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MANAGING REFORM?
SAUDI ARABIA AND THE
KING'S DILEMMA

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Saudi Arabia stands out among Gulf monarchies due to the size of its polity,¹ its strategic influence in and outside the Gulf,² and its unique influence in the Muslim world as the keeper of the two holiest sites in Islam: Mecca and Medina. There are also substantial pressures affecting the status quo relationship between the monarchy and various societal forces. The burgeoning youth population is straining the capacity of the Saudi welfare state at the same time as it is becoming more urban and educated—all characteristics of other societies that have experienced political upheaval.³

Contrary to received wisdom, oil does not render the Al-Saud regime immune to popular discontent. As the winds of revolution sweep the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is facing immense strains on its traditional ruling balance. It is thus crucial to understand the possibilities and limits of the monarchy's ability to adapt to these mounting challenges.

Several factors indicate that social unrest in the kingdom will remain limited to small pockets for the near future. These include largely co-opted elites, divided opposition movements, and the popularity of King Abdullah. However, many of the underlying factors for instability are growing more evident, and if not addressed could conflagrate with a catalyzing event—such as a succession crisis. Political liberalization to improve governance and accountability is potentially destabilizing in the short run but necessary for long-term stability given the array of pressures facing Saudi Arabia. The Al-Saud regime is entering a crucial moment in its history; how it navigates this crisis will have profound effects for both the monarchy and the Saudi Arabian state in the years to come.

This paper will provide background as to how the Al-Saud regime has recently managed social unrest in the kingdom. It will then briefly detail the various reform movements within the kingdom, their

demands, and relative influence with the regime. It will conclude by examining the scope of institutional reform efforts under King Abdullah and the prospects for political liberalization in an increasingly tumultuous domestic and regional environment.

BACKGROUND

The Al-Saud family's claim to legitimacy rests on several pillars: tribal, historical, and religious—of which religious legitimacy is both the most fundamental and the most problematic. The Al-Saud rule under the Islamic criteria of *wali al-ahd* (rightful leadership) with the support of the *ulema* (religious scholars). However, this relationship between the regime and the *ulema* is a double-edged sword, as a loss of legitimacy in one can shake the other.

The Al-Saud regime has weathered severe tests to its legitimacy before. From King Abd al-Aziz's battle with the Ikhwan in 1929, to managing the dual challenges of Arab nationalism and revolutionary Islam in the region, the Al-Saud has navigated challenges to its stability through a variety of methods: co-opting opposition leaders, expanding the social welfare net, and suppressing dissent. To put the current unrest in perspective, it is useful to examine how the regime has handled recent crises to its legitimacy, such as in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, and whether such tactics are likely to work in today's volatile climate.

PETITIONS AND A FRAGMENTED REFORM MOVEMENT

In the strained financial and political climate following the Gulf War, young Islamist scholars and liberal elites alike saw an opportunity to press the regime for radical changes.⁴ From 1990-1994 a series of petitions were submitted to King Fahd pressing for political, social, and economic reforms, the

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most strident of which, “The Memorandum of Advice,” was signed in 1992 by 107 religious scholars.⁵ It criticized key elements of the Saudi system, including the role of the official ulema, the distribution of wealth, and the country’s foreign policy, particularly its relationship with the United States. The document also called for the establishment of an independent judiciary and consultative council, as well as a more extensive application of Islamic law, including tightened control of the religious sector over education. Liberal petitioners, as well as the Shi’i Reform Movement, called for an end to corruption and pressed for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy as well as expanded rights for women and the Shi’i minority.⁶ Although these groups had radically different views on the nature of reforms that should take place, they were briefly united in their desire to change the status quo.

In response, the regime instituted “basic laws” in 1992 and established the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*). However, as the crisis dissipated and leaders of the opposition were repressed, it became clear that the promise of reform was more rhetorical than real. The basic law fell far short of a constitution and did not guarantee freedom of association, expression, or assembly—let alone political participation.⁷ In effect, the Consultative Council was established by royal decree as a purely advisory body. The council’s membership has been expanded on three separate occasions in response to calls for reform and now stands at 150 members appointed by the king to a four-year renewable term. Its capacity to call ministers and conduct investigations into administrative irregularities remains limited, as does its access to concrete budget information.

THE SAHWA AL-ISLAMIYYA

The ulema are not a monolithic body and have been divided on several occasions—most notably during the 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, after the first Gulf War, and during protests against education reform in 2004 and gender mixing in 2009.⁸ The “official” or establishment ulema occupy positions of authority in state-proscribed bodies such as the Senior Ulema

Committee and enjoy a close relationship with the regime. This relationship has on several occasions⁹ led to charges of co-optation and inflamed popular support for dissident religious leaders.

The most serious opposition to the regime in the 1990s came from young religious dissidents and university students; this became known as the *sahwa* (awakening) movement. This diffuse movement was critical of the establishment ulema’s issuing of *fatwas* in support of U.S. basing in the wake of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait.¹⁰ This relationship between the state-sponsored ulema and dissident religious voices, such as the *sahwa* clerics and various Islamist factions, is a complex one and an important factor in the push-pull dynamic between many reform efforts and the state.¹¹

To rein in the growing *sahwa* movement in the mid 1990s, the regime cracked down on its leaders and made concessions to the ulema—particularly in the education and judicial sectors. Thus, while the regime made some concessions to liberal reformers, namely the introduction of the basic laws, it solidified the ulema’s control over social institutions in hopes of limiting religious dissent. This pattern of concessions underlines that the Al-Saud regime views the greatest challenge to its legitimacy as emerging from the religious sphere rather than from liberal elites, who are seen as lacking popular influence.

SHI’I OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

The Shi’i reform faction also has limited sway among the larger populace, as the Shi’i minority—estimated between 5-15 percent of Saudi Arabia—is both geographically and socially isolated in the broader Sunni society.¹² The Shi’i population is located mainly in the Eastern Province, the center of the kingdom’s oil production. Regional underdevelopment and institutional discrimination are the main grievances of the various Shi’i opposition strains.¹³ Riots in Qatif and al-Hasa have broken out several times in the past, most notably in 1979, and have been quickly, and often brutally, suppressed. Recent confrontations include the 2009 attacks by Saudi security forces on Shi’i pilgrims

in Medina and the March 2011 protests centered in Qatif. The depth of anti-Shia sentiment among many Saudis, and the tendency to see an Iranian hand behind Shi'i protests, limit the ability of the Shi'i reform movement to gain broader support.

REFORMS UNDER ABDULLAH

The 9/11 terrorist attacks created several ripple effects across the Saudi regime. The first was a significant strain in its alliance with United States, as 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals. The second, and most significant in terms of a direct threat to the Al-Saud regime, was a new wave of domestic terrorism in 2003 led by various extremist factions, including Al Qaeda. The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan also served as a focal point of extremist opposition. In a time span of a year and a half, there were over five separate terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia, shaking the appearance of domestic stability.¹⁴ The rising threat of extremism, combined with focused international attention, created the political space for liberal elites to press the case for reform more forcefully with a newly receptive regime.

In a replay of the short-lived activism following the Gulf War, more than a dozen petitions were submitted to senior members of the royal family between 2000 and 2004. On January 20, 2003, then Crown Prince Abdullah received a petition entitled "A Vision for the Present and the Future of the Nation" signed by 104 prominent liberal and Islamist intellectuals. The petition demanded elections to the consultative council, separation of powers, judicial reform, and respect for civil rights as well as expanded rights for women.¹⁵ In April 2003, 450 Shias signed and submitted "Partners in One Nation," demanding equal treatment under the law. In September 2003 more than 306 Saudi men and women signed a petition "In Defense of the Nation" giving their support to the January petition while explicitly rejecting violence and all forms of terrorism.¹⁶ In December of the same year, over 300 women submitted a petition demanding increased rights under Saudi law. In February of 2004, 880 intellectuals demanded

accountability for previously announced reforms, a schedule for implementing political reforms, and the reform of the Saudi basic law.¹⁷ Unlike King Fahd's response to the petitions following the first Gulf war, Crown Prince Abdullah formally met with several of the petitioners to discuss their demands, giving the impression that reform was imminent.

The mandate for reform was not uniformly endorsed throughout the regime. The Ministry of Interior, led by Prince Nayef, the third most senior official in the kingdom, stated that reform advocates would be arrested for statements "that do not serve the unity of the homeland or the integrity of the society."¹⁸ Needless to say, the line between advocacy and incitement is often blurred in the eyes of the more security-focused state apparatus. Meanwhile, there was also no consensus on the scope, content, or pace of reform among the various factions pushing for it. Liberal critics often claim that the regime is using the specter of militant Salafis to delay substantive liberalization, while dissident ulema charge the Al-Saud regime with backing creeping Westernization at the expense of Islam and traditional culture.

Nonetheless, with the ascent of Abdullah to the throne in 2005, the Al-Saud regime began cautiously recalibrating its relations with various reform factions. In the past 10 years the regime has pursued both a carrot and stick approach to reform—allowing selective privatization of the economic sector through such mechanisms as membership in the World Trade Organization, and pushing for gradual reform of the social sector through a series of a national dialogue forums broadcast on national television on topics such as women's rights and religious tolerance, all while coming down hard on opposition.¹⁹

Among the most significant moves were elections at the municipal level in 2005, and expanded powers for the Consultative Council, including some access to budget information and the ability to propose new legislation.²⁰ However, the impact of these initiatives was mixed at best. The municipal elections were marked by low voter turnout, the exclusion of female candidates, and a subsequent round

of elections scheduled for 2009 was cancelled.²¹ In 2009, after a period during which reform had been largely viewed as stalled,²² King Abdullah announced a significant reshuffling of his cabinet. These changes were notable, as they placed more reform-minded and technocratic ministers in top positions including the ministries of education and the judiciary, along with the appointment of Nora bint Abdullah al-Fayez as Deputy Education Minister, the first woman to serve in a senior ministerial position.²³ Other significant moves included the expansion of the Senior Ulema Committee and 2010's royal decree limiting the power to issue official fatwas to the Senior Ulema Committee, both of which were seen as trying to limit the ability of religious interests to oppose reforms.²⁴ On a day-to-day level, the influence of the religious police, especially in the kingdom's western region, the Hijaz, significantly diminished, and press censorship was eased, especially on controversial social issues such as gender segregation.

However, reform, even under a popular leader like King Abdullah, has been partial and tends to backslide due to competing interests, both within the royal family and society at large. The bureaucracy itself is difficult to change. Indeed, reform of the most critical sectors is often carried out outside of established bureaucratic channels through either new institutions such as the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) or insulated "islands of efficiency" like Aramco.²⁵ Certainly, some of the most galvanizing criticism of the regime focuses on the often unresponsive and opaque bureaucracy. In particular, the Jeddah floods of both 2008 and 2011 led to widespread criticism of the decrepit infrastructure and lack of accountability. To counter the growing anger over mismanagement and corruption, Prince Khalid al-Faisal, the governor of Mecca, went on a public relations offensive to address the crisis on local television.²⁶ However, without concrete steps to make local government structures more responsive, top-level interventions will continue to be ad-hoc and intermittent. Gradualism is the mantra, and even potentially positive reforms with substantial political effects are halted by a bloated bureaucracy

and the perennial threat of conservative backlash.

JOB, JOB, JOB

Unemployment is estimated at anywhere from 10-20 percent for men with severely limited employment opportunities for women, and little private sector job creation.²⁷ According to official Saudi statistics, 27 percent of Saudis under the age of 30 were unemployed in 2009,²⁸ a problem aggravated by a dependence on foreign labor²⁹ and declining government subsidies.³⁰ Even with significant rises in the price of oil, Saudi Arabia's average GDP of \$24,000 ranks second to last in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).³¹

The real challenge is transforming the economy in a way that allows for the productive employment of the 47 percent of the Saudi population who are under the age 18.³² Given the dual pressures of youth demographics and weak job creation, this is the single most pressing issue facing the Saudi regime. To address this gap, King Abdullah has embarked on a rapid transformation of the higher education system, expanding from 6 to 24 universities in less than ten years, in addition to allowing for the cautious introduction of private education and funding a massive \$2.4 billion overhaul of K-12 education. However, improving the quality and not just the quantity of education is a long-term struggle. Addressing the mismatch of skills to the labor market's demands will require years, if not decades.

Unemployed and underemployed youth in Saudi Arabia are growing impatient waiting for structural reforms to take root.³³ An example of this dilemma is the king's recent announcement of an increase in public sector salaries, unemployment benefits, as well as the intention to create one million jobs through accelerated Saudization of the workforce.³⁴ While these measures may act as a temporary steam valve for employment pressures, they can create inefficiencies in the labor market and private sector, leading to a negative feedback loop. This balance between employing the youth population in the near-term and creating

a dynamic and healthy economy for the long-term will remain a critical challenge for the regime.

SUCCESSION AND THE GENERATION GAP

Due to his relative popularity, King Abdullah has been able to champion a variety of institutional and social reforms. The 87 year-old king's recent surgery in the United States and convalescence in Morocco at the height of unrest in the Middle East, however, has many in and outside the kingdom nervous about succession plans. The next in line for the throne, Crown Prince Sultan, 83, has himself suffered from multiple health problems.

Mindful of the disarray and factionalism that dominated the period during King Fahd's long convalescence following a stroke in 1995, one of Abdullah's reform initiatives was the formation of an "allegiance council" to allow for both sons and select grandsons of King Abd al-Aziz to come to consensus on subsequent crown princes or facilitate the removal of a king if incapacitated.³⁵ However, the council's mechanisms are vague and there is no guarantee that a subsequent king would abide by the council's decisions.³⁶

It is also unclear whether King Abdullah's successor will enjoy the same widespread credibility needed to implement reforms while remaining above the fray of reactionary forces. Without strong leadership from the top, many of the reform initiatives begun under King Abdullah may stagnate or backslide. Indeed, a pressing concern is how long a generation of Al-Sauds in their 80s can rule over a populace of which 80 percent is under the age of 30. With many observers predicting that a transfer of power will remain among the sons of Saudi Arabia's founder King Abd al-Aziz, a generational shift in leadership seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.

RECENT UNREST

As protests brought down regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, many turned to Saudi Arabia's monarchy as

the next regime to be rocked by widespread social unrest. Indeed, several petitions were circulated in the wake of the revolutions, including "A Declaration of National Reform"³⁷ and "Toward the State of Rights and Institutions."³⁸ Each emphasized enhanced economic, political, and social liberties and was signed by an array of liberal elites as well as some prominent Islamists. However, the forecasted "day of rage" did not materialize and protests were largely limited to Shi'i population in the Eastern Province. Public debate about social and economic reforms is overshadowed by regional developments, particularly the Shi'i-led protests against the Sunni minority Al-Khalifa regime in Bahrain.

Although Saudi Shi'i protesters have numbered in the hundreds, not thousands, the crisis in Bahrain could prove to be a mobilizing force for Shi'i discontent. The Saudi-led GCC intervention in Bahrain, and the heavy-handed repression of the Shi'i protestors there, risk internationalizing domestic grievances among both Shi'i populations. In addition, by framing protests in the kingdom in terms of Iranian influence and "saboteurs," the Saudi regime risks a chilling effect on all advocacy for internal reform at precisely the moment it is most needed.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Al-Saud regime finds itself in a difficult position, as much-needed reform of the education and economic sectors is a long-term commitment that could take years to come to fruition. At the same time, the regime must contend with an often reactionary religious sector, labyrinthine bureaucracy, and volatile regional environment, all of which serve as impediments to rapid reform.

Unlike during past crises, the media environment has changed substantially and with it the ability of the regime to suppress dissent. Though the media is censored in Saudi Arabia, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the regime to keep news from reaching others either in the outside world or inside the kingdom. The proliferation of blogs, social media, and satellite channels has the potential to

upset the traditional balance of accommodation and obfuscation. The impact of the youth revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as the upheaval in Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain on the kingdom is uncertain, but it underlines the urgency of the moment.

How the regime handles the current unrest will be crucial. Will it be a replay of the ephemeral liberalization of the 1970s, which was quickly reversed when the regime was threatened by the 1979 Mecca crisis? Will it adopt the wait-and-see approach of the 1990s when, after the internal unrest and criticism following the 1991 Gulf War, the regime moved to adopt the long-discussed “basic laws,” but then did little to implement them? Or will the regime move to accelerate the implementation of reforms in the education and economic sectors despite opposition from conservative forces?

Based on the regime’s announcement of new municipal elections to be held this year, coupled with tightened control over the press and increased funding to security forces, the regime is trying to forge a limited compromise with reform advocates while sending the unequivocal message that dissent outside of proscribed lines will not be tolerated. In his March 18 address, King Abdullah announced the establishment of an anti-corruption commission, while strengthening support for the religious establishment, military, and internal security, including adding over 60,000 new jobs in the interior ministry alone.³⁹ The king also stated that criticism of religious scholars in the media would be met with swift prosecution—returning the favor after the Senior Ulema Committee issued fatwas condemning demonstrations as against *sharia* law.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE KINGDOM

The regime needs to be seen as managing the reform process instead of obstructing it. Under King Abdullah, political reforms that can be accelerated should be, with a focus on reducing corruption, improving bureaucratic transparency, and allowing for more political space to express dissent, both in the media and through political associations. Possible reforms

include setting a timetable for the often discussed elections to the Consultative Council. In addition, the powers of the Consultative Council should be expanded to allow it a greater role in ensuring greater public accountability and transparency. The recently announced municipal elections should also go hand in hand with a clearly delineated bureaucratic oversight role for local councils. This would help to devolve ministerial lines of authority to the local level and increase bureaucratic responsiveness.

Bureaucratic reform is easier said than done, but the empowerment of new and potentially nimble institutions as SAGIA, which was established to ease bureaucratic red tape for foreign direct investment, and changes to civil service labor laws may help to increase the dynamism of the public sector. Other institutions that could play an expanded role in leading economic and labor reforms include the regional chambers of commerce, which represent a wide cross section of local business elites, and have taken the lead in pushing for a variety of private sector regulatory reforms.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The American ability to constructively engage the Saudi regime on political liberalization is limited. The U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are a mobilizing issue for reactionary forces in Saudi Arabia and remain deeply unpopular with all segments of Saudi society. Too forceful a public emphasis on political liberalization by the Obama administration might, at this time, delegitimize indigenous reform efforts by allowing conservative opposition forces to characterize them as Western-backed. U.S. geo-strategic considerations, such as oil and its reliance on the Saudi Arabian regime for counter-terrorism cooperation, particularly in fragile Yemen, further complicate the picture. Indeed, as demonstrated by the strong show of conservative Islamists in the 2005 municipal elections, political liberalization has the potential to empower elements hostile to the current U.S.-Saudi relationship. However, without further liberalization,

unrest will likely only intensify over time, resulting in an unpredictable and chaotic situation.

Over the past several decades, a network of substantial relationships has been built between officials in both governments. The United States should leverage these high-level ties to privately press the message that it is better to reform now, under the popular King Abdullah, than after. Putting off structural economic and social reforms in the 1990s only deepened the problem for the regime—and the Al-Sauds are aware of that.

A critical role for the United States will be to assure Saudi Arabia on the regional security front, so that perceived external threats, such as Iran, do not dictate or delay the pace of internal reform. This is especially crucial in light of the recent developments in Bahrain and the presence of Saudi Arabian forces there. A regional conflagration on Sunni-Shi'i lines is becoming a very real possibility. The Al-Saud regime has made it clear that Bahrain is a red line and that it will not tolerate Western intervention in what it perceives as its backyard. Indeed, Saudi Arabia's intensified diplomatic outreach to both Russia and China in the wake of U.S. support of Mubarak's ouster in Egypt is intended to send a clear message that it can recalibrate its orientation towards the East if the United States missteps. Nonetheless, the United States must move swiftly and decisively to work with all actors to prevent the immediate crisis from escalating into a proxy war. Possible points of leverage include the recent 20-year \$60 billion U.S.-Saudi arms deal. However, a public re-examination of the deal should be approached with caution, as it could further undermine U.S.-Saudi relations at a delicate juncture. Given the regional insecurity that Saudi Arabia currently faces, a re-opening of the deal might further cement the regime's perception as isolated and threatened.

As the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions reverberate throughout the Middle East, the Al-Saud regime faces critical choices. On the international front, the Al-Saud must demobilize their forces in Bahrain to avoid a further regional escalation of Shi'i unrest. Rather than allow regional instability

to deter domestic reform, King Abdullah must accelerate political and economic liberalization. The tenuous nature of the moment underlines the need for the Al-Saud regime to boldly manage reform, rather than be overwhelmed by it. The piecemeal reforms of the past have been inadequate in addressing the social economic pressures building in the kingdom. Now is the time for the Al-Saud regime to make considerable strides toward liberalization. If it does not, the Saudi people may force the issue themselves, threatening the stability of the kingdom and possibly the survival of the regime.

NOTES

- ¹ Saudi Arabia's population has reached 27.137 million, with expatriates accounting for more than 30 percent of this number, according to preliminary results of the kingdom's 2010 census.
- ² Saudi Arabia contains one-fourth of the world's proven oil reserves.
- ³ Gregory Gause, et al., "A Dialogue: Saudi Arabia," *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2002): 199-228.
- ⁴ I use the terms "Islamist" and "liberal" with hesitation as both use Islam as a starting point in the justification for their demands and many would not self-identify with the term liberal.
- ⁵ See Abdul-Aziz O. Sager's excellent article, "Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society Foreign Affairs*, ed. Gerd Nonneman and Paul Aarts (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 234-270.
- ⁶ Gwenn Okruhlik, "Networks of Dissent, Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia," in *Current History* (January 2002), <<http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/okruhlik.htm>>
- ⁷ See in particular article 39, Basic Law of Government, <http://www.mideastinfo.com/documents/Saudi_Arabia_Basic_Law.htm>
- ⁸ For an excellent summary of this relationship see Guido Steinberg "The Wahhabi Ulema and the Saudi State: 1745 to the Present" in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society Foreign Affairs*, ed. Gerd Nonneman and Paul Aarts (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 11-34; On ulema opposition to recent social reforms see "King Abdullah Dismisses Alshithri," *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 10, 2009.
- ⁹ Such the Senior Ulema Committee's issuing of a fatwa in August of 1990 decreeing that the basing of foreign troops on Saudi Arabian soil was necessary to defend against a possible Iraqi invasion
- ¹⁰ Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St Martins Press, 1999).
- ¹¹ See "Saudi Arabia: Who are the Islamists?" ICG Middle East Report No. 31, September 21, 2004, for a more detailed break down of the various Islamist factions pushing for reform.
- ¹² Estimates vary. See Henry Meyer, "Saudi Arabia Risks Shiite Unrest in Wake of Bahrain Turmoil," *Bloomberg*, February 20, 2011, <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-02-20/saudi-arabia-risks-shiite-unrest-in-wake-of-bahrain-turmoil.html>>
- ¹³ See Toby Craig Jones, "Embattled in Arabia: Shias and the Politics of Confrontation in Saudi Arabia," Occasional Paper Series, Shi'i Militancy Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, June 3, 2009, for a detailed account of the multiple Shi'i reform movement strains in Saudi Arabia.
- ¹⁴ See Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁵ Iris Wurm, "In Doubt for the Monarchy: Autocratic Modernization in Saudi Arabia," Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, May 2008.
- ¹⁶ Petition "In Defense of the Nation," 24 September 2003. <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/pdf/files/SaudiPetitionTranslation.pdf>>
- ¹⁷ Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Saudi Arabia: Steps Towards Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?" *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, No. 5-6 (459-482); see "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?" ICG Middle East Report No. 28, July 14 2004, The letter can be found at <www.arabrenewal.com>.
- ¹⁸ Wilson, Washington Post, "Saudi Trial Could Alter the Pace of Reform", 2004.
- ¹⁹ Notably the arrest of Fouad Al Farhan in 2007. See Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Dissident Saudi Blogger Is Arrested," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2008, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/31/AR2007123101915.html>> and "Saudi Arabia: Charges against Rights Activist Frivolous," *Human Rights Watch* (14 July 2010), <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/07/14/saudi-arabia-charges-against-rights-activist-frivolous>>
- ²⁰ Kapiszewski, "Democratization or Reconfiguration."
- ²¹ Edward Burke and Ana Echagüe, "'Strong Foundations'?: The Imperative for Reform in Saudi Arabia," Working Paper 84, FRIDE, June 2009.
- ²² Hassan M. Fattah, "After First Steps, Saudi Reformers See Efforts Stall", *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007.
- ²³ P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "Major government reshuffle," *Arab News*, February 15, 2009.
- ²⁴ Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Fatwa Restrictions and the State-Clerical Relationship," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 27, 2010.
- ²⁵ See Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

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- ³¹ “Explanation note on 2010 Human Development Report composite indices: Saudi Arabia, UNDP, <<http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/SAU.pdf>>
- ³² “Banque Saudi Fransi.”
- ³³ “Unemployed Saudi graduates stage rare protest,” *The Peninsula*, January 10, 2011, <<http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/middle-east/138569-unemployed-saudi-graduates-stage-rare-protest.html>>
- ³⁴ Ghazanfar Ali Khan, “Saudis to have over a million jobs in two years,” *Arab News*, March 1, 2011.
- ³⁵ “King Abdullah names members of the Allegiance Commission,” Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington, DC, 10 December 2007, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/latest_news/news12100801.aspx>
- ³⁶ See also Simon Henderson, “Saudi Arabia’s Musk Revolution,” (1 March 2011). *Foreign Policy* <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/1/saudi_arabias_musk_revolution>
- ³⁷ “A Declaration of National Reform,” February 2011, <<http://www.saudireform.com/?p=english>>
- ³⁸ See the blog Saudijeans for more information on recent petitions, <www.saudijeans.org>
- ³⁹ Caryle Murphy, “Saudi king ignores calls for political reform, gives out money,” *GlobalPost*, March 18, 2011.

ABOUT THE BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

The Brookings Doha Center, a project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, undertakes independent, policy-oriented research on the socioeconomic and geopolitical issues facing Muslim-majority states and communities, including relations with the United States. Launched through an agreement dated January 1, 2007, the Brookings Doha Center was established through the vision and support of H.H. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, and reflects the commitment of the Brookings Institution to become a truly global think tank.

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The center was formally inaugurated by H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, on February 17, 2008, together with Carlos Pascual, then Brookings Vice President for Foreign Policy Studies, Martin Indyk, founding Director of the Saban Center at Brookings and now Brookings Vice President for Foreign Policy Studies, and Hady Amr, the Founding Director of the Brookings Doha Center.

In pursuing its mission, the Brookings Doha Center undertakes research and programming that engage key elements of business, government, civil society, the media, and academia on key public policy issues in the following three core areas: (i) Governance issues such as the analysis of constitutions, media laws, and society; (ii) Human Development and Economic issues such as the analysis of policy in the areas of education, health, environment, business, energy, and economics; (iii) International Affairs issues such as the analysis of security frameworks, political and military conflicts, and other contemporary issues.

Open to a broad range of views, the Brookings Doha Center is a hub for Brookings scholarship in the region. The center's research and programming agenda includes key mutually reinforcing endeavors. These include: convening ongoing public policy discussions with diverse political, business and thought leaders from the region and the United States; hosting visiting fellows drawn from significant ranks of the academic and policy communities to write analysis papers; and engaging the media to broadly share Brookings analysis with the public. Together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, and the Saban Center at Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, the Brookings Doha Center contributes to the conceptualization and organization of the annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum which brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society, for much needed discussion and dialogue. In undertaking this work, the Brookings Doha Center upholds the Brookings Institution's core values of quality, independence, and impact.

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