. But at times he and the royal family have come under criticism for failing to do so.

Shi'ites, adherents of the second major branch of Islam, make up a small portion of the population and are found mostly in the oases of Al-Hasa and Al-Qatif in the eastern part of the country. Most are Ithna 'Ashari, although there remain small numbers of Isma'ilis. The only Christians are foreign workers and businessmen. The country's once small Jewish population is now apparently extinct. Other religions are practiced among foreign workers. Public worship and display by non-Muslim faiths is prohibited. Public displays by non-Wahhabi Muslim groups, including by other Sunni sects, have been limited and even banned by the government. Sufism, for instance, is not openly practiced, nor is celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*). Shi'ites have suffered the greatest persecution.

Settlement patterns

Four traditional regions stand out—the Hejaz, Asir, Najd, and Al-Hasa (transliterated more precisely as Al-Hijaz, 'Asir, Najd, and Al-Ahsa', respectively). The Hejaz, in the northwest, contains Mecca and Medina, as well as one of the kingdom's primary ports, Jiddah. Asir is the highland region south of the Hejaz; its capital, Abha, lies at an elevation of about 8,000 feet (2,400 metres). Subregions in Asir are formed by the oasis cluster of Najran—a highland area north of Yemen—and by the coastal plain, the Tihamah. Najd occupies a large part of the interior and includes the capital, Riyadh. Al-Hasa, in the east along the Persian Gulf, includes the principal petroleum-producing areas.

Nomadism, the form of land use with which the kingdom is traditionally associated, has become virtually nonexistent, and the pattern of extensive land use traditionally practiced by the nomadic Bedouin has been supplanted by the highly intensive patterns of urban land use. More

than four-fifths of Saudi Arabia's total population live in cities, and almost all of the rest live in government-supported agricultural enterprises.

The major areas of population are in the central Hejaz, in Asir, in central Najd, and near the Persian Gulf.



The Kingdom Tower
(centre background)
in central Riyadh,

Saudi Arabia.

Peter Macdiarmid—

Reuters/Corbis

The largest towns are cosmopolitan in character, and some are associated with dominant functions: Mecca and Medina are religious, Riyadh is political and administrative, and Jiddah is commercial. Dhahran (Al-Zahran), near the Persian Gulf coast in Al-Sharqiyyah province, is the administrative centre of Saudi Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company), and nearby Al-Khubar and Al-Dammam are important commercial coastal towns. Al-Jubayl on the Gulf and Yanbu' on the Red Sea are the terminus points of oil and gas pipelines, and large petrochemical industrial complexes are located in both. Other large cities include Al-Ta'if, Al-Hufuf, Tabuk, Buraydah, Al-Mubarraz, Khamis Mushayt, Najran, Ha'il, Jizan, and

Abha.

Demographic trends

A major demographic theme since the early 20th century has been the government's policy of settling the Bedouin. This practice has largely been successful, though sedentary Bedouin remain strongly attached to their tribal affiliation. A second major theme has been an influx of foreign workers (first foreign Arabs and later workers from other regions) since the 1950s; no exact numbers are available, but it is generally agreed that these foreign workers have numbered in the millions. Some Arabs, particularly early arrivals, have been naturalized, but most are temporary, albeit often long-term, residents. Moreover, most of these are unaccompanied males who have left their families in their native land; this situation is particularly true for lower-paid workers. Although large numbers of Saudi citizens travel abroad for school or holiday, the number of those settling abroad is relatively small.

Thanks partly to the government's policies promoting large families and partly to its large investment in health care, the country's birth rate is well above the world average. The national death rate is markedly below the world standard. As a result, Saudi Arabia's overall rate of natural increase is more than twice the world average, and its population is extremely young, with roughly two-thirds under 30 years old and about two-fifths younger than 15. Life expectancy averages about 75 years.

Economy

Fueled by enormous revenues from oil exports, the economy boomed during the 1970s and '80s. Unlike most developing countries, Saudi Arabia had an abundance of capital, and vast development projects sprung up that turned the once underdeveloped country into a modern state. During that time, unemployment was all but nonexistent—large numbers of foreign workers were imported to do the most menial and the most highly technical tasks—and per capita income and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita were among the highest in the non-Western world.

Long-range economic development has been directed through a series of five-year plans. The first two five-year plans (1970-75 and 1976-80) established most of the country's basic transport and communications facilities. Subsequent plans sought to diversify the economy; to increase domestic food production; to improve education, vocational training, and health services; and to further improve communications routes between the different regions of the country. But the economic boom was not without a price. As world oil prices stagnated in the 1990s, government

policies encouraging larger families led to a marked increase in population. GDP per capita actually began to fall in real terms, and the kingdom's young, highly educated workforce began to face high rates of unemployment and underemployment for the first time. However, those trends reversed as oil prices again rose. In addition, five-year plans were directed toward increasing the share of private enterprise in the economy in an effort to move away from dependence on oil exports and to generate jobs.

Agriculture



Irrigated alfalfa fields, Saudi Arabia.
George Steinmetz/Corbis

At its founding, the kingdom inherited the simple, tribal economy of Arabia. Many of the people were nomads, engaged in raising camels, sheep, and goats. Agricultural production was localized and subsistent. The kingdom's development plans have given domestic food production special attention, and the government has made subsidies and generous incentives available to the agriculture sector. Agriculture now contributes only a small fraction of the Saudi GDP and employs a comparable proportion of the workforce.

Less than 2 percent of the total land area is used for crops. Of the cultivated land, about half consists of rain-fed dry farming (mostly in Asir), two-fifths is in tree crops, and the remainder is irrigated. Most of the irrigated areas—in the districts of Riyadh and Al-Qasim, for example, and near Al-Hufuf in Al-Sharqiyyah province—utilize underground water.

The kingdom has achieved self-sufficiency in the production of wheat, eggs, and milk, among other commodities, though it still imports the bulk of its food needs. Wheat is the primary cultivated grain, followed by sorghum and barley. Dates, melons, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, and squash are also important crops.

Two major constraints on cultivation are poor water supply and poor soil. Concrete and earth-filled dams have been built, primarily in the southwest, to store water for irrigation and as a means of flood control. Agricultural expansion has been great in irrigated areas, while the amount of land given to rain-fed farming has decreased. Substantial resources of subterranean water have been discovered in the central and eastern parts of the country and exploited for agriculture; however, these underground aquifers are difficult to renew.

Resources and power

Petroleum



Al-Shaybah oil field, southeastern Saudi Arabia.
George Steinmetz/Corbis

The economy of Saudi Arabia is dominated by petroleum and its associated industries. In terms of oil reserves, Saudi Arabia ranks first internationally, with about one-fifth of the world's known reserves. Oil deposits are located in the east, southward from Iraq and Kuwait into the Rub' al-Khali and under the waters of the Persian Gulf.

The discovery of oil changed the entire economic situation of Saudi Arabia. As early as 1923, Ibn Sa'ud granted an oil-prospecting concession to a British company, but this concession was never exploited. Although oil was discovered in 1938, World War II curtailed oil-producing activities until near its end. The Ras Tanura refinery was opened in 1945, and rapid expansion of the oil industry followed to meet increasing postwar demand.

In 1951 the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) discovered the first offshore field in the Middle East, at Ra's Al-Saffaniyyah, just south of the former Saudi Arabia-Kuwait neutral zone, and oil was discovered in the zone itself in 1953. Al-Ghawar, just south of Dhahran and west of

Al-Hufuf, is one of the world's largest oil fields. The first portion of the Al-Ghawar oil field was discovered at 'Ayn Dar in 1948. Intensive exploration of the Rub' al-Khali began in 1950, and oil fields were finally discovered in the area in the 1970s.

In 1950 Aramco put into operation the Trans-Arabian Pipe Line (Tapline), which ran from Al-Qaysumah in Saudi Arabia across Jordan and Syria to its Mediterranean terminal at Sidon, Lebanon. The line was in operation only sporadically during the 1970s, and in 1983 it ceased to function beyond supplying a refinery in Jordan. In 1981 Petrolina, built to carry crude oil, was completed from Al-Jubayl on the Persian Gulf to Yanbu' on the Red Sea, and this greatly shortened the distance to Europe and obviated navigation through the gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Petrolina was built by the General Petroleum and Mineral Organization (Petromin), a government-owned corporation. Aramco constructed a massive gas-gathering system and, parallel to Petrolina, a pipeline for transporting natural-gas liquids, which reached Yanbu' in 1981.

During the 1970s and early '80s, Saudi Arabia gradually acquired complete ownership of Aramco, and in 1984 Aramco had its first Saudi president. In 1988 the company was renamed Saudi Aramco.

Other resources

Other mineral resources are known to exist, and the government has pursued a policy of exploration and production in order to diversify the economic base. Geologic reconnaissance mapping of the Precambrian shield in the west has revealed deposits of gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, iron, titanium, pyrite, magnesite, platinum, and cadmium. There are also nonmetallic resources such as limestone, silica, gypsum, and phosphorite.

Scarcity of water is a perennial problem in the kingdom. Saudi Arabia has the largest single desalination program in the world, which meets most domestic and industrial needs. Underwater aquifers provide a limited amount of potable water, and a great deal of energy has been committed to constructing dams for water storage and to developing water-recycling plants.

The kingdom has relied increasingly on electricity, and electrical production has grown rapidly since the 1970s. Originally highly decentralized, electrical production was slowly centralized under state control during the latter half of the 20th century. In 2000 electrical production was consolidated under a single corporation in an effort to develop a comprehensive national grid. Most of the kingdom's generators are powered by natural gas and diesel fuel.

Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector has expanded widely since 1976, when the government established the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (Sabic) in order to diversify the economy. Its initial goal was to expand the manufacturing potential of sectors of the economy related to petroleum. Since then manufactures, many associated with Sabic, have included rolled steel, petrochemicals, fertilizers, pipes, copper wire and cable, truck assembly, refrigeration, plastics, aluminum products, metal products, and cement. Small-scale enterprises have included baking, printing, and furniture manufacturing.

Finance



The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) was established in 1952 as the kingdom's central money and banking authority. It regulates commercial and development banks and other financial institutions. Its functions include issuing,

Ministry of Finance
building in Riyadh,
Saudi Arabia.
*Diane Rawson—Photo
Researchers*

regulating, and stabilizing the value of the national currency, the riyal; acting as banker for the government; and managing foreign reserves and investments. As an Islamic institution, it has a nonprofit status. Under Islamic law, banks cannot charge interest, but they do charge fees for lending and pay commission on deposits. Money supply and the tempo of business are dominated by government economic activity, though the government has increasingly favoured expansion of the private sector.

A number of commercial banks operate in the country, some of which are joint ventures between Saudi citizens and foreign banks. (Like all enterprises, banks doing business in the country require a Saudi partner.) Others, however, are wholly owned by Saudis. Banking regulations traditionally have not been stringently enforced, and private banks have shown great flexibility and creativity in interpreting Islamic banking regulations. Moreover, despite the ubiquity of banks in the country, large numbers of citizens and expatriates continue to rely on money changers, both for their convenience and for the anonymity that they provide.

Trade

Exports consist almost entirely of petroleum and petroleum products. Major imports are machinery and transport equipment, foodstuffs and animals, and chemicals and chemical products. The principal trading partners are the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China. The principal sources of imports are the United States, Japan, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan.

Services

The service sector grew dramatically in the second half of the 20th century with the influx of revenue derived from petroleum sales and because of large levels of government spending. Nearly three-fifths of workers are engaged in service-related occupations, including civil administration, defense, wholesale and retail sales, and hospitality and tourism. These sectors of the economy account for roughly one-fourth of GDP.

The hospitality industry has traditionally been strong only in and around the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, with the annual influx of pilgrims. However, in the 1960s, large numbers of expatriates—some with their dependents—began to arrive in the country, and facilities began to spring up to meet their needs. Only in the late 20th century did the government actively seek to attract tourists to Saudi Arabia with the construction of a number of coastal resorts and a relaxation of visa requirements for entering the country. Tourism unassociated with religious observance, however, remains an extremely small part of GDP.

Labour and taxation

The kingdom has traditionally relied on large numbers of foreign labourers, who, at the height of their influx, accounted for roughly two-thirds of the labour force. Most of these have been unskilled or semiskilled workers from other parts of the Middle East and from South Asia, while Westerners, particularly Americans, have filled the most highly skilled positions in the country. Workers in Saudi Arabia have few legal rights, and they are not permitted to organize and do not have the right to strike.

Rapid population growth since the late 20th century has increased the number of native Saudis entering the labour force. Beginning in the 1990s, the government responded by encouraging a policy of “Saudi-ization” (in which employers were required to hire fewer migrant workers), but highly educated young Saudis seemed unwilling to engage in occupations that had been traditionally filled by expatriates and were therefore considered menial. Female citizens

traditionally have had limited employment opportunities outside the home, with most occupations being restricted to men. Many foreign women have been employed as domestic servants.

Roughly three-fourths of government revenues are derived from the proceeds of oil exports. Remaining revenues are raised through tariffs, licensing fees, and the proceeds of government investments. Foreign companies are required to pay an income tax, but exemptions are often granted. Saudi citizens are required to pay the *zakat*, an obligatory tax on Muslims that is used to help the less fortunate in society.

Transportation and telecommunications

The country's roads are all paved, and the automobile is a common form of transport. Taxis are found in cities and most large towns. Women are not permitted to drive. The first coast-to-coast road connection, from Al-Dammam on the gulf to Jiddah on the Red Sea, by way of Riyadh, was opened in 1967; it includes a spectacular descent of the western escarpment from Al-Ta'if to Mecca. A causeway, opened in 1986, connects the kingdom with the island nation of Bahrain. A railroad passing through Al-Hufuf connects Riyadh and Al-Dammam.



Terminal building at
Dhahran International
Airport, Dhahran,
Saudi Arabia.
The J. Allan Cash
Photolibrary

Seaport capacity has been greatly expanded. Major cargo ports are Jiddah, Yanbu', Diba, and Jizan on the Red Sea and Al-Dammam and Al-Jubayl on the gulf. The country has many small airports and airfields. The national airline, Saudi Arabian Airlines (formerly Saudia; founded 1945), provides both domestic and international service. The chief international airports are at Dhahran, Riyadh, and Jiddah.

Radio broadcasts began in the kingdom in 1948, and the first television station was established in 1965. All broadcasts are operated by the state, and programming focuses on religious and cultural affairs, news, and other topics that are viewed as edifying by the government. Radio and television services are widely accessible, as is telephone service. The government has invested significant resources in updating and expanding the country's telecommunications infrastructure, and large portions of the telephone grid have been digitized. Cellular telephone service is widespread, and access to the Internet is available in all major population centres.

Government and society

Constitutional framework

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the Al Sa'ud, a family whose status was established by its close ties with and support for the Wahhabi religious establishment. Islamic law, the Shari'ah, is the primary source of legislation, but the actual promulgation of legislation and implementation of policy is often mitigated by more mundane factors, such as political expediency, the inner politics of the ruling family, and the influence of intertribal politics, which remain strong in the modern kingdom.

The kingdom has never had a written constitution, although in 1992 the king issued a document known as the Basic Law of Government (Al-Nizam al-Asasi li al-Hukm), which provides guidelines for how the government is to be run and sets forth the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The king combines legislative, executive, and judicial functions. As prime minister, he presides over the Council of Ministers (Majlis al-Wuzara'). The council is responsible for such executive and administrative matters as foreign and domestic policy, defense, finance, health, and education, which it administers through numerous separate agencies. Appointment to and dismissal from the

council are prerogatives of the king. The Basic Law of Government paved the way in 1993 for the establishment of a new quasi-legislative body, the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura), which includes many technical experts; all members are appointed by the king. The Consultative Council has the power to draft legislation and, along with the Council of Ministers, promote it for the king's approval.

In the end, however, all major policy decisions are made outside these formal apparatuses. Decisions are made through a consensus of opinion that is sought primarily within the royal family (comprising the numerous descendants of the kingdom's founder, Ibn Sa'ud), many of whom hold sensitive government posts. Likewise, the views of important members of the '*ulama*' (religious scholars), leading tribal sheikhs, and heads of prominent commercial families are considered.

Local government

The kingdom is divided into 13 administrative regions (*manatiq*), which in turn are divided into numerous districts. Regional governors are appointed, usually from the royal family, and preside over one or more municipal councils, half of whose members are appointed and half elected. With their councils, the governors are responsible for such functions as finance, health, education, agriculture, and municipalities. The consultative principle operates at all levels of government, including the government of villages and tribes.

Justice

The Shari'ah is the basis of justice. Judgment usually is according to the Hanbali tradition of Islam; the law tends to be conservative and punishment severe, including amputation for crimes such as theft and execution for crimes that are deemed more severe (e.g., drug trafficking and practicing witchcraft).

In 1970 the Ministry of Justice was established; its work is assisted by a Supreme Judicial Council consisting of leading members of the '*ulama*'. There are more than 300 Shari'ah courts across the country. Rapid changes since the mid-20th century have produced circumstances—such as traffic violations and industrial accidents—not encompassed by traditional law, and these have been handled by the issuance of royal decrees. These decrees have evolved into a body of administrative law that is not directly drawn from Islamic precepts. Avenues of appeal are available, and the monarch is both the final court of appeal and the dispenser of pardon.

Political process

Participation in the political process is limited to a relatively small portion of the population. There are no elections for national bodies, political parties are outlawed, and women have few political rights. Power rests largely in the hands of the royal family, which governs through a process that—despite the political and economic changes since the late 20th century—differs little from the traditional system of tribal rule. Tribal identity remains strong and is still an important pillar of social control; despite the existence of a modern state bureaucracy, political influence is frequently determined by tribal affiliation. Tribal sheikhs, therefore, maintain a high degree of authority within the tribe and a considerable degree of influence over local and national events.

The tribal hierarchy in the country is complex. There are a number of smaller, less-influential tribes and a handful of very influential major tribes. The Sa'ud family, although not a tribe strictly speaking, behaves like one in many respects. Although the ruling family came to power largely through its martial skill and religious ties, its continued hegemony has been based on the

traditional view in Arabian society that leaders owe their positions to their ability to manage affairs. Just as the tribal sheikh leads the tribe, so has the Sa'ud family ruled the country—by placating rival factions, building a broad consensus, and squelching extreme voices. (Early Orientalists used the Latin phrase *primus inter pares*, “first among equals,” to refer to such an arrangement.) The medium for this process is the traditional *diwan*, an informal council in which the senior male (whether he is a sheikh at the tribal level or the king at the national) hears outstanding grievances and dispenses justice and largess. In theory, any male citizen may make his voice heard in the *diwan*.

In this system, succession to the throne is not directly hereditary, though, under the Basic Law of Government, the king must be a son or grandson of Ibn Sa'ud. Traditionally the heir apparent, who is also deputy prime minister, has been determined by a consensus of the royal family, but since 1992 he has been appointed by the king (confirmation by the family occurring only after the monarch's death). In the same way, through consensus, the family may depose the monarch, as was seen in King Sa'ud's deposition in 1964.

The family has also relied heavily on its long relationship with the Wahhabi religious hierarchy to maintain social and political control. The crown appoints all major religious functionaries, who are almost exclusively selected from Wahhabi '*ulama*'; in turn it is supported by that sect. Most major threats to the political status quo have come either from dissident factions within the religious community or from groups that appeal in some way to Islamic values. Many of these groups have operated abroad, and a number have been involved in political violence.

Security

Military service is voluntary. The army accounts for about three-fifths of the total military force. It experienced rapid modernization especially after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. The air force was equipped largely by the British until the 1970s, when the kingdom began to buy aircraft from the United States. It is now one of the best-equipped forces in the region, with several hundred high-performance aircraft; likewise, ground forces have large numbers of state-of-the-art main battle tanks. Army officers are trained at King 'Abd al-'Aziz Military Academy just north of Riyadh. Major air bases are at Riyadh, Dhahran, Hafar al-Batin (part of the King Khalid Military City) near the border with Iraq and Kuwait, Tabuk in the northwest near Jordan, and Khamis Mushayt in the southwest near Yemen. All three armed services—army, air force, and navy—are directed by the defense minister, who is also the second deputy prime minister.

The National Guard, which has roughly the same troop strength as the army, is essentially an internal security force, though it can support the regular forces for national defense. One of its primary peacetime tasks is to guard the country's oil fields. It is administered separately, and its commander reports to the crown prince. The armed forces employ expatriate personnel in support and training positions.

The kingdom has several internal security organs, including the Coast Guard, Frontier Force, and a centralized national police force. All of these organizations report to the Ministry of the Interior, which also supervises the country's intelligence and counterintelligence bodies. Police interaction with civilians, particularly with foreigners, has often been described as heavy-handed, but reports of human rights abuses are far less numerous and severe than those reported in other countries of the region. There is also a religious police force attached to the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Known as the Mutawwa'un (colloquially, Mutawwa'in), this force operates in plain clothes and enforces such Islamic precepts as ensuring that women are properly veiled, that shops close during prayer, and that the fast is kept during Ramadan. Imposing impromptu corporal punishment for infractions is an accepted part of their duty.

Health and welfare

A great deal of attention has been given to health care, and the numbers of hospital beds, physicians, and nurses have increased greatly. In addition to numerous health institutes, hospitals, and health centres, a network of dispensaries serving communities of 10,000 or more people has been set up, complemented by a system of mobile health services reaching small communities and the remaining nomadic populations. The government has also begun to train Saudis to replace foreign medical personnel. Of serious concern are a high rate of trachoma and occasional outbreaks of malaria, bilharzia (schistosomiasis), and cholera. Outbreaks of serious diseases such as meningitis have occurred during the hajj.

Housing



Mud dwellings with crenellated rooftops typical of Najran, Asir region, Saudi Arabia.
Peter Ryan/Robert Harding Picture Library

Because of the kingdom's geographic diversity, a wide variety of traditional housing types were embraced. These ranged from the conventional black tents of the Bedouin and mud-brick dwellings of agrarian villages to the lofty, ornate townhouses found in urban centres along the coast. Since the advent of oil wealth, the government has invested heavily in housing construction. It provides low-interest or interest-free loans to citizens wishing to purchase or build homes. Homes in newer areas are equipped with standard utilities (such as water, sewerage, and electricity) as well as many technical conveniences, such as Internet access and cable and satellite television. Towns in some rural areas, however, remain far removed from power and water networks.

Education

Education is free at all levels and is given high priority by the government. The school system consists of elementary (grades 1-6), intermediate (7-9), and secondary (10-12) schools. A significant portion of the curriculum at all levels is devoted to religious subjects, and, at the secondary level, students are able to follow either a religious or a technical track. Girls are able to attend school (all courses are segregated by gender), but fewer girls attend than boys. This disproportion is reflected in the rate of literacy, which exceeds 85 percent among males and is about 70 percent among females.

Higher education has expanded at a remarkable pace. Institutions of higher education include the King Sa'ud University (formerly the University of Riyadh, founded in 1957), the Islamic University (1961) at Medina, and the King 'Abd al-'Aziz University (1967) in Jiddah. Other colleges and universities emphasize curricula in sciences and technology, military studies, religion, and medicine. Institutes devoted to Islamic studies in particular abound, and schools for religious pedagogy are located in several towns. Women receive college instruction in segregated institutions. Many foreign teachers are employed, especially in technical and medical schools. Large numbers of students travel abroad for university study.

Cultural life

Cultural milieu

The cultural setting is Arab and Muslim. To preserve the country's purist religious position, many proscriptions of behaviour and dress are enforced. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited, for example, and there is no theatre or public exhibition of films. Educated Saudis are well informed on issues of the Arab world, the Muslim world, and the world at large, but public expression of opinion about domestic matters is not encouraged. There are no organizations such as political parties or labour unions to provide public forums.

Daily life and social customs

Saudi Arabia's population has traditionally been composed of nomads, villagers, and townspeople. Pervading this triad, however, is the patrilineal kinship principle, and superimposed on all is the administrative organization centred on the royal family. The kinship principle is pervasive in Saudi society, and the extended family is a strong social unit. Villages constitute local service centres and contain members from more than one tribal affiliation, though one group may tend to be dominant. Cities are not tribally organized, though the importance of kinship affiliation endures, and local affairs tend to be dominated and administered by a few families. Social stratification is more clearly developed in the cities than elsewhere. Before the effects of oil were felt on the economy, status was a matter of lineage and occupation rather than of wealth; with the development of the oil industry, however, wealth and material position have acquired an additional social value. The new technology and industry have produced a growing middle-income economic group of technocrats that is increasingly aware of the widening gap between the ruling families and the rest of the population. This has led to discontent and, in some cases, outbreaks of civil unrest.

Most Saudis continue to dress in a traditional fashion. For men this consists of an ankle-length shirt known as a *thawb* (or *dishdashah*), which is usually woven of white cotton. The traditional head cover is the kaffiyeh (sometimes known as a *ghutra*), a broad cloth folded and held in place by a camel's hair cord known as an *'iqal*. The time-honoured dress for women consists of a *thawb* beneath which is worn a loose fitting pair of slacks known as a *sirwal*. In public women are expected to be fully veiled, however, and a long black cloak known as an *'abayah* is worn. A veil called a *hijab* covers the head, and another known as a *niqab* covers the face. Among Bedouin, women's clothing is often quite ornate and has traditionally consisted of a beautiful panoply of handcrafted silver jewelry.

Cuisine in Saudi Arabia is broadly similar to that of the surrounding Persian Gulf countries, and Turkish, Persian, and African cultures have heavily influenced culinary tastes. Islamic dietary customs are closely observed; for instance, pork is not consumed, wine is eschewed, and even ritually licit animals such as lambs must be slaughtered in a prescribed fashion. A dish consisting of a stuffed lamb, known as *khuzi*, is the traditional national favourite. Kebabs are also popular, as is *shawarmah* (*shwarma*), a marinated meat dish of lamb, mutton, or chicken that is grilled on a spit and served either as an entrée or a sandwich. As in the countries of the Persian Gulf, *makhbus* (*machbous*), a rice dish with fish or shrimp, is extremely popular. Flat, unleavened bread is a staple of virtually every meal, as are all varieties of fresh fruit. Dates, either fresh or candied, are ubiquitous. Coffee, served strong and hot in the Turkish style, is the traditional beverage.

In accordance with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, only two religious holidays are publicly recognized, 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha. The celebration of other Islamic holidays, such as the Prophet's birthday (see *mawlid*) and 'Ashura—an important holiday to Shi'ites—are tolerated only when celebrated on a small scale at the local level but are otherwise condemned as dangerous innovations. Public observance of non-Islamic religious holidays is prohibited, with the exception of September 23, which celebrates the unification of the kingdom. (It is also the only holiday celebrated on the Western calendar.)

The arts

For a thousand years, artistic expression usually perpetuated ancient forms. From the 18th century onward, the strict Wahhabi religious outlook discouraged intellectual deviation from accepted purist positions. With the advent of the petroleum industry came exposure to outside influences, such as Western housing styles, furnishings, and clothes, and, at the same time, local

craftsmen found themselves in competition with imported goods.

Music and dance have always been part of Saudi life. Native music, of which there are several types, is generally associated with poetry and is sung collectively. Instruments include the *rababah*, an instrument not unlike a three-string fiddle, and various types of percussion instruments, such as the *tabl* (drum) and the *tar* (tambourine). Of the native dances, the most popular is a martial line dance known as the *'ardah*, which includes lines of men, frequently armed with swords or rifles, dancing to the beat of drums and tambourines.

Native Bedouin poetry, known as *nabati*, is extremely popular. It has similarities to the classical *qasidah*, or ode, of which the central and eastern regions of the country are the traditional birthplace. Many of the great masters of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry dwelt in what is now Saudi Arabia, and the two styles, *qasidah* and *nabati*, differ largely in the former's use of Classical Arabic as a medium. *Nabati* poetry is composed in the vernacular and has a strong musical quality.

Visual arts are dominated by geometric, floral, and abstract designs and by calligraphy, the latter a sophisticated and learned enterprise. Not much diversity is seen in traditional architecture; typical features are decorative designs on doors and windows and wide use of crenellated walls. The wave of change starting in the 1960s influenced architectural styles, and stark linear motifs became common in office and residential buildings. The spectacular airport terminals at Jiddah and Riyadh, however, are testimony to the persistence and worth of traditional styles.

Cultural institutions

The King Fahd National Library (founded 1968) is located in Riyadh, as is the National Museum (1978). There are a number of smaller libraries and museums throughout the country, mostly in the larger towns and cities. The Society for Arts and Cultures was founded in 1972 to coordinate and support traditional Arabian art forms. The King Faysal Foundation (1976) supports literary, educational, and cultural programs. The annual Jinadiriyyah Heritage and Cultural Festival brings together thousands near Riyadh to partake in traditional pastimes such as camel racing, arts and crafts, and traditional song and dance.

Sports and recreation



Competitors in the King's Camel Race, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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Images

Saudis value a number of traditional and modern pastimes. Football (soccer) is extremely popular. Many Saudis also participate in activities such as scuba diving, windsurfing, and sailing. The time-honoured pursuit of camel racing developed a new following in the 1970s. During the winter—the coolest part of the year—races are held weekly at the Riyadh stadium. The annual King's Camel Race, begun in 1974, is one of the sport's most important contests and attracts animals and riders from throughout the region. Falconry, another traditional pursuit, is still practiced, although it has come under increasingly strict regulation because several species on which the falcon preys have become endangered.

The government of Saudi Arabia has encouraged sports and athletics by constructing sports and recreation facilities in all major urban areas. The Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee was organized in 1964 and was recognized internationally the following year. It has sent athletes to the Summer Games since 1972 but has not fielded a team for the Winter Games. The country also sends athletes to the Asian Games.

Media and publishing

Several daily and weekly newspapers are published in Arabic and in English. Although newspapers and periodicals are mostly privately owned, editors frequently practice self-censorship. Criticism of the government and of the royal family is frowned upon, and on occasion journalists have been dismissed for statements seen as antigovernment or against religion. The government heavily subsidizes the publishing industry, including periodical and academic presses. Radio and television broadcasting is operated by the Ministry of Information.

Joshua Teitelbaum

History

This discussion focuses on Saudi Arabia since the 18th century. For a treatment of earlier periods and of the country in its regional context, *see* [Arabia](#).

The coastal parts of the territory that was to become Saudi Arabia participated in the broad trends of Arabian Peninsula history in the Islamic period—the rise of Islam in western Arabia in the 7th century, the creation and expansion of the various Islamic empires to the 10th century, the establishment of separate and usually small Muslim states in the period leading to the 15th century, and the ordering of the Arab Middle East conducted by the Ottoman Empire starting in the 16th century. Central Arabia was linked commercially and intellectually with western Arabia and the Fertile Crescent but was often isolated from general political and military trends because of its remoteness and relative poverty. In the middle of the 18th century in central Arabia, an alliance of Muslim Wahhabi religious reformers and the Sa'udi dynasty formed a new state and society that resulted in the creation of three successive Sa'udi kingdoms, including the modern country of Saudi Arabia, officially proclaimed in 1932.

The Wahhabi movement

Origins and early expansion

As the population of the oasis towns of central Arabia such as 'Uyaynah slowly grew from the 16th to the early 18th century, the '*ulama*' (religious scholars) residing there increased in number and sophistication. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement, was born in 'Uyaynah in 1703 to a family of religious judges and scholars and as a young man traveled widely in other regions of the Middle East. It was upon his return to 'Uyaynah that he first began to preach his revolutionary ideas of conservative religious reformation based on a strict moral code. His teaching was influenced by that of the 14th-century Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyyah, who called for the purification of Islam through the expulsion of practices that he saw as innovations, including speculative theology, Sufism, and such popular religious practices as saint worship.

The ruler of 'Uyaynah, 'Uthman ibn Mu'ammār, gladly welcomed the returning prodigal and even adhered to his doctrines. But many opposed him, and 'Abd al-Wahhab's preaching was put to a number of severe tests. The chief of the Al-Hasa region, who was of the influential Banu Khalid tribe, threatened to withhold gifts to 'Uthman, or even to go to war with him, unless 'Abd al-Wahhab was put to death.

'Uthman, unable to face this danger but unwilling to kill his guest, decided to dismiss 'Abd al-Wahhab from his territory. 'Abd al-Wahhab went to Al-Dir'iyyah, some 40 miles (65 km) away, which had been the seat of the local prince Muhammad ibn Sa'ud since 1726. In 1745 people

flocked to the teaching of the reformer. The alliance of theologian and prince, duly sealed by mutual oaths of loyalty, soon began to prosper in terms of military success and expansion.

One by one, the enemies of the new union were conquered. The earliest wars brought 'Uyaynah and portions of Al-Hasa under Wahhabi control, but the oasis town of Riyadh maintained a stubborn resistance for 27 years before succumbing to the steady pressure of the new movement. By 1765, when Muhammad ibn Sa'ud died, only a few parts of central and eastern Arabia had fallen under more or less effective Wahhabi rule.

Muhammad ibn Sa'ud's son and successor, 'Abd al-'Aziz I (reigned 1765-1803), who had been largely responsible for this extension of his father's realm through his exploits as commander in chief of the Wahhabi forces, continued to work in complete harmony with Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. It was the latter who virtually controlled the civil administration of the country, while 'Abd al-'Aziz himself, later in cooperation with his warlike son, Sa'ud I (1803-14), busied himself with the expansion of his empire far beyond the limits inherited by him. Meanwhile, in 1792, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab died at the age of 89. Wahhabi attacks on settled areas had begun to attract the attention of officials of the Ottoman Empire, the dominant political force in the region. In 1798 an Ottoman force invaded Al-Hasa, though it later was compelled to withdraw. Qatar fell to the Sa'udis in 1797, and they also gained control through local allies over Bahrain and parts of Oman.

Struggle with the Ottomans

In 1801 the Wahhabis captured and sacked the Shi'ite holy city of Karbala' in Ottoman Iraq, plundering and damaging important religious buildings. In the following year, Sa'ud led his father's army to the capture of Mecca itself in the Hejaz, which was also under Ottoman control. It was soon after Sa'ud's return from this expedition that his father was assassinated by a Shi'ite in the mosque of Al-Dir'iyyah in revenge for the desecration of Karbala'.

Conflict between the Ottomans and the Wahhabis of Arabia now broke out in earnest. In 1804 Sa'ud captured Medina, and the Wahhabi empire embraced the whole of Arabia down to Yemen and Oman. Year after year, Sa'ud visited Mecca to preside over the hajj pilgrimage as the imam of the Muslim congregation. But the tide was soon to turn to his disadvantage. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire, preoccupied in other directions, consigned to Muhammad 'Ali, the virtually independent viceroy of Egypt, the task of crushing those the Ottomans viewed as heretics. An Egyptian force landed on the Hejaz coast under the command of Muhammad 'Ali's son Tusun. Sa'ud inflicted a severe defeat on the invaders, but reinforcements enabled Tusun to occupy Mecca and Medina in 1812. The following year, Muhammad 'Ali assumed command of the expeditionary force in person. In the east, Britain severely curbed the maritime activities of the Qawasim dynasty, who were allies of the Wahhabis, in 1809.

Sa'ud died at Al-Dir'iyyah in 1814. His successor, his son 'Abd Allah ibn Sa'ud, was scarcely of his father's calibre, and the capture of Al-Ra's in Al-Qasim region by the Egyptians in 1815 forced him to sue for peace. This was duly arranged, but the truce was short-lived, and in 1816 the struggle was renewed, with Ibrahim Pasha, another of Muhammad 'Ali's sons, in command of the Egyptian forces. Gaining the support of the volatile tribes by skillful diplomacy and lavish gifts, he advanced into central Arabia. Joined by most of the principal tribes, he appeared before Al-Dir'iyyah in April 1818. Fighting ended in September with the surrender of 'Abd Allah, who was sent to the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (Istanbul) and beheaded. Local Wahhabi leaders also were executed, Al-Dir'iyyah was razed, and Egyptian garrisons were posted to the principal towns. The Sa'ud family had suffered heavy losses during the fighting. A few had managed to escape before the surrender; the rest were sent to Egypt for detention along with descendants of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. The Wahhabi empire ceased to exist, but the faith lived on in

the desert and in the towns of central Arabia in defiance of the new rulers of the land.

Second Sa'udi state

The dynasty was restored and the second Sa'udi state begun in 1824 when Turki (1823-34), a grandson of Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, succeeded in capturing Riyadh and expelling the Egyptian garrison. Thereafter, Riyadh remained the capital of the state. Turki tried to maintain friendly ties with the Ottoman governors of Iraq, as he accepted nominal Ottoman sovereignty, and with the British. Al-Hasa and Ha'il fell again to the Sa'udis by 1830 as the town militias of central Arabia, which formed the bases of the Sa'udi army, overcame the nomadic tribes. Literature, commerce, and agriculture flourished despite the crushing losses to society occasioned by the return of cholera.

In 1834 Turki was murdered by an ambitious cousin, who then was deposed and executed by Turki's son Faysal (1834-38; 1843-65). Faysal had been carried away into captivity in Egypt in 1818 but had escaped in 1828 to rejoin his father and play a prominent part in reestablishing Wahhabi rule. He refused to pay the Egyptian tribute, and in 1837 an Egyptian expeditionary force entered Riyadh. Faysal was captured the following year and returned to Cairo. Khalid, son of Sa'ud and brother of 'Abd Allah, was installed as ruler of Najd by the Egyptians on the condition that he recognize Egyptian hegemony.

The subservience of Khalid to his Egyptian and Ottoman masters was increasingly resented by his Wahhabi subjects, and in 1841 his cousin, 'Abd Allah ibn Thunayan, raised the standard of revolt. Riyadh was captured by a bold coup; its garrison was expelled; and Khalid, who was in Al-Hasa at the time, fled by ship to Jiddah. 'Abd Allah resisted when Faysal reappeared in 1843, only to be overpowered and slain. So Faysal resumed his reign after an interruption of five years and ruled basically unchallenged, despite occasional tribal uprisings and friction with the townspeople of Al-Qasim, until his death in 1865. The Hejaz remained in Ottoman hands, while northern Arabia (the province of Jabal Shammar) was locally autonomous but acknowledged the supremacy of Riyadh. Faysal reestablished Sa'udi authority for a short time in Bahrain and for a longer time in Al-Buraymi and the Oman hinterland. He extended his influence as far as Hadhramaut and the frontiers of Yemen. Only British intervention stopped the extension of direct Sa'udi power over the western shore of the gulf.

Administration under Faysal was simple and involved few people, mostly members of the royal family and descendants of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Justice in the provinces was enforced by officials appointed by Riyadh; even the tribes paid taxes; and the writing of poetry and history flourished.

Death of Faysal

In 1865, when his power was an acknowledged factor in Arabian politics, Faysal died. His sons disputed the succession. His eldest son, 'Abd Allah, succeeded first, maintaining himself against the rebellion of his brother Sa'ud II for six years until the Battle of Judah (1871), in which Sa'ud triumphed. 'Abd Allah fled, and Sa'ud took power. But during the next five years the throne changed hands no fewer than seven times in favour of different members of the Sa'ud family. Drought in 1870-74 exacerbated the civil war's effects as the unity of the Wahhabi community disintegrated. Meanwhile, 'Abd Allah had appealed to the Ottoman governor in Baghdad, who came to his assistance but took advantage of the situation to occupy the province of Al-Hasa for the empire in 1871—an occupation that lasted 42 years.

The Rashidis

Sa'ud II died in 1875, and, after a brief interval of chaos, 'Abd Allah (as 'Abd Allah II) returned to the throne the following year only to find himself powerless against the Rashidi emirs of Jabal Shammar, with their capital at Ha'il. The Rashidis had ruled there since 1836, first as agents for the Sa'ud family, but subsequently they became independent, with strong links to the Ottomans and growing wealth from the caravan trade. Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Rashid (reigned 1869-97) was undoubtedly the dominant figure in Arabian politics when 'Abd Allah (now as 'Abd Allah II ibn Sa'ud) returned to Riyadh for his third spell of authority. At first the Rashidis refrained from any forward action, but they soon intervened in the chaotic affairs of the Wahhabi state. And it was not long before 'Abd Allah was persuaded to join Ibn Rashid at Ha'il (ostensibly as a guest but in truth as a hostage), while a representative of the Rashidis was appointed governor of Riyadh in 1887. 'Abd Allah eventually was allowed to return to Riyadh and even was named governor of the city in 1889. 'Abd Allah did not live to enjoy his restoration for long, however; he died in the same year, leaving to his youngest brother, 'Abd al-Rahman, the almost hopeless task of reviving the dynasty.

'Abd al-Rahman was soon embroiled in hostilities with the Rashidis. The Battle of Al-Mulaydah (in Al-Qasim) settled the issue between them decisively in 1891, and, for the second time in a space of 70 years, the Wahhabi state seemed to be completely destroyed. 'Abd al-Rahman fled with his family to take refuge in Kuwait as the guest of its rulers. Unlike the first Sa'udi regime, which was ended by external conquest, the second Sa'udi state fell chiefly because of internal disputes between members of the royal family.

Ibn Sa'ud and the third Sa'udi state

'Abd al-'Aziz (known commonly as Ibn Sa'ud), the son of the exiled 'Abd al-Rahman, took advantage of his new location to acquire useful knowledge of world affairs, while the new Rashidi prince, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd Mit'ab, alienated the population of Najd. In 1901 the young Ibn Sa'ud (he was about 22 to 26 years old) sallied out of Kuwait with a force of 40 followers on what must have seemed a forlorn adventure. On Jan. 15, 1902, with a select body of only 15 warriors, he scaled the walls of Riyadh, surprised and defeated the Rashidi governor and his escort before the gate of the fort of Mismak (Musmak), and was hailed by the populace as their ruler.

The following years witnessed the development of the struggle by the third Sa'udi state to expand its control once again over most of the Arabian Peninsula and thereby reestablish the glories of the first Sa'udi state in the 18th century. The first challenge was from the Rashidis, whose power was by no means spent and who received substantial help from the Ottomans in men and material. In 1904 Ibn Sa'ud defeated a combined Rashidi and Ottoman force but afterward allowed the Ottomans to place garrisons in central Arabia for one year. Ibn Rashid continued the struggle, but he was killed in battle in 1906, and thenceforth Ibn Sa'ud, who secured the withdrawal of Ottoman troops from Al-Qasim in 1906, became the undisputed master of central Arabia. Ibn Sa'ud bent himself to the task of regaining the whole realm of his ancestors. He was cautious enough to continue acknowledging Ottoman overlordship (even if only in name), and, by cultivating contacts with Britain, he hoped to balance each power against the other.

Meanwhile, he busied himself with the reorganization of the country's administration, including the inception of a plan designed to ensure the stability and permanence of his military force. In 1912 he established the first Ikhwan ("Brethren") colony on the desert wells of Al-Artawiyyah, peopled entirely by Bedouin. The colony formed a militant cantonment dedicated to the service of God and prince. During the next decade, nearly 100 similar colonies organized around tribal group identity were founded throughout the country, providing Ibn Sa'ud with a formidable military force. At the same time, however, the Sa'udi military also included soldiers recruited

from the towns and settled areas.

Ibn Sa'ud's first major conquest in Najd was the taking of Al-Hasa province from the Ottomans in 1913, although he was again compelled to reaffirm Ottoman sovereignty over all of his territory in 1914. During World War I (1914-18), he was aided by British subsidies, but he managed by adroit diplomacy to be relatively quiescent, though surrounded by enemies. In 1919, however, he struck his first blow, against Husayn ibn 'Ali of the Hejaz, whose army was annihilated by the Ikhwan. In 1920 Ibn Sa'ud's son Faysal captured the province of Asir between the Hejaz and Yemen. In 1921 Ibn Sa'ud defeated the forces of Muhammad ibn Talal, the last Rashidi emir, and annexed the whole of northern Arabia, occupying Al-Jawf and Wadi Al-Sirhan in the following year. Kuwait experienced border raids and a Sa'udi blockade over payment of customs duties. Meanwhile, Faysal I and 'Abdullah I, the sons of Husayn ibn 'Ali, had been placed on the thrones of Iraq and Transjordan, respectively, by the British government. These territories and the Hejaz served as a formidable British-protected cordon around the northern and western borders of the Wahhabi state, though incidents along the border were frequent.

In 1923 the British government invited all the rulers concerned in these sporadic hostilities to attend a conference in Kuwait and if possible to settle their differences. The British also made it clear that the subsidies theretofore paid to Ibn Sa'ud and Husayn ibn 'Ali would be terminated.

The conference ended in complete disagreement, and in September 1924 the Wahhabis attacked the Hejaz. They captured Al-Ta'if after a brief struggle, but this was followed by a massacre of the city's male civilians. The Sa'udis occupied Mecca without opposition. Ibn Sa'ud then laid siege to Jiddah and Medina, while Husayn ibn 'Ali abdicated his throne in favour of his son 'Ali. By the end of 1925, both Medina and Jiddah had surrendered to the Sa'udis. The Al-'Aqabah-Ma'an district adjacent to the northern Hejaz was occupied by Transjordan to prevent its falling into Wahhabi hands. On Jan. 8, 1926, Ibn Sa'ud, who had adopted the title sultan of Najd in 1921, was proclaimed king of the Hejaz in the Great Mosque of Mecca. In 1927 he also changed his title of sultan to king of Najd and its dependencies, the two parts of his dual kingdom being administered for the time being as separate units. In the same year, the Treaty of Jiddah, negotiated between Ibn Sa'ud and a British special envoy, Sir Gilbert Clayton, placed Sa'udi relations with Great Britain on a permanent footing as the British fully acknowledged Sa'udi independence. A series of Muslim conferences sponsored by the Sa'udis in the Hejaz legitimized their presence as rulers.

Associating with Christian powers put Ibn Sa'ud in an awkward position with the more religious elements in Najd. Moreover, his alleged complaisance over British involvement in and protection of Iraq and Transjordan, both of which the Ikhwan thought ripe for conquest, created tension with his military supporters. Incidents on their frontiers created a state of virtual though undeclared war, in which British aircraft played a part in discouraging Wahhabi incursions. Ibn Sa'ud also on several occasions violently suppressed political and military opposition by the Ikhwan.

In 1928 and 1929, Faysal al-Dawish, Sultan ibn Bijad, and other leaders of the Ikhwan, accusing Ibn Sa'ud of betraying the cause for which they had fought and opposing the taxes levied upon their followers, resumed their defiance of the king's authority. The rebels sought to stop the centralization of power in the hands of the king and keep the purity of Wahhabi practices against what they saw as innovations advocated by Ibn Sa'ud. The majority of the population rallied to the king's side, and this, with the support of the Najdi '*ulama*', enabled him to defeat the rebels. The civil war, however, dragged on into 1930, when the rebels were rounded up by the British in Kuwaiti territory and their leaders handed over to the king. With their defeat, power passed definitively into the hands of townspeople rather than the tribes.

Ibn Sa'ud was at last free to give his undivided attention to the development of his country and to the problems of foreign policy that beset him on all sides. Above all, he was concerned to assert and maintain the complete independence of his country and in it the exclusive supremacy of Islam. As long as these fundamental objectives remained in place, he was not only ready to cooperate with all nations but prepared to regard with sympathy some of the practices that had taken root in the Hejaz and other areas as the result of foreign contacts. The ban on music, for example, was progressively circumvented by the radio, which was also used as a tool to unite the kingdom and increase military efficiency. And so the latitudinarian spirit, slowly at first but with ever-increasing momentum, lessened a few of the inhibitions of the puritan regime.

On the other hand, Ibn Sa'ud rigorously opposed the intervention of any foreign government whatever in the internal politics of the regime. Yet, aside from members of the royal family, and Najdi and Hejazi merchants, many of the king's chief advisers were foreign Muslims. Some of the foreign advisers were political refugees from their homelands and served Ibn Sa'ud for many years.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia begins properly on Sept. 23, 1932, when by royal decree the dual kingdom of the Hejaz and Najd with its dependencies, administered since 1927 as two separate units, was unified under the name of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The chief immediate effect was to increase the unity of the kingdom and to decrease the possibility of Hejazi separatism, while the name underscored the central role of the royal family in the kingdom's creation. No attempt was made to change the supreme authority of the king as the absolute monarch of the new regime; indeed, his power was emphasized in 1933 by his choice of his son Sa'ud as heir apparent.

Foreign relations, 1932-53

From the date of its establishment in September 1932, Saudi Arabia enjoyed full international recognition as an independent state, although it did not join the League of Nations.

In 1934 Ibn Sa'ud was involved in war with Yemen over a boundary dispute. An additional cause of the war was Yemen's support of an uprising by an Asiri prince against Ibn Sa'ud. In a seven-week campaign, the Saudis were generally victorious. Hostilities were terminated by the Treaty of Al-Ta'if, by which the Saudis gained the disputed district. Diplomatic relations with Egypt, severed in 1926 because of an incident on the Meccan pilgrimage, were not renewed until after the death of King Fu'ad of Egypt in 1936.

Fixing the boundaries of the country remained a problem throughout the 1930s. In tribal society, sovereignty was traditionally expressed in the form of suzerainty over certain tribes rather than in fixed territorial boundaries. Hence, Ibn Sa'ud regarded the demarcation of land frontiers with suspicion. Nevertheless, the majority of the frontiers with Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan had been demarcated by 1930. In the south, no agreement was reached on the exact site of the frontiers with the Trucial States and with the interior of Yemen and Muscat and Oman.

After Saudi Arabia declared its neutrality during World War II (1939-45), Britain and the United States subsidized Saudi Arabia, which declared war on Germany in 1945, and this thus enabled the kingdom to enter the United Nations as a founding member. Ibn Sa'ud also joined the Arab League, but he did not play a leading part in it, since the religious and conservative element in Saudi Arabia opposed cooperation with other Arab states, even when Saudis shared common views, as in opposition to Zionism. In the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Saudi Arabia contributed only one battalion.

Internal affairs, 1932-53

Although oil had been discovered in Al-Hasa near the shores of the Persian Gulf before World War II, it was not exploited until after 1941. State revenues before the war were derived primarily from the pilgrimage, customs duties, and taxes—which decreased as a result of the world economic depression of the 1930s. After 1944 large numbers of foreign oil workers arrived in the country, and Aramco (the Arabian American Oil Company) was established as a joint venture between a number of American oil companies and the Saudi government. The country was itself unable to supply the oil company with sufficient skilled workers, and oil production was largely managed and undertaken by foreigners. When in 1949 Aramco paid more taxes to the U.S. government than the yield to Saudi Arabia in royalties, the Saudi leadership obtained a new agreement in 1950 that required Aramco to pay an income tax of 50 percent of the net operating income to the Saudis.

The sudden wealth from increased production was a mixed blessing. Cultural life flourished, primarily in the Hejaz, which was the centre for newspapers and radio, but the large influx of outsiders apparently increased xenophobia in a population already noted for its distrust of foreigners. The disturbance of traditional patterns caused by the cultural changes, new wealth from increased production of oil, inflation, and the movement of the population to the major cities was reflected in the government, which had become increasingly wasteful and lavish. Despite the new wealth, extravagant spending led to governmental deficits and foreign borrowing in the 1950s.

Ibn Sa'ud, who had been brought up in the strict puritanical faith of the Wahhabis, viewed this flood of wealth and the consequent changing mores with distaste and bewilderment. He died on Nov. 9, 1953.

King Sa'ud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz

Ibn Sa'ud was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Sa'ud, with his second son, Faysal (the two had different mothers), declared heir apparent. The two half-brothers were remarkably different. Sa'ud had been heir apparent since 1933; he had many ties among the desert tribes. Faysal, who had lived chiefly in the cities of the Hejaz, had often been abroad in his post as Saudi foreign minister. Sa'ud thus represented what soon would become the *ancien régime*, while those advocating modernization supported Faysal.

Meanwhile, money continued to pour into the country. There was an enormous increase in the population of the towns, notably of Riyadh and Jiddah. The character of these urban societies was changed beyond all recognition by a large influx of bourgeoisie from neighbouring countries. The freer lifestyle of immigrant wives was tolerated to a certain degree, but such liberalization was not extended to Saudi women. Roads, schools, hospitals, palaces, apartment buildings, and airports replaced the old alleyways and mud-brick houses. Weaving and other crafts continued, but they were modified by the use of new patterns and materials.

At the royal court, there was constant rivalry between Sa'ud and Faysal. In March 1958, as a result of pressure from the royal family, Sa'ud issued a decree transferring all executive power to Faysal. In December 1960, however, Faysal was obliged to resign as prime minister, and the king himself assumed the office. In 1962-63 Faysal was once more given executive powers. Finally, on Nov. 2, 1964, the family collectively deposed Sa'ud and proclaimed Faysal king. The National Guard, the royal princes, and the '*ulama*' had supported Faysal in the struggle for power against Sa'ud. Faysal was simply more competent than Sa'ud: it was he who developed the ministries of government and established for the first time an efficient bureaucracy.

Foreign affairs under Sa'ud and Faysal

Since the frontier between Saudi Arabia and Oman had never been demarcated and there was the possibility of discovering oil in the area, in 1952 Saudi Arabian forces occupied the oasis of Al-Buraymi, which Britain felt belonged to Oman and the emirate of Abu Dhabi (Abu Zabi)—both of which enjoyed British protection. In July 1954 the British and Saudi governments agreed to submit the dispute to an arbitration tribunal. It convened in Geneva in September 1955, but the negotiations broke down, and British-officered forces from Oman and Abu Dhabi reoccupied the oasis. During the Suez Crisis in 1956, Saudi Arabia broke off relations with Britain, and they were not reestablished until 1963. In September 1961, following the Iraqi claim to sovereignty over Kuwait, Saudi Arabia sent troops to Kuwait in response to a request from its ruler.

Since World War II, the United States had become the most influential foreign power in Saudi Arabia. American interest was directed toward the oil industry, which was owned by U.S. companies. In 1960 Saudi Arabia helped found the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Saudis favoured the United States in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, but they opposed American support of Israel.

As a result of the rise to power of Egypt's Pan-Arab nationalist president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Saudi relations with Egypt were often strained. Egyptian propaganda made frequent attacks on the Saudi system of royal government. When Egyptian troops were sent to North Yemen in 1962, tension between Saudi Arabia and Egypt became more acute. The Saudis helped the Yemeni royalists against the Egyptian-backed Yemen republic. King Faysal ultimately agreed to assist Egypt with financial aid, provided Nasser withdrew his troops from Yemen.

Faysal, leader of the largest conservative Arab state, continued to warn against the danger of communist influence in Arab and Muslim countries. Saudi Arabia also acted against the United States, however, as a result of U.S. assistance to Israel during the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. The Saudis and other Arab oil producers organized a short-lived oil boycott, and the price of oil worldwide quadrupled.

The Saudi government gained direct ownership of one-fourth of Aramco's crude oil operations in 1973. Ultimately, the Saudis achieved complete control of the company and, therefore, over their chief economic resource. By 1984 the president of Aramco was a Saudi citizen.

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Reigns of Khalid and Fahd

Domestic and foreign policy until the Persian Gulf War

On March 25, 1975, King Faysal was assassinated; he was succeeded by his half-brother, Crown Prince Khalid, and Prince Fahd was made crown prince. During the new king's reign, economic and social development continued at an extremely rapid rate, revolutionizing the infrastructure and educational system of the country.

After the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement on March 26, 1979, Saudi Arabia joined most of the other Arab nations in severing diplomatic relations with Egypt. (See Camp David

Accords.) The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980-90) also caused the Saudi monarchy serious concern—owing in no small part to the large Shi'ite minority in eastern Saudi Arabia (the same sect that predominates in Iran) that rioted in 1979 and 1980 in support of Iran's revolution. The kingdom thereafter supported Iraq in its war with Iran.

The only dramatic domestic challenge to the monarchy since World War II took place in November 1979 when the Haram mosque (Great Mosque) in Mecca, the holiest site in the world for Muslims, was seized by followers of a Saudi religious extremist, Juhayman al-'Utaybi, who had been educated by the Saudi religious establishment and was a former member of the National Guard. Juhayman protested what he saw as the un-Islamic behaviour of the Saudi royal family. The rebels occupied the mosque for two weeks before they were defeated by National Guard troops.

On June 13, 1982, King Khalid died, and Crown Prince Fahd, who had long been influential in the administration of affairs, succeeded to the throne. Fahd maintained Saudi Arabia's foreign policy of close cooperation with the United States and increased purchases of sophisticated military equipment from the United States and Britain. In the 1970s and '80s, the country had become the single largest oil producer in the world, and the government played a major role in determining OPEC policy on oil production and pricing. Oil revenues were crucial to Saudi society as its economy was changed by the extraordinary wealth channeled through the government and derived from oil operations, notwithstanding a downturn in oil prices and production in the mid-1980s. Urbanization, mass public education, the presence of numerous foreign workers, and access to new media all affected Saudi values and mores. While society changed profoundly, however, political processes did not. The political elite came to include more bureaucrats and technocrats, but real power continued in the hands of the dynasty.

The Persian Gulf War and its aftermath

Saudi political leadership was challenged when Iraq, after having rejected attempted Saudi mediation, reasserted its earlier claims and invaded neighbouring Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, precipitating the Persian Gulf War (1990-91). The Kuwaiti government fled to Saudi Arabia, and King Fahd denounced the Iraqi invaders. Fearing that President Saddam Hussein of Iraq might invade Saudi Arabia next (despite Saudi assistance to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War), the Saudis, breaking with tradition, invited the United States and other countries to send troops to protect the kingdom. This was done after Fahd had received the approbation of the kingdom's highest-ranking religious official, Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, who agreed that non-Muslims could defend Islam's holiest places. By mid-November the United States had sent 230,000 troops, which were the most important part of the coalition force that ultimately included soldiers from many other countries. The Saudis adroitly coordinated Arab and Muslim contingents and also established diplomatic ties with China, the Soviet Union, and, later, Iran. King Fahd expanded his goal beyond the protection of Saudi Arabia to include the liberation of Kuwait and, if possible, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

With approval from Saudi Arabia secured in advance, the coalition, with some 800,000 troops (more than 540,000 from the United States), attacked Iraq by air on Jan. 16-17, 1991. Saudi pilots flew more than 7,000 sorties and were prominent in the battles around the Saudi town of Ra's al-Khafji. In the four-day ground war that began on February 24, Saudi troops, including the National Guard, helped defeat the Iraqis and drive them out of Kuwait. Despite the clear military victory, the full implications of the war for Saudi Arabia were not immediately known.

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Yet as time wore on, that cardinal event, in which a fellow Arab state threatened to rend years of the royal family's accomplishments asunder, seemed to be a turning point for many aspects of Saudi political, social, and economic life. A certain malaise set in, with various groups questioning the wisdom of the royal family and demanding accountability. Many citizens questioned how a regime that had spent such vast sums on defense would, in the end, be required to call on the help of non-Muslim outsiders when it felt threatened. In the internal political sphere, two opposition movements emerged, one Islamist and the other liberal and modernist, and forced Fahd to undertake several initiatives.

The economic impact of the Persian Gulf War was considerable, as Saudi Arabia housed and assisted not only foreign troops but also Kuwaiti civilians while at the same time expelling Yemenis and Jordanians, whose countries had supported Iraq diplomatically. Saudi Arabia purchased new weapons from abroad, increased the size of its own armed forces, and gave financial subsidies to a number of foreign governments. Higher Saudi oil production and substantially higher prices in the world oil market provided some compensation for the Saudi economy. However, gross domestic product per capita grew only marginally through the 1990s and in real terms actually fell in some years. A languid economy—in a country perceived as otherwise being extremely wealthy—combined with a growth in unemployment to contribute to the kingdom's sense of malaise. This disquiet added to a subsequent rise in civil unrest.

One of the first results of the altered situation in Saudi Arabia was King Fahd's March 1, 1992, issuance of three important decrees: the Basic Law of Government; the Consultative Council Statute; and the Regions Statute. Whereas Fahd was responding to demands for greater governmental accountability, the first and second decrees contained a number of quasi-constitutional clauses. But since the government had often stated that the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (practices) of the Prophet were the country's constitution, he was at pains to state that there had not been a “constitutional vacuum” in Saudi Arabia and that the new laws confirmed existing practice.

The Saudi dilemma was to respond to dissent while making as few actual changes in the status quo as possible. The Basic Law of Government changed the process used to select the heir to the throne by extending candidates to the grandchildren of Ibn Sa'ud, enshrined the king's right to choose his heir, established a right to privacy, and prohibited infringements of human rights without just cause. The Consultative Council Statute set up an advisory body of 60 (later expanded to 120) members plus a chairman. While convoking a council gave the appearance of a step toward a more representative government, the council actually was appointed by the king and could be dissolved by him at will.

Fahd made it clear that he did not have democracy in mind: “A system based on elections is not consistent with our Islamic creed, which [approves of] government by consultation [*shura*].”

The Islamist opposition

After the Persian Gulf War, Saudi Arabia's Islamist opposition grew more influential. It was not made up of extremists like Juhayman; instead, highly educated academics and Islamic preachers from the lower ranks of the establishment '*ulama*' formed its core. It was a loose agglomeration of various trends, but the main spokesmen were two charismatic preachers, Salman al-'Awdah and Safar al-Hawali. Their main grievance was that the regime failed to act according to what the opposition defined as proper Islamic norms in foreign and domestic affairs. Criticism of the government was not allowed in Saudi Arabia, but in September 1992 a group associated with the

two clerics published a daring, lengthy, and detailed document called the “Memorandum of Exhortation,” in which they took the regime to task for having an overfinanced military that did not live up to expectations, for glorifying decadent and Westernized lifestyles, and for not allowing dissenting Islamist opinions to be expressed in print and on the airwaves.

The regime tried to rely on clerics with whom it had close ties to reign in the dissidents, but to no avail. The kingdom's first organized Sunni Islamist opposition group, the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), was established in 1993. The committee was not a Western-style human rights organization—as its English-language sobriquet might suggest—but an Islamist opposition group that demanded that the regime act according to the strict Islamic norms on which the country had been founded. Its original members were clerics and university faculty, and it was quick to disseminate its message via telephone facsimile and, later, the Internet.

The Islamist challenge that faced the regime was an especially troubling one inasmuch as the regime itself had risen to power and maintained its status by appealing to those same Islamic symbols. This attack threatened to undermine the Sa'ud family's very legitimacy, and the family reacted by outlawing the committee and arresting its members. The group thereafter operated abroad, in London, until it split in 1996.

Meanwhile, in 1994 the first mass Islamist demonstration was held in the central Arabian city of Burayda, following the arrest of al-Hawali. It was led by al-'Awdah, who was arrested during the demonstration. While one could not conclude that Islamist opposition was rampant, the fact that such a large demonstration was held at all was an indication that all was not right in the capital. The demonstration was followed by a further crackdown on dissent.

The dissidents condemned the regime's supposed un-Islamic practices. Of particular concern to them was the presence of U.S. troops and those of other non-Muslim countries on Saudi soil, a presence that—given the proximity of the two holy cities—they deemed not only an affront to their religion but a situation designed only to protect the regime. In November 1995 an explosion rocked the central Riyadh headquarters of a U.S. government group that trained members of the Saudi National Guard. The explosion killed five Americans and two Indians. Three hitherto-unknown organizations took responsibility for the operation, and all of them demanded the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the kingdom. While there was no proven connection between the bombers and the known leaders of the Saudi Islamist movement, in May 1996 Saudi authorities arrested and executed four youths who claimed—in televised confessions—to have been influenced by the CDLR and by the views of an Afghanistan-based Saudi Islamist financier, Osama bin Laden.

In June 1996 a massive explosion ripped through an apartment complex housing U.S. Air Force personnel. Nineteen U.S. servicemembers were killed, and hundreds were injured. This bombing remained unsolved, but U.S. and Saudi authorities suggested that Iranian-backed Saudi Shi'ites were involved.

Although they still actively campaigned from abroad—particularly on the Internet—Islamists maintained a low profile within the kingdom throughout the 1990s. Indications were that Crown Prince 'Abd Allah (Abdullah)—who had effectively run day-to-day affairs after Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995—had either reached some kind of agreement with Islamist leaders or had been granted some form of grace period by them. In 1999 the government ordered the release of the opposition clerics al-Hawali and al-'Awdah, and, although there were no indications of the conditions of their release, the two thereafter refrained from publicly criticizing the royal family.

Far more ominous was the development outside the kingdom of a network, which was associated

with bin Laden, known as al-Qaeda. Although there were no direct attacks against the regime either at home or abroad, al-Qaeda staged a number of violent attacks against U.S. targets throughout the world. These attacks culminated in the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, a majority of whose participants were citizens of Saudi Arabia.

Foreign policy since the end of the Persian Gulf War

Saudi Arabia owed a tremendous debt to the countries whose forces had defeated Iraq, particularly to the United States. The kingdom repaid this debt in part by purchasing large quantities of weapons from American firms and by supporting the U.S.-led peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. In the aftermath of the war, however, the kingdom also sought to cultivate closer relations with other regional powers, particularly with Iran.

Saudi Arabia played a behind-the-scenes role in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations by persuading Syria to attend the October 1991 Madrid Conference, which opened the postwar peace dialogue in the region; Saudi Arabia held observer status at the conference and was active in an effort to soften Syria's position against Israel, though with little avail. Following the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993, the government overcame its anger at PLO chairman Yasir 'Arafat for having supported Iraq during the Persian Gulf War and pledged large sums of money to support the development of the Palestinian Authority. In 1994 the Saudis, encouraged by the United States, led the Gulf Cooperation Council in withdrawing from a long-standing Arab League boycott of companies either directly or indirectly doing business with Israel.

With Iraq seemingly chastened by the Persian Gulf War, Saudi worries over regional security turned to Iran, which, since the Islamic revolution, had purportedly sought to export the revolution to other countries in the region with significant Shi'ite populations, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. In strongly opposing Iran, the Saudi government also followed the U.S. policy of "dual containment" (i.e., isolating both Iran and Iraq), in which the United States sought to depict Iran as a "rogue" state that supported terrorism.

By 1996, however, Saudi Arabia's sense of obligation to the United States for its support during the war had begun to wane. Saudi leaders, particularly the newly powerful 'Abd Allah, began to develop closer relations with Iran. 'Abd Allah, keen to put a distance between his policies and the unpopular pro-Western policies of Fahd, apparently assessed that the United States would continue to support the Sa'ud family, despite U.S. antipathy toward Iran, and so turned his attention to improving regional relations. Soon dignitaries from Iran and Saudi Arabia were exchanging visits, and the two countries' leaders were cooperating in several matters. The kingdom also resolved several long-standing border disputes; these actions included significantly reshaping its border with Yemen.

In the end, however, the greatest hurdle to U.S.-Saudi relations came from within the kingdom—from the Saudi citizens who participated in the September 11 attacks and other acts of terrorism against the United States. The perception of many Americans was that the royal family, through its long and close relations with the Wahhabi sect, had laid the groundwork for the growth of militant groups like al-Qaeda and that after the attacks had done little to help track the militants or ward off future atrocities. That viewpoint was reinforced when in 2003 the Saudi government refused to support or to participate in the Iraq War between U.S.-led forces and Iraq, an action seen by some as an attempt by the royal family to placate the kingdom's Islamist radicals. That same year Saudi and U.S. government officials agreed to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Saudi soil. The country underwent a peaceful power transition in 2005, when, following Fahd's death on August 1, 'Abd Allah ascended the throne. Also, in December, Saudi Arabia formally joined the World Trade Organization.

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