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**Religion and Foreign Policy:  
The Case of Saudi Arabia**

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# THESIS PROJECT

# Master Thesis Proposal

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## Proposed Topic:

Religion and Foreign Policy: The Case of Saudi Arabia

## Topic Characteristics

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy and there are no officially recognized political parties. The constitution of the country is based on the ideas of Islamic law. No modern constitution has been written, and no national elections have taken place in the history of Saudi Arabia. Despite all internal restrictions, Saudi Arabia has increased its power not only in the Middle East but also across the world.

As a major center of the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia is a crucial country so I believe we need to understand the tools this country uses with regard to its foreign policy and the consequences these have had so far.

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is focused on maintaining its key position among Islamic and other oil-exporting countries. In addition, Saudi diplomacy protects and promotes the interests of Islam throughout the world. Despite its alliances with the West, Saudi Arabia has often been criticized for financing Islamic extremists. It is well-known that Saudi Arabia was one of three states that recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; it is also the birthplace of the former leader of the terrorist organization "Al-Qaeda", Osama bin Laden.

The Saudi government has complicated relationships with Iran, since Saudi Arabia and Iran – as the centers of the two main branches of Islam, Sunni Islam and Shia Islam – claim to be the informal leaders of the Islamic world.

Historically, Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and the dominant stream of Islam in is still Wahhabism. Although this stream has spread to involve many Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia is still its heartland. There is no doubt that Wahhabism has an intolerant view of non-Muslims and other Islamic streams and this has influenced and complicated Saudi Arabia's relationships with other countries. For example, regarding relations with the USA and the UK some Wahhabi scholars have criticized the Saudi regime for their close relations with "unbelievers and moral pollution".

Over the past two decades, Saudi Arabia has expended several billion dollars in "overseas development aid", and there is much evidence to show that the majority of this aid was spent on propagating and extending the influence of Wahhabism. The Saudi government nonetheless denies these accusations.

*The main aim of thesis is to enhance understanding of one of the main geopolitical actors and powers in the Middle East.*

*My research task is to explore the extent to which religion is important in advancing the foreign policy objectives and priorities of Saudi Arabia.*

*In particular I will attempt to clarify whether religion is an unavoidable factor in foreign policy or just a tool by which Saudi Arabia accomplishes its foreign policy objectives and priorities.*

## **Hypotheses:**

1. Religion is an internal factor affecting the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.
2. Religion is an extremely important factor in achieving the foreign policy objectives and priorities of Saudi Arabia
3. Saudi Arabia and Iran are locked into a struggle over the balance of power in the Persian Gulf.
4. The Saudi-US strategic alliance is based on paradoxical relations.

## **Outline**

*Abstract*

**Introduction**

*Topic overview*

*Thesis objective*

*Theoretical background*

*Methodology*

Overview of literature

**1. The religious atmosphere in Saudi Arabia**

**2. The political system of Saudi Arabia and its correlation with Islam**

2.1 Government structure

2.2 Wahhabism as a political ideology for state formation

2.3 Some contradictions between Salafism and Wahhabism

**3. Foreign policy objectives and religious revivalism**

3.1 Historical features of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy during various administrations

3.2 Controversy and the mismanagement of financial assistance as a flashpoint for criticism in foreign relations

3.3 Priorities and targets of Saudi Arabian foreign policy

3.4 The new Middle East uprising and its effects on the Saudi government

**CONCLUSION**

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## **DECLARATION:**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the listed literature and the sources in the appended bibliography. I also state that the thesis has not been used to obtain the same or a different degree. The thesis as submitted is keystrokes 128,803 long (including spaces), i.e. 55 manuscript pages.

Sabir Mammadov

7 January, 2013

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the religious and ideological aspects of the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It seeks to understand the dynamics of this foreign policy and its correlation with the state religion, Islam.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia plays a highly significant role in the Islamic world. Two major factors that contribute to this situation are the presence of two major Muslim shrines (in Mecca and Medina), and the country's huge oil reserves. Saudi Arabia's religious stature and significant economic potential places it well and truly on the world stage.

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is based on historical, geographical, religious, economic, security, and political factors, and is activated in a number of geo-political circles, including the Gulf and wider Middle East, the 'Arab world', the 'Muslim world', and internationally. The Islamic circle is a very important arena in which the country exercises its foreign policy as it claims to be a leader in the Muslim world.

The religious basis of Saudi politics is generally very stable and contributes to the perception of Saudi Arabia in parts of the Islamic world as a 'bearer of divine grace'. The Kingdom portrays itself as a conservative state guided by the ideological norms of Islam and promotes their proliferation and protection.

Saudi Arabia has been among the major allies of the United States of America for half a century, but the events of 11 September 2001 marked a turning point in the popular view of Saudi Arabia in the West, which thereafter linked Saudis with global terrorism.

## **Introduction**

### ***Topic Overview***

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with no officially recognized political parties. The country's constitution is based on the ideas of Islamic law – the *Sharia*. No modern constitution has been written and no national elections have ever taken place in the entire history of Saudi Arabia. (CIA World Factbook)

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam; Wahhabism, a strictly puritanical form of Sunni Islam, remains the dominant religious stream in the country and although it has spread across a number of other Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia is its heartland.<sup>1</sup> The Wahhabi movement helped to initiate a political and military campaign that ended in the creation of the Saudi state, (Bowen, Wayne, 2007: 69-70) and in Wahhabism there is a close relationship between its theology-ideology and the formation and legitimization of state institutions. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: 57) Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself never sought to found an openly political movement, but the implications of his movement called for belief in God's unity (*tawhid*) and the unity of the Muslim community (the *Umma*). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's referring to his followers as *muwahiddin* – literally, those who follow the *tawhid* – showed the importance of the central doctrine of the unity and uniqueness of God. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: 57)

Today, the kingdom is ruled by the family of Saud; its head is King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz, who ascended to the throne in 2005. In King Abdullah's hands are concentrated the power of a single legislator, the supreme commander of the armed forces, the supreme judge and protector, and the prime minister of the holy cities of Medina and Mecca. The king is, furthermore, a Wahhabi imam, which means he is also the highest religious authority in Saudi Arabia; the whole dynasty comprises only the sons and brothers of the Saudi king (Gombar, 2004: 54). A resurgence of Islamist movements in the Arabian peninsula, starting in the 1980s, saw the emergence of criticism of the Saudi regime and this intensified after the (first) Gulf War, during which the Saud family allowed a permanent presence of American troops on Saudi soil. At the same time, 1992, the king made reforms which further consolidated power in the hands of family of Saud. The reforms included the Basic Law of Succession (Ibid), which stated that the

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<sup>1</sup> Harris.L- Mews.S- Morri.P- Shepherd.J, (1992): Contemporary religions: a world guide. p. 369.

king must comply with the *Sharia* (Islamic law) and holy *Quran*. (The *Sunnah* – the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad – and the *Quran* are declared to be the country's constitution.<sup>2</sup>)

Although much analysis ignores the fact, there is deep suspicion that al-Qaeda was primarily the product of US- and Saudi-sponsored insurgency in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation, which spawned international Jihadism by making possible the coming together in Afghanistan and on the Pakistani borderlands of Islamist militants from around the world. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009:1) Since the emergence of terrorism in the Middle East in 1968, the world has seen three categories of terrorist organization: ideological (left or right wing), ethno-nationalist (irredentist, separatist, and autonomous), and politico-religious groups.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen of the nineteen hijackers who took part in the New York and Washington attacks of 9/11 were Saudi citizens. Even those who were not Saudi citizens adhered to radical Islam associated with extremist Saudi Wahhabism. (Niblock, 2006: 5) There has recently been much speculation about the kind of relationship that exists between al-Qaeda and Wahhabism. Some deny there is any relationship whatsoever. Others allege cooperation between al-Qaeda and the Saudi government and others link Wahhabism with global terrorism because of a supposed shared extremism and intolerance.<sup>4</sup> However, according to some scholars, Wahhabism had nothing to do with the terror attacks on the USA and any analysis that follows the dominant discourse that equates Wahhabism with transnational jihadism is therefore misled in identifying a particular ideology with the root cause of the problem (while at the same time excluding political, economic and psychological factors that exist in contexts in which Islamist militancy has emerged).

Wahhabism clearly has an intolerant view of non-Muslims and even of non-Wahhabist Islamic movements and it is clear also that this has influenced, and complicated, Saudi Arabia's foreign relations. Wahhabi scholars have criticized the Saud family for their close relations with the USA and the UK, who they claim are 'unbelievers', bringing 'moral pollution' into the country. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009:12) The presence of US troops on Saudi soil after the liberation of Kuwait created serious tensions between the royal family and the public, and this only improved in 2003 once US troops had left the country. (CIA, The world fact book)

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<sup>2</sup> Gerhard. R, (2000): Encyclopedia of world constitutions, p. 791.

<sup>3</sup> Gunaratna.R, (2003): The Rise and Decline of Al Qaeda. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. On-line text: [http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/hearings/hearing3/witness\\_gunaratna.htm](http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/hearings/hearing3/witness_gunaratna.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Sozek. J. Osama bin Laden's Global Islamism and Wahhabi Islam, p.1. On-line text: <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/mes/MJMESSozek.pdf>

Most importantly, the influence of Wahhabism was evident in the social ethos by which the Saudi government assumed responsibility for the “moral ordering of society, from the behavior of individuals, to institutions, to businesses, to the government itself.”<sup>5</sup>

Saudi Arabia has had a significant impact and influence on Islam worldwide. Being the location of Mecca and Medina, the two most holy cities in Islam, which attract millions of pilgrims every year, Saudi Arabia is bound to occupy a special position within the Islamic world. (Niblock, 2006: 4) The Saudi regime’s ‘credibility and legitimacy’ depends, furthermore, on its prestige as a defender of Arab rights and of international Islam. (Quandt, 1981: 10)

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis is divided into five chapters. First, in order to set the framework for the thesis, it is important to understand the role of Islam during the formation of the country and its impact on the internal and external policies of the kingdom. In Chapter one, therefore, I describe the general religious atmosphere and its various internal aspects in the Kingdom’s national policy. In the second chapter I seek to shed light on the political system of Saudi Arabia and the way religion has an impact on state processes. I also attempt to elucidate the different features of Wahhabism and Salafism. Chapter three focuses on illustrating Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy from a historical perspective and on highlighting the priorities and targets of Saudi foreign policy. In the fourth chapter I focus on religious revivalism, and on the rivalry between the two major powers of the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran, before and after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. Chapter five then discusses Saudi-US relations and explores the religious and economic aspects of the relationship and how it has affected Saudi foreign policy and how the ‘West’ now views Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress Country Study on Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia Wahhabi Theology. On-line text: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/loc/sa/wahhabi.htm>

## **Thesis Objective**

*The main intention of this thesis is to enhance understanding of one of the major geo-political actors and powers in the Gulf and wider Middle East. Saudi Arabia, as a core state of the Islamic religion, has a central role not only in the Muslim world but, with its huge oil reserves, globally. The thesis will attempt to highlight the main aspects of Saudi foreign policy. The research task is to explore the extent to which religion plays a role in advancing the foreign policy objectives and priorities of Saudi Arabia. In particular I will attempt to clarify whether religion is an essential factor or merely a tool used to accomplish these foreign policy objectives and priorities.*

## **Methodology**

In my thesis I will combine qualitative study methods with an interpretative approach. I will attempt to shape the thesis with analysis that gathers the relevant data from academic publications, on-line articles, and from reliable news media. Sources will also include the foreign policy agenda of Saudi Arabia, documentary films, and the speeches of top officials.

I will attach some statistics regarding the financial cost of promoting religion and will research quantitative data that will demonstrate the level of involvement of Saudi Arabia in Third World countries. In case any points remain unclear I will contact the Saudi Arabian Embassy in the Czech Republic and request an interview. Realizable “field work” will be also conducted.

## Overview of Literature

There is a large literature (books, academic articles, news items and online discussion from all over the world and in many languages) on the subjects covered in this thesis as they are subjects that are concerned with some of the most significant events in recent world history, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the current 'Arab Spring' uprising. It was therefore necessary for me to be very selective, and the focus on the religious aspect of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy helped in this respect. The main part of this thesis forms a discussion of some of the literature, so this 'review' is a only very brief summary of the main points that I highlight later in the thesis, which are taken from authors who I reference in the main body of the text, and, due to constraints on space, not here in this summary. Discussion and analysis of the literature will also take place in the relevant sections.

In The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, state formation and political power have always had close ties with to the religious elite (*Ulama*); one has served to legitimize the other. In the Kingdom, religion is mandatory for all citizens, and according to some sources, the religious establishment controls the state as much or more than the state controls religion and most religious organizations are institutionalized within the state power structure. The pre-dominant religious movement in the Kingdom is Wahhabism, which is puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam. The historical roots of the movement, however, have little to do with religion: Wahhabism was a political entity which pushed for the establishment of a central state.

Saudi Arabia's role in global and regional international relations, especially throughout the Islamic world, is immense. The Islamic factor has an inevitable impact on domestic and foreign policy of the state. Islam is not only the ideological basis of kingdom but is also a tool of power in its foreign policy. The Saudi regime receives billions of dollars in oil revenue, which the regime is able to use as a carrot or a as stick, depending on the results it is seeking. Regarding the current 'Arab Spring', the Saudi government faces new challenges, such as potential foreign threats, foreign policy problems, and violent and extremist Islamic minorities. The state must find ways to adapt its Islamic faith to economic and social changes in the new Arab world around it, but the change must be evolutionary and smooth in order to sustain the country's development.

Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry in the Middle East and the Gulf, which increased after the Iranian revolution of 1979, is one of most significant regional relationships. Shiite Iran has geopolitical

ambitions in the region against which Saudi Arabia seeks to protect its Saudi version of Islam. A major ally of the Kingdom is the USA. Saudi-US relations affect a number of US foreign policy interests (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East peace process, and energy concerns), and helps Saudi Arabia maintain its strategic position and leadership role in global Islamic affairs and international energy markets. The events of 9/11 were a turning point in the prestige of Saudi Arabia in the West, but Saudi Arabia remains one of the major allies of US in the region, especially during the threat of the Iranian nuclear program.

The Saudi Kingdom combines the ideological motives of its foreign policy with attempts at domination in all corners of the Islam world, including countries where the local followers of Islam are religious minorities.

## Theoretical Background

Religion has often been used as a tool of power and in some cases as a tool of pressure and persecution; the distinction between politics and religion has taken a central position in contemporary intellectual debates. Religion provides clues to a country's cultural evolution – in particular the evolutionary threshold separating tradition and modernity – and has become increasingly relevant in any analysis of current political 'crusades' and violent conflicts: religious fundamentalism and any associated 'terrorism' are customarily related to the disappearance of the boundary between politics and religion in modern societies. Recently, centuries-old issues have come into the center-stage of global attention – issues that require practical action and theoretical assessment.<sup>6</sup>

According to McGowan and Shapiro, comparative analysis of foreign policy has been impeded by the absence of a viable framework for analysis. (McGowan- Shapiro, 1973: 160)

In general, foreign policy aims to safeguard a state's national interests – it involves a state's political relations with other states or international actors such as NGOs or transnational organizations. *The theoretical part of my thesis will seek to explain Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in the context of the influence of religion, including the use of theories such as Realism (from international relations), the Theory of Rational Choice, Economy and the Theory of Ideology.*

I will explain these relations in the context of the three-dimensional view of the concept of policy analysis: Polity, Politics, Policy. "Polity" refers to the normative and institutional platform; "Politics" expresses the procession aspect of policy. "Policy" itself includes materials, documents and results. "Polity, politics and policy" is primarily to be understood as individual but theoretically divisible aspects of one whole: "Politics". The advantage of this approach is the fact that we do not define a priori policy as normative and static, but that it can be seen in its versatility and openness.<sup>7</sup>

All societies indoctrinate people with certain cultural, religious or ideological values. To increase the populace's obedience, rulers often use cultural, religious or ideological values or symbols in ways that affirm their views in order to make it seem like they are the protectors of these values

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<sup>6</sup> Giesen.B, - Suber.D,(2005): Religion and Politics,p.1, Leiden, Boston.

<sup>7</sup> Fiala.P- Schubert.K (2000): Moderní analýza politiky. Uvedení do teorií a metod Policyanalysis,p.17. Barrister and Principal.Brno.

and symbols. What are emphasized are the cultural, religious or ideological values that comprise the ethnic, religious and historical iconography that resonate with people and encourage identification with – and participation in – the movement. (Stephan, 2009:19-20) A number of scholars recognize the impact religion has on politics and the important role religion has played in world politics. Elisabeth Hurd argues that “Cultural and religious systems of belief and the practices they engender are powerful determinants of modern domestic politics and make an influential contribution to contemporary international politics both in the west and outside it.”<sup>8</sup> Polybios, an ancient philosopher, distinguishes between “religion” and “popular beliefs” – it is mass religion, not the ‘gods’, which is fictitious, and which depends on fictitious concepts and imaginations, and fulfills political functions. The political function of religion legitimizes religion because “belief in gods is indispensable for political order and social harmony”, and it criticizes religion by “exposing its fictitious character.” (Giesen – Suber, 2005: 194) We continue to see many examples of the impact of religion on politics: the evangelical upsurge in Latin America, Muslim-Christian rivalries in Africa, disputes between Arabs and Israelis, and the rise of Hindu fundamentalists in India. Some of these political movements, as Peter Berger points out, are genuinely inspired by religion, while some use religion to legitimize political agendas. (Bogdani, 2010: 2)

It is often argued that ideology plays an important role in determining a country’s foreign policy. Although there is no precise definition of ideology, some authors express their views concerning the conceptualization of ideology. For example, according to Hamilton, whose definition is close to my point of view, “Ideology is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realize, pursue or maintain.”<sup>9</sup> Ideology has always occupied an important place in human history and is designed to meet specific needs in the formation of human societies, defining the essence of a particular historical period. For example: ‘class division’ determined the popularity of communism and socialism, and the dependence of one state on another had an impact on the development of particular nationalist ideologies; the rise in ‘social democracy’ saw the collapse of the bipolar world and the configuration of a new world political elite. In the context of the theory of ideology, Trevor Pateman argues that ideologies vary through time and

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<sup>8</sup> Bogdani- Mirela,(2010): Turkey and the Dilemma of EU Accession : When Religion Meets Politics.London, GBR: I.B.Tauris.

<sup>9</sup> Sylvan.D – S.Majeski,(2008): Ideology and Intervention, p.3.On-line text: <http://faculty.washington.edu/majeski/sylvan.majeski.isa08.pap.pdf>

between individuals despite social or cultural efforts to stabilize them, as the mind is not completely 'plastic' to social and cultural shaping. Ideologies are like languages: they are internalized in individuals as 'generative mechanisms' which are not 'transparent to introspection or self-monitoring.'<sup>10</sup> According to Khalid S. al Dakhil, Wahhabi ideology in Saudi Arabia was not simply a religious reform movement. Rather, it was a powerful, political urban movement which contributed to the process of state formation. Therefore the roots of Wahhabiyya were not of a religious nature but were political and social in character. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: 24-25) However, I do not think we can say that Saudi Arabia uses this religious ideology as a tool of "soft power", whereas, arguably, the current Turkish government under the Justice and Development Party does. There is no generally accepted definition of "soft power", but many researchers have sought one. In a simplified summary, "soft power" can be defined as the attractiveness of a country's international image. In this case a country's image includes an integral set of parts, such as its value system, political system, economic order, culture, traditions and customs, historical heritage, ideology, and religion.<sup>11</sup> Last century numerous cases provided examples, such as the mechanism used by the US government (and Hollywood) whereby the attractiveness of its market mechanism, material affluence, and consumer society combined to make a tool of soft power. In a similar way, the EU used the welfare state as an instrument of external attraction, mainly for post-communist countries.

Theoretically, scholars of comparative foreign policy challenged many assumptions which were central to the 'realist' paradigm. Realists (Carr 1939; Morgenthau 1973) argue that the international system is characterized by a "struggle for power" in which states pursue power in order to ensure their safety and survival. Realists argue that since all states operate in the same 'anarchical' international system, all will implement essentially identical foreign policies, with national security paramount. Furthermore, realists assume that decision makers are rational and goal-oriented actors who consciously follow a process of analyzing all the available information about an international event before choosing the option that will maximize their goals.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of relations between (Sunni) Saudi Arabia and (Shia) Iran, in terms of the "balance of power" I would appeal to the thoughts of the classic realist, Morgenthau, who insists that

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<sup>10</sup> Pateman.T, The Theory of Ideology: Bringing the Mind Back In. On-line text: <http://www.selectedworks.co.uk/theoryideology.html>

<sup>11</sup> Valdai, (2009): What is soft power and how should Russia use it? On-line text: <http://valdaiclub.com/politics/49480.html>

<sup>12</sup> Huxsoll.D, (2003): Regimes, Institutions and Foreign Policy Change, p.5, Dissertation work. On-line text: [http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0129103-074005/unrestricted/Huxsoll\\_dis.pdf](http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0129103-074005/unrestricted/Huxsoll_dis.pdf)

statesmen have no alternative but to attempt to maximize their power position and their power potential. In this context I would also emphasize the role of the theory of rational choice. Morgenthau identifies an automatic law by which if one state increases its power capabilities in order to pursue an imperial policy at the expense of a rival, then there will be a “proportionate increase in the power of the other”. Equally, if a state feels in danger of being overwhelmed by a neighbor, it will form alliances with other states it identifies as being in similar position. States can use their own power, therefore, in conjunction with the power of other states, in an attempt to counter the power of their enemies. (Morgenthau, 1973: 355) In *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Morgenthau identifies six principles of political realism, two of which are, in my opinion, characteristic of Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy: (a) International politics is a concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides a link between an understanding of international politics and the facts to be understood. It sets politics as an “autonomous sphere of action and understanding” apart from other spheres, such as economics (understood in terms of interest defined as wealth), ethics, aesthetics, or religion. Without such a concept a theory of politics, international or domestic, would be impossible, as without it we would not be able to distinguish between political and nonpolitical facts, nor would we be able to bring systematic order to the political sphere;<sup>13</sup> (b) Political realism refuses to identify a nation’s moral aspirations with the moral laws that govern the universe. It is the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from the “moral excess and political folly.”<sup>14</sup> We can see both of these principles at work in relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and between Saudi Arabia and the USA. For example, although the Saudi regime behaves as a protector of Palestinians Muslims, it has close ties with the US government which supports Israel. Also, while Saudi Arabia and Iran are both nations which define themselves as Islamic, they appear to be ‘silent enemies’. According to information leaked from US diplomatic cables that show how its Arab allies have secretly campaigned for military action against Iran, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has, even more than Israel, urged the United States to destroy Iran’s nuclear program.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Morgenthau, H. (1978): *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, p.4-15, Fifth Edition, Revised, New York: Alfred A. Knopf. On-line text: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/morg6.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Cambridge forecast group. (2006): Hans Morgenthau. On-line text: <http://cambridgeforecast.wordpress.com/2006/11/01/hans-morgenthau/>

<sup>15</sup> The Guardian, (2010): Saudi Arabia urges US attack on Iran to stop nuclear program me. On-line text: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/28/us-embassy-cables-saudis-iran>

How religious and cultural factors shape and influence international politics is clearly shown in the work of contemporary scholars such as Samuel Huntington, who has written about these factors with great insight since the early 1990s. In his highly influential thesis *Clash of Civilizations* he argues that world politics is entering a new phase in which the primary sources of conflict are not ideological, political or economic, but cultural; conflicts are, in other words, based on the “politics of identity and culturally distinctive values, which transcend national boundaries.” Huntington made these predictions in 1993; nine years later the world witnessed the events of 9/11. (Bogdani, 2010: 2) According to Huntington, culture is playing both a divisive and unifying role in the post-Cold War world. Nations are divided by ideology, but cultures are beginning to blend and unite, as was the case with the re-unification of Germany, but is yet to be the case with the two Koreas. On the contrary, countries which had a unified ideology but historically had disparate populations have been falling apart, as has been the case with the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* paradigm is based on the premise that civilizations and cultures are founded on religion. Similarly, George Weigel suggests that religion is at the heart of culture. Cultures spring from religions; religion becomes embedded in a culture to an extent that persists when people cease to believe. Religious norms become social values, the main component of cultures, and thus become the culture itself. (Bogdani, 2010: 74) It is argued that civilization’s identity will become increasingly important in the future, and that the world will largely be shaped by the interactions of seven or eight major civilizations, including Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African. The most significant conflicts of the future will occur along the “cultural fault lines” that separate these civilizations from one another.<sup>17</sup> But I have my doubts about this hypothesis. For example, in the case of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabach, Iran supports Christian Armenia rather than Muslim Azerbaijan, even though the majority of the population of Azerbaijan belongs to the Shia branch of Islam, of which Iran declares itself to be the leader. It is no co-incidence that Armenians call their border with Iran the “way of life”.

Religions do not only become embedded in one culture, but, as in the case of universal religions such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, they become transnational, transcending the boundaries of countries, societies and territories. As a result we talk about a Muslim culture and

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<sup>16</sup> Huntington.S (1996): *Stret Civilizaci. Boj kultur a proměna světového řádu*, p.15. Czech edition. Rybka Publishers.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Huntington, (1993): “The clash of civilizations”, *Foreign Affairs* vol.72, p.25. On-line text: <http://ikesharpless.pbworks.com/f/Samuel+Huntington,+The+Clash+of+Civilizations.pdf>

Muslim society, which can be found in many countries not just in one. As with Christian protestant or Buddhist culture, Islam is transnational in nature and makes universal claims on all persons, at all times, in all places. (Bogdani, 2010: 74) Regarding Islamic resurgence, Huntington suggested that Muslims seek identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power and hope in Islam, expressing the hope that "Islam is the solution". Islamic revival is, in its scope and depth, in a phase in which Islamic civilization might begin dealings with the West, although not seeking its solution in western ideology, but in Islam. Parts of this process includes an admission of certain aspects of modernity but a rejection of Western culture in favor of Islam as a guide to life in the modern world. In 1994, Huntington paraphrased the thoughts of one prominent Saudi official as follows: "imports from abroad are nice, if it is a luxury or a piece of technology, but our social and political institutions are inviolable; it doesn't matter where things are imported from – they can have a deadly effect. Take the example of the Shah of Iran. Islam for us is not merely a religion but a way of life. As Saudis we want to modernize our society, but that does not mean we want westernize." (Huntington, 1996:121) Furthermore, according to the Saudi researcher A.H Al-Sueyg, "American foreign policy is based on a system of liberal values; Soviet foreign policy drew its legitimacy from Marxist-Leninist ideology, but an analysis of Saudi foreign policy shows that its values are rooted in Islam, which defines its features, directions and priorities."<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to Huntington, Francis Fukuyama, in his *The End of History*, argues that once ideological divisions are over the world will live "happily ever after". His argument is based on a different aspect of civilization. He considers the rise and fall of major ideologies such as absolutism, fascism and communism, and suggests that human history should be viewed in terms of a battle of ideologies, and that this battle has reached its conclusion in the global hegemony of Western liberal democracy. Although the process is still ongoing, the "idea" of Western liberalism has triumphed, as can be seen by the global influence of Western consumerist culture and the steady move towards liberal democratic reforms in countries that previously embraced alternative ideologies.<sup>19</sup> But reconciling civilizations still seems to be a very difficult path, especially since the end of Cold War. Events such as the Salman Rushdie affair in the UK, the confrontations over the *hijab* (veil) in France and elsewhere in Europe, the terrorist acts committed by Muslims in the USA and Europe, the killing in 2004 of Dutch film director Theo

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<sup>18</sup> Косач.Г.(2005): Саудовская Аравия: реформы и стабилизация. On-line text: [http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_5744](http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_5744)

<sup>19</sup> Fukuyama. F, ( 1989): "The end of history", National Interest. Summary. On-line text: <http://skram-marks.blogspot.cz/2008/11/summary-of-francis-fukuyamas-end-of.html>

van Gogh, and the bitter controversy over cartoons of the prophet Muhammad published in Denmark, have intensified anti-Muslim feeling and reinforced the Western view of Islam as a “fundamentalist religion” that is not compatible with democracy. This response has further enhanced Muslims’ belief that when they make too many concessions to majority societies their faith suffers. (Khosrokhavar, 2009: 254)

Religion has influenced not only politics but also economics and social life. The best-known thesis in support of the relationship between religion and economics was Max Weber’s 1905 work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he argued that Protestantism provided fertile ground for capitalism. (Bogdani, 2010: 3) Economic theory will mainly be used in order to understand the impact of Saudi Arabia’s growing financial resources (accumulating from petrodollars) on the formulation and control of its foreign policies. Weber’s principal thesis is that religion can have an important impact, positive or negative, on economic development. The stimulus to economic growth would be positive if, in addition to a view on rewards obtained in an after-life, religion looked favorably on the earthly accumulation of material wealth. Another line of argument involves the moral codes advocated by some religious doctrines. Religion can encourage economic development by promoting a positive attitude towards honesty, which will in turn increase levels of trust and reduce corruption and criminal activity.<sup>20</sup>

I think one of the reasons why political programs and ideology are closely related is the different manner in which modern regimes legitimize them.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Barro.R – McCleary.R, (2002): Religion and Political Economy in an International Panel. National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>21</sup> Legitimacy is the quality that leads people to voluntarily accept and consent to an individual’s or organization’s orders. It is a function of the degree to which people believe that an individual or an organization has the right and capability to rule. (Stephan, 2009:19-20)

## **1. The religious atmosphere in Saudi Arabia**

Religion affects all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. The country's Sunni Muslims – who comprise about 90 percent of the population – are governed by highly conservative interpretations of Islam.<sup>22</sup> Sunni Muslims mainly follow the Hanbali School of Islamic jurisprudence. Shia Muslims make up the remaining 10 percent of the population.<sup>23</sup>

In his valedictory address to his host country, the former British ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sir James Craig, said that “Moral values bring us to Islam, which is, for good or evil, the central feature of Saudi Arabia” Furthermore, “The ethics of Islam are not all that different from the ethics of Christianity: love your neighbor, keep your word, help the poor. But Islam is everywhere and its ubiquity is inescapable and increasingly comprehensive. New mosques are in every street, the mention of God and his prophet in every sentence, even the King's budget speech. Islam governs every detail of the believer's life. It tells him how to wash, how to urinate, how much of his estate to leave to his step-daughter.”<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam: the Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 571. The two mosques of Mecca and Medina are considered the holiest sites of the Islamic faith. One of the pillars of Islam is to go on the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.<sup>25</sup> Islam is practiced by all Saudis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's messengers, following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses and Abraham, to bring revelation to mankind. Political control of Mecca and Medina give significant power to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> OECD (2010): Atlas of Gender and Development. On-line text: <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/docserver/download/4110011ec079.pdf?expires=1355273507&id=id&accname=ocid57016075&checksum=7B677AC167A2DBF07FCFC281B359BA2B>

<sup>23</sup> Embassy of the USA in Riyadh Saudi Arabia: Religious Freedom Report 2010. On-line text: <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/saudi-arabia/231771/pdfs/Saudi%20Arabia%20religious%20freedom%20report%202011.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Wilson.P- Graham.D, (1994): Saudi Arabia. The coming storm, p.16

<sup>25</sup> Price.J, (2012): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and Oil Export: On-line text: <http://www.ambassadorjohnprice.com/the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-wahhabism-and-oil-exports/1925/>

<sup>26</sup> Kwintessential: Saudi Arabia-Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette. On-line text: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/saudi-arabia-country-profile.html>

Saudi Arabia bans non-Muslim worship services and imposes the death penalty on Muslims who convert to another religion.<sup>27</sup> Drug trafficking, murder, rape and practicing homosexuality are all crimes that carry the death penalty.<sup>28</sup> In a BBC Documentary, ‘Inside the Saudi Kingdom’, Prince Saud bin Abdul Mohsen says that public execution is “part of our religion”. The Quran, however, the Holy book of Islam, is in contradiction with this statement, and holds that, “Anybody who kills one man is considered a person who killed all of mankind”, and the “Quran” and “Sunnah” are in reality the country's constitution.<sup>29</sup>

Saudi laws and policies restrict religious freedom, and the government generally enforces these restrictions. Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and is severely restricted. Public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and there is no separation between state and religion. The government does not respect religious freedom in law, but does generally permit Shia religious gatherings and non-Muslim private religious practices. Muslims who do not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam suffer significant political, legal, social, economic and religious discrimination, severely limited employment and educational opportunities, under-representation in national institutions, restrictions on religious practice, and restrictions on places of worship and community centers.<sup>30</sup>

Muslims are largely divided into two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shiite. The main difference between them lies in who should be seen as the leader (Imam) in Muslim society. Sunnis believe that the Muslim community leader should be chosen according to consensus within the political order and on the leader's individual merits. The Imam should be qualified on the basis of his piety and leadership qualities, even if these assumptions have not been consistently applied for Sunnis. For Shiites, the first true leader of the Muslim community is Ali, who is considered an *imam*. For Shiites, the term *imam* not only indicates leadership abilities but also signifies blood relations to the Prophet Muhammad. For Shiites, an imam is a both a political and religious leader who has the right to interpret religious and legal matters to the public; the most educated imams are referred to as ayatollahs. (Armanios, 2004: 2- 3) Saudi

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<sup>27</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica: Religion: Year in Review 2008. On-line text: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/861168/Abd-Allah/861168yblinks/Year-in-Review-Links>

<sup>28</sup> BBC Documentary, (2012): Inside the Saudi Kingdom. On-line video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=au9Aqd\\_-2hc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=au9Aqd_-2hc)

<sup>29</sup> Sunnah, Arabic: “habitual practice”- also spelled Sunna, the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community. Along with the Quran (the holy book of Islam) and Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), it is a major source of Sharia, or Islamic law.

<sup>30</sup> Saudi Arabia: on-line text: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171744.pdf>

Arabia is also home to various sects of Islam such as Salafism, which, according to some scholars, is related to Wahhabism. Saudi Arabia is dominated by the Sunni branch, which remains, in some of its offshoots, committed to the teaching of Ibn Wahhab. Conservative Wahhabis consider his way as the only right way to follow the Prophet Muhammad: Shia Muslims and non-Wahhabi Sunni Muslims perceive Wahabbism as heretics. (Armanios, 2004: 5) Wahhabism (or Unitarianism, or, as some current adherents prefer, Salafism) is an ascetic and conservative movement *within* Sunni Islam, not a separate sect. It is the pre-dominant school in Saudi Arabia and Qatar and has traditionally been found in only a few other Gulf States. Wahhabism as practiced in Saudi Arabia forbids alcohol and the veneration of ancestors and saints, adheres to the strict segregation of men and women, insists that all shops and offices are closed during the five daily prayers, and employs “religious police” to enforce acceptable public behavior. Saudi Arabia, as the birthplace of Muhammad and the sites of the two holiest cities in Islam, regards itself as the “protector of Islam”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Congressional Quarterly, (2005): The Middle East: 10<sup>th</sup> edition. p -171

## **2. The political system of Saudi Arabia and its correlation with Islam**

### ***2.1 Government structure***

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy based on Islam. The Saudi king is the absolutist secular ruler and the Wahhabi imam with complete theocratic power. He concentrates in his hands the power of a single legislator, supreme judge, commander in chief of the armed forces and guardian of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

The ruling family contains a total of about 3,000 Saudi princes (emirs) and 2,000 princesses who carry the title "Highness" (sumuw al-Amir, His Highness). The closest circle of brothers and sons of the Saudi kings have the title "Royal Highness". (Gombar, 2004: 54) To help him with his duties the King appoints a Crown Prince, who is second in line to the throne. The King governs with the help of the Council of Ministers, also called the Cabinet. There are 22 government ministries in the Cabinet. Each ministry specializes in a different aspect of government, such as foreign affairs, education and finance. The King also has an advisory and legislative body called the Consultative Council (Majlis Al-Shura), which proposes new laws and amendments to existing ones and consists of 150 members, all of whom are appointed by the King for renewable four-year terms.<sup>32</sup> A Council of Ministers acts as an executive body which has the power to veto royal decisions but only within thirty days of their announcement.<sup>33</sup> The country is divided into 13 provinces, each of which has a governor and deputy governor and its own council that advises the governor and deals with the province's development. As an Islamic state, Saudi Arabia's judicial system is based on Islamic law (*Sharia*) and the king is at the top of this system, able to issue pardons and act as the final court of appeal. The kingdom has courts, the largest of which are the Sharia Courts, which hear the majority of cases in the Saudi legal system.<sup>34</sup> The monarchy's legitimacy depends on an alliance between the royal family and the *Ulama* (religious clerics), who serve as consultants. Religious organizations are institutionalized within the state power structure. The most powerful of these organizations is the state-funded Council of Senior Ulama, which provides religious approval for the government's policies.

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington DC: Government. On-line text: <http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/government/>

<sup>33</sup> Johnson.G - Lehman.G - Matthijs.M, (2002): Power and Preservation in the House of Saud. The Bologna Center Journal of International Affairs. On-line text: <http://www.jhubc.it/bcjournal/archive/print/2002/houseofsaud.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington DC: Government. On-line text: <http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/government/>

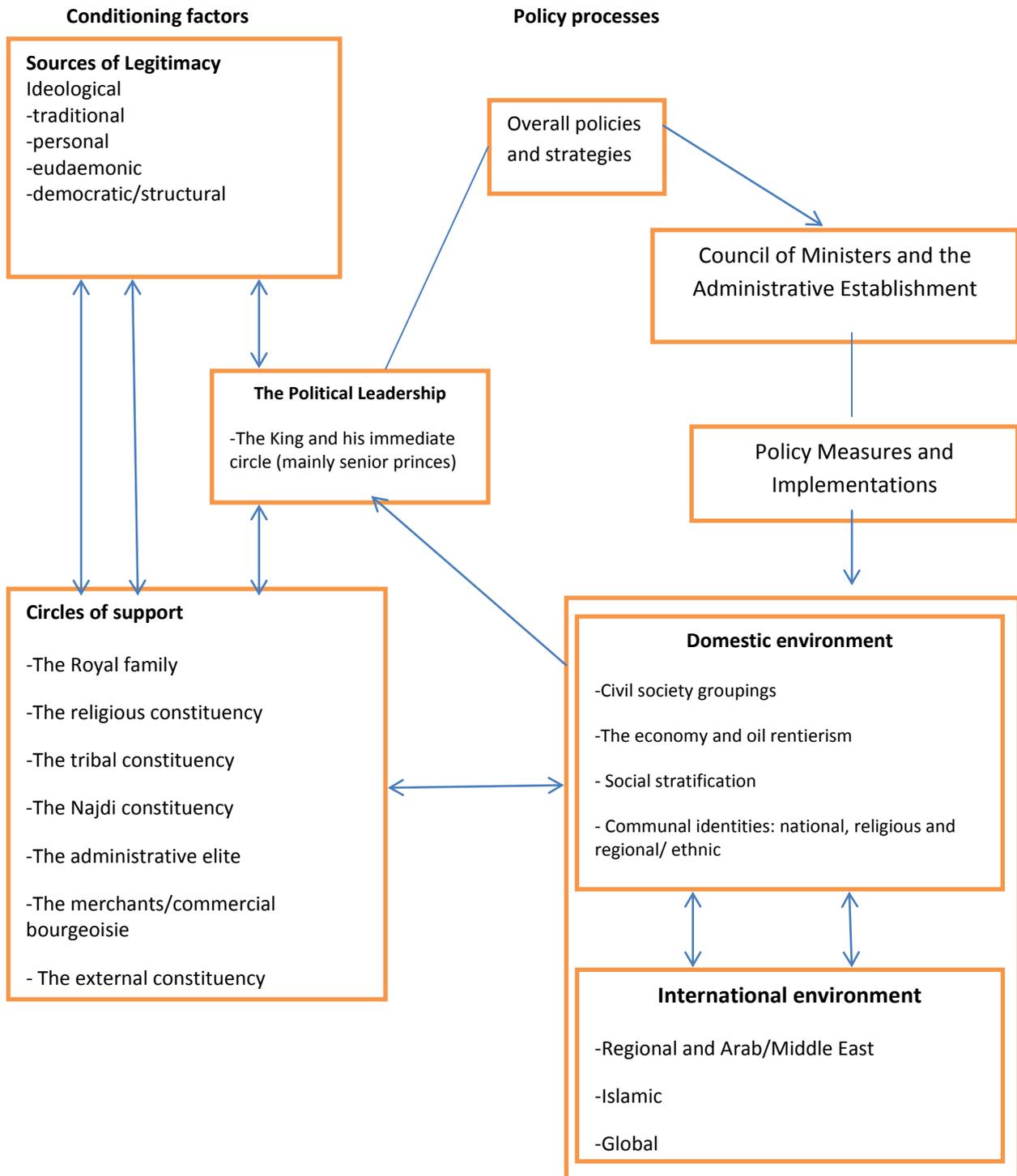
Public morality guidelines set by the Council are enforced by a “Religious police”.<sup>35</sup> Religious support for the King helped in creating the al Sheikh family, which originated from the founder of the Wahhabi movement, Ibn abd al Wahhab. Family members comprise the elite of religious clerics (*Ulama*). Internal politics of the royal family, particularly in matters of succession, remains a closely kept secret; members of the public have been admitted only as far as an alleged ‘royal family council’, which addresses succession in the ruling family. The state administration mostly comprises loyal family relatives. (Gomabar ,2004: 55-56)

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<sup>35</sup> Oxford Islamic Studies Online:<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2114>

*The dynamics of Saudi Arabian politics.*

Example model. Source: Niblock.T, (2006): *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, p.9.



## ***2.2 Wahhabism as a political ideology for state formation***

The Wahhabi movement was born in the middle of the eighteenth century in Najd (Central Arabia). It initiated a military and political campaign that culminated in the creation of a state that by the beginning of the nineteenth century controlled 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009:23)

There are four schools of legal theory in Islam and Wahhabism is an offshoot of the most conservative of these schools, the Hanbali School of law, which developed in the ninth century. Wahhabism is a puritanical form of Sunni Islam, and is the doctrine practiced in Saudi Arabia and, less rigidly, in Qatar. “Wahhabi” derives from the Muslim scholar Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791). Wahhab was frustrated by moral decline in his society and denounced a number of popular beliefs and practices as idolatrous. He encouraged a “return” to the “pure and orthodox practice” of the “fundamentals” of Islam, as embodied in the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. In the eighteenth century, Muhammad bin Saud, founder of the modern-day Saudi dynasty, joined Abd al-Wahhab in starting the process of unifying the disparate tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, and since the foundation of modern day Saudi Arabia in 1932 there has been a very close relationship between the Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi religious establishment.<sup>36</sup>

The historical roots of the movement do not, however, have anything to do with religion. The Wahabiyya<sup>37</sup> was a political entity, the only political force of its time pushing for the establishment of a central state. It was not just a religious reform movement obsessed with the question of *shirk* (the association of others with the one true God), and nor was it a manifestation of the nomadic mode of living for which Arabia is well known. It was, rather, a powerful, political urban movement in the process of state formation (and was a product of this process itself) and helped to push state formation to its conclusion. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009:24) The state formation process includes political, social and cultural dynamics, and reflects the evolution of the concept of the state in a society: the relations, ideas, ideologies, institutions, and ultimately the state itself. This process had started in Arabia (and Najd in particular) long before the rise of

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<sup>36</sup> CRS Report for Congress. (2003): The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya. On-line text: <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RS2169501222003.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> The name of the movement in Arabic is “Al-Harakah al-Wahhabiyya”. Its most common name in the literature is “Wahhabism”.

the Wahhabi movement, but by leading the way for the establishment of the state, the Wahhabiyya represented an advanced phase in the process. Reconstructing that history and showing its relevance to the rise of the movement, the shape it took and the role it played in the history of Arabia, is essential. Religion was important to the rise of the movement as in Najd society in the eighteenth century it was the only educational and intellectual means available through which new ideas could be transmitted. Religious discourse, therefore, was a form of expression that reflected other political and social aspirations. (Ibid)

### ***2.3 Some contradictions between Salafism and Wahhabism***

“Wahhabism” includes a variety of concepts, but generally refers to a movement whose aim is to purify the Islamic religion from innovations and practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. In the West, “Wahhabism” has mostly been applied to the form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, and which has recently spread to other parts of the world. In most Muslim nations, however, believers who adhere to this creed prefer to call themselves “Unitarians” (muwahiddun) or “Salafiyyun” (sing. Salafi, noun Salafiyya). (Armanious, 2003: 1) “Salafism” comes from the word *salaf*, to “follow” or “precede”, and refers to the followers and companions of the Prophet. Salafism started in Egypt in the mid-1800s and observed the teachings of early generations of Muslims, or as-Salaf as-Saleh (pious predecessors). Religious conservatives latched onto this orthodox belief, which spread to Morocco, Mauritania and Somalia. In the early 1960s, the struggle with secular Arab factions prompted King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to allow the Muslim Brotherhood to migrate, and so started the Salafist movement, eventually leading to the integration of the Wahhabists, who rejected modern influences, with the Salafists who follow the original tenets of Islam.<sup>38</sup> The terms “Salafiyya” and “Wahhabism” have distinct historical roots, but have recently been used interchangeably. Some consider Wahhabism to be the Saudi form of Salafiyya. Modern Salafi beliefs are rooted in a reform movement of the early twentieth century which progressively grew more conservative. Salafis believe, in line with the more puritanical Islamic teachings, that religious authority is ultimately located in the Quran and the Prophet’s practices, not in interpretive commentaries. Salafis also claim to be “the only Muslim group that will be saved on Judgment Day.” The Salafiyya is not a unified movement and there is no single Salafi “sect”. Salafism appeals, however, to a large number of Muslims in Africa, Asia, North America, and the Middle East. (Armanios, 2003: 3)

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<sup>38</sup> Price,J, (2012): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Wahhabism and Oil Exports. On-line text: <http://www.ambassadorjohnprice.com/the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-wahhabism-and-oil-exports/1925/>

### **3. Foreign policy objectives and religious revivalism**

#### ***3.1 Historical features of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy during various administrations***

In 1932, the first King of Saudi Arabia, Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Saud (1932-1953), officially declared the independence of the modern Saudi state. He established a relatively stable, dynastic rule and became a major Arab leader and figure, acquainted with other world leaders such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. (Reich, 1990:20) Before declaring Saudi Arabia's independence, King Abd-al-Aziz's struggle was mostly against internal foes in an effort to unite the country under his family's rule. The first serious threat came from the *Ikhwan* (Brethren), who were actually former allies of Ibn Saud. Initially the *Ikhwan* played an important role in Saudi conquests and as pioneers, spreading Wahhabi ideas and helping to integrate tribes around the Wahhabi ideology. (Reich, 1990:20) According to Wilfred Thesiger, this militant religious brotherhood declared dedication to the 'purification and unification of Islam'. Feeling that nomadic life was incompatible with strict conformity with Islam, their aim was to break up the tribes and settle the Bedu around the wells and oases. Ibn Saud rose to power through this movement. Later, however, the *Ikhwan* rebelled and accused Ibn Saud of "religious laxity" for forbidding them to make raids into neighboring states. The conquest of the Hejaz in 1924 brought the whole of what is now Saudi Arabia under Ibn Saud's control, but the king found himself in conflict with the *Ikhwan*. It was with the help of the British Royal Air Force that the king was able to crush the *Ikhwan*'s power at the battle of Sabilla in 1929.<sup>39</sup> Supporting the king were the *Ulama*,<sup>40</sup> who decided that the *Ikhwan* had no right to resist the king. After the battle of Sabilla the only possible domestic threat to Ibn Saud's plans were religious scholars. But, fearful that they might face a similar fate to that of the *Ikhwan*, they remained loyal to the king. (Beranek, 2007:22) Now all that remained was for the Saudi regime to finalize its institutionalization. (Reich, 1990:22)

After the First World War the main supporter of the Saudi regime was Great Britain. In 1915, Ibn Saud signed an agreement with Britain that made the Saudi lands a protectorate state. According to this agreement Saudi foreign policy would be under British supervision, and they undertook not to make concessions to foreign states without the approval of the British

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<sup>39</sup> Thesiger. W, (1991): Arabian sands, p.248-249.Travel Library

<sup>40</sup> The ulema are a class of men with knowledge in Sunni Islam who have been trained in the religious sciences such as the Sunnah, Quran, hadith, sharia and so on, and who exercise their authority in the mosque or in any religion school. As such, they are similar to a clergy. On-line text: <http://middleeast.about.com/od/u/g/ulema-definition.htm>

government. In 1927 the countries signed a new agreement in which Great Britain recognized Saudi Arabia as an independent country. (Beranek, 2007:22) The complicated relationship that Ibn Saud had with Britain enabled him to diversify his foreign policy over the years that followed. During the war, Ibn Saud witnessed the ascending role of the USA and realized that the USA had superior financial resources to Britain, and particularly benefited from the direct and indirect support from American oil companies. Furthermore, the superior political and military strength of the USA became apparent towards the end of the war. (Reich, 1990:21)

King Abd al-Aziz had 43 sons but the status of a prince comes from his mother's lineage and from his alliance with other princes. Abd al-Aziz's marriages, therefore, were arranged mainly to consolidate power among the various tribes of the Arabian peninsula. King Abd al-Aziz conquered and united the immense territory of the Arabian Peninsula and alienated and controlled his cousins and brothers in order to establish a clear and undisputed succession process. He could not, however, secure solidarity among his sons. His final words to two of his sons – the future King Saud, and the next in line, Faisal, who were already fighting each other – were: “You are brothers: unite!”<sup>41</sup>

Due to his religious character and his great aspirations for his country, King Abdulaziz sought to promote Islamic teachings and apply *sharia*, and simultaneously to modernize the country. He did not see modernity and religiosity as conflicting but as reconcilable. *Sharia* does not, he claimed, prohibit anything that is useful to people, nor does it permit anything that is harmful for them.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Saud combined the traditional qualities of leadership – especially the tactical maneuvering among tribal segments – with more ambitious and innovative qualities, based on a long term alliance with Britain and on building a stable and institutionalized state. Driven on by his ancestral heritage to re-establish the Wahhabi Empire, Ibn Saud employed both traditional and innovative methods in order to realize his ambitions.

Ibn Saud saw stable relations with surrounding states as crucial to internal stability and the development of Saudi Arabia. (Reich, 1990:16) Ibn Saud's internal strategy was twofold: he promoted centralization by reinforcing the authority of the new government offices, and he encouraged mineral research and the imposition of high taxation. (Reich, 1990:22). The key

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<sup>41</sup> Yamani. M , (2009): From fragility to stability: a survival strategy for the Saudi monarchy. On-line text: <http://www.maiyamani.com/pdf/From%20Fragility%20to%20stability.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Al-Jeraisy.Ch. King Abdul-Aziz Noble Character, p.45. On-line book. [http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih\\_books/single/en\\_king\\_Abdul\\_Aziz.pdf](http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_king_Abdul_Aziz.pdf)

development project on which Ibn Saud embarked was oil exploration; taking advantage of the interest shown by American companies to search for mineral resources in the region and making them pay in advance for each concession. Thanks to the export of oil, Ibn Saud received financial aid from the British and (chiefly) US governments amounting to \$6 million which was aimed at securing his goodwill during the war. After the war, American oil companies, which had organized themselves into the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), started building the trans-Arabian pipeline, taking oil through Syria to the Mediterranean; the pipeline was finally completed in 1950. The oil companies were also able to develop the standard of living for their workers in the country. (Ibid)

In the 1950s, new challenges appeared for the Saudi kingdom due to the impact of the Cold War on the Middle East, and of the changes initiated by ARAMCO. Some Saudi princes and officials also demanded changes in the process of decision making and it was only King Faisal's reforms in the mid-1960s that changed this situation. Ibn Saud had insufficient ability to transform Saudi Arabia into a modernized state, but he had been a great leader who had led a small tribal grouping to becoming an organized monarchy that spread across the whole region. (Reich, 1990:23) King Ibn Saud died in 1953, and as expected, was succeeded by his son, Saud (1953-1964). Saud's government was famous for financial scandals, but he faced a real struggle within the ruling family, with many disputes relating to uncertainties about the succession. After the Second World War the USA replaced Great Britain as the main Saudi ally.

Crown Prince Faisal stood up against King Saud and for the first time different members of this large family began to form power blocks. To the three main areas of foreign policy left by his father (pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and close cooperation with the United States), King Saud added another important pillar, "Realpolitik". This aimed at using oil wealth to influence both followers and enemies of the kingdom. However, during the 1950s, when it was negatively affected by the surrounding secular ideology, Saudi Arabia, several times, was on the verge of collapse. (Beranek, 2007:23) King Saud's rule was well intentioned but he was accused of seriously mismanaging the country's political and financial affairs. His massive spending on luxuries and his lack of financial planning depleted the nation's resources and helped to strengthen the pro-Nasser movement. Saud's erratic and unstable foreign policy had led the kingdom into growing tension with Nasser at a time when civil war in Northern Yemen had brought Egyptian forces into the peninsula. This, and Saud's mismanagement of the Saudi budget, led to a long struggle between King Saud and his half-brother, Crown Prince Faisal bin Turki bin Abdulaziz. (Cordesman, 2003: 16) Saud's rule is remembered for its being the state's

worst period for corruption and political amateurism, and this was an important lesson for the ruling family. Since then the family has been keen to publicly demonstrate solidarity between the individual princes in order to ensure the country's survival. (Beranek, 2007: 25) The reign of Saud ended in 1964 and the process that led to his downfall was agreed by general consensus of the royal family: the reformist-led faction and the religious and tribal factions were solicited by Faisal in order to gain broader acceptance of the family's decision.<sup>43</sup>

Faisal (1964-1975) emerged from the fight victorious, and his rule was associated with the ever-growing income from oil. The 1960s across the Arab world were marked by Arab nationalism, embodied in Egyptian Nasserism and Syrian-Iraqi Baathism. Faisal dedicated himself to following Islam, a strategy by which he sought to underline the integrity and legitimacy of the Saudi government. Also, in the first two years of his rule, Faisal made a number of visits to Islamic countries and preached everywhere his pan-Islamic message. (Beranek, 2007:25) Faisal's conservative approach to politics, especially to the budget, was in stark contrast to Saud's profligate spending. Faisal also took control of the Kingdom's foreign and internal affairs, initiated a strict austerity program, balanced the books, stabilized the currency and considerably reduced the national debt. (Cordesman, 2003: 16) Faisal attracted the world's attention to Saudi Arabia after leading OPEC in placing an embargo on the export of oil to the USA for approximately six months in protest at the US military's support of Israel during the Arab-Israeli War of 1973.<sup>44</sup> Faisal received unprecedented support in the Islamic world for his policy and thanks to the country's oil wealth he could begin to campaign for the construction of mosques and religious educational centers abroad, thus bringing the benefits of Saudi oil to many countries in Asia and Africa. In 1974, Faisal gave more than \$10 billion to the Islamic Solidarity Fund and founded the Islamic Development Bank based in Jeddah. (Beranek, 2007: 26) Under King Faisal, Saudi Arabia became a benefactor of many religious institutions, thus contributing to increased political awareness of the international Muslim community. Local issues, from Kashmir to Jerusalem to the Republic of South Africa, suddenly became an issue for the whole Islamic community. Saudi aid abroad, thanks to oil wealth between 1973 and 1990, rose to an amazing \$93 billion. King Faisal was assassinated in 1975. (Ibid)

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<sup>43</sup> Charles E. Balka, (2008): The Fate of Saudi Arabia: Regime Evolution in the Saudi Monarchy. Thesis. On-line text: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA493945>

<sup>44</sup> Helen Ziegler. The Kings of Saudi Arabia. On-line text: <http://www.hziegler.com/articles/kings-of-saudi-arabia.html>

King Khalid (1975-1982) assumed the throne just three days after the death of his brother. Khalid's government reflected the contradictions between Faisal's religious rhetoric and the increasing affluence and materialism of Saudi society. Policies at home were strongly influenced by the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the wave of Islamist activism which followed. Khalid's government brought consolidation with his brothers. (Beranek, 2007:28) As king, with Fahd as his First Deputy Premier, despite having a heart condition which might have prevented others from such strenuous and stressful activity, Khalid achieved great things in both his domestic and foreign policies. He soon launched a 'Five Year Plan' which established much of the development of the country's infrastructure, on which the future health and prosperity of the Kingdom would depend. He got involved in the seemingly intractable Lebanese civil war; he drew together the historic summit of Arab leaders in Taif and the Holy City of Mecca in 1981, and founded the Gulf Co-operation Council the same year.<sup>45</sup> Unlike his predecessors, King Khalid devoted his reign to achieving mutual consensus and began to significantly involve the most senior princes. Prince Abdullah, for example, the current Saudi king, became an expert on Syria and Iraq. This collaborative approach to security issues was strengthened during the 1980s while Prince Bandar bin Sultan was the ambassador to the USA, and opened many cases to the detriment of the formal Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Saud ibn Faisal. The real strength of the country was Khalid's brother Fahd, who later took control of the government. (Beranek, 2007: 28)

King Fahd (1982-2005) ascended to the throne in 1982 after seven years as Crown Prince. He threw the kingdom's weight behind Arab causes, becoming heavily involved in regional issues such as the search for a peaceful settlement to the Lebanese civil war which ended with an agreement signed in the kingdom. However, the king's decision in 1990 to welcome American forces onto Saudi soil after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait drew heavy criticism within the country, and some commentators say that this decision contributed to the rise of al-Qaeda, whose leader, Osama Bin Laden, was Saudi-born.<sup>46</sup> During King Fahd's reign the Kingdom played an active and growing role in international affairs. King Fahd was considered to be very good at international relations and was key to stability and peace internally and in the region. Arab and Islamic solidarity and unity became the main objective of Saudi policy and the Kingdom played

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<sup>45</sup> Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2005): Kings of Saudi Arabia, On-line text: <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/Pages/SaudiArabiaKings36148.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> BBC News. (2005): King Fahd of Saudi Arabia dies. On-line text: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4734175.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4734175.stm)

a major role in the resolution of conflicts involving Muslim peoples.<sup>47</sup> Despite the economic downturn, King Fahd continued to fund international religious institutions founded by King Faisal in the 1960s. During 1980s, however, the gap in the economic situation of the population began to widen, and many Saudis found a solution to their growing social and economic problems in Islam. King Fahd, more than any of his predecessors, maintained very cordial relations with the USA. (Beranek, 2007: 29)

In August 2005, the former Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz became the sixth King of Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah has been well known as a staunch Arab nationalist, but has also been keen to reach out to other countries, even attempting to revive interest in his 2002 Middle East Peace Plan. Although it received renewed attention in 2005, it is yet to be implemented. The plan, like others, calls for a return to the pre-1967 borders and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Israel would, in return, control the Western Wall and portions of the West Bank, and would receive recognition from Arab states. In order to placate Saudi Islamists, the king has continued to forbid US forces to use bases in Saudi Arabia.<sup>48</sup> During Abdullah's reign, a growing rift has opened between conservative Wahhabists and modernizers. The King is relatively moderate but hasn't made many substantive reforms. During his reign there have been accusations of atrocious human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. (Ibid) King Abdullah is eighty-eight years old and already older than any of his predecessors. Over the coming years, Saudi Arabia is likely to see dramatic changes in its leadership, as will the Saudi-US relationship, the nature of which has, over the years, been strongly influenced by the personality and style of the Saudi king. (Henderson, 2009:1) In the midst of political uncertainty, King Abdullah has taken sure but steady steps to transform his country, and his Saudi Arabia is a very different country from that of King Fahd. With Abdullah's blessing, the Saudi press, although it can hardly be said to be free, is from time to time vibrant and sometimes even mildly critical of internal affairs.<sup>49</sup>

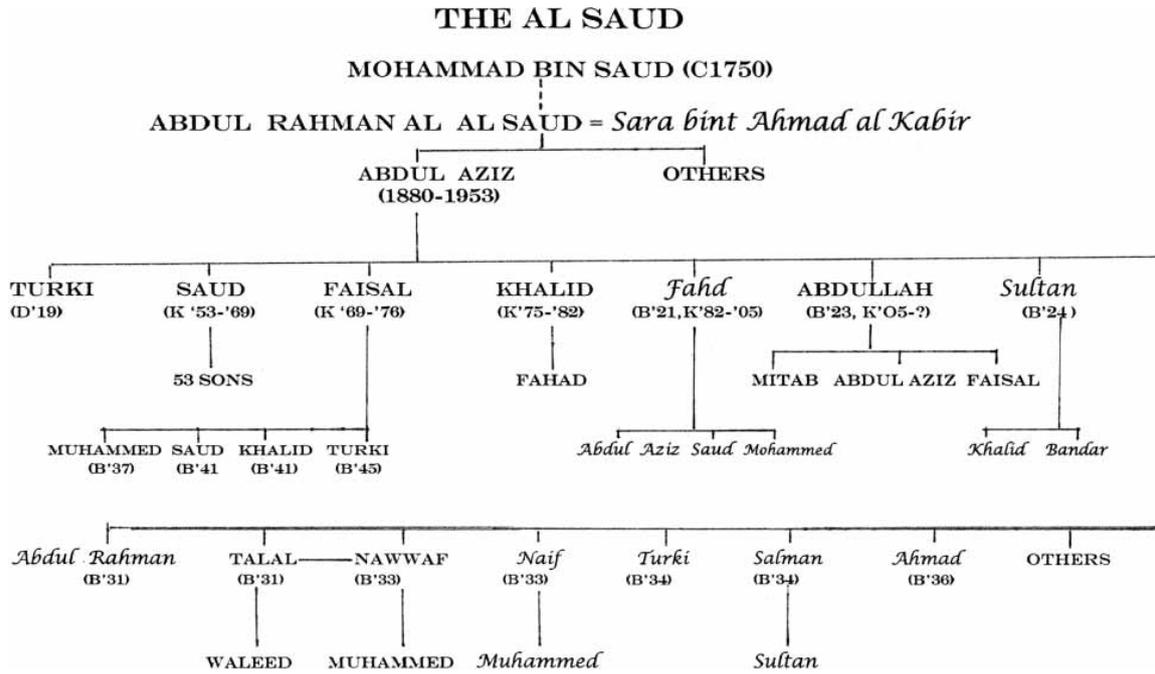
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<sup>47</sup> Uzinform.Внешняя политика.On-line text: <http://iiagency.com/sahistory/vneshnyaya-politika/>

<sup>48</sup> Szczepanski.K, Biography of Saudi King Abdullah. On-line text: <http://asianhistory.about.com/od/profilesofasianleaders/p/AbdullahProfile.htm>

<sup>49</sup> Jones.T, (2010):Abdullah's No Reformer. Foreign Policy Journal. On-line text: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/28/abdullahs\\_no\\_reformer](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/28/abdullahs_no_reformer)

# THE AL SAUD FAMILY



Source: Taylor and Francis group.(2006): *The Al Saud Family and The Future of Saudi Arabia*. On-line text:  
[http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348\\_1.pdf](http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348_1.pdf)

### ***3.2 Controversy and mismanagement of financial assistance as a flashpoint for criticism in foreign relations.***

Saudi aid goes primarily to third-world Muslim countries; at times the Saudis appear to attempt to export their conservative religious views along with their aid, as in the case of Pakistan.

(Quandt, 1981: 10)

When massive amounts of income from oil started to flow into Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s, the country sought to extend its religious influence abroad, donating mosques and Qurans to Muslim communities around the world. It also sought to persuade these communities to embrace and adopt Wahhabi thought and practices. (Congressional Quarterly, 2005: 171) After 9/11, American commentators accused the Saudis of promoting anti-Western hatred through its funding of mosques and education institutions around the world. The US government put pressure on the Saudis to drain al-Qaeda of funds, but the process has been only partly successful. Thanks to oil proceeds (due to the West's apparently insatiable thirst for petroleum), Saudi Arabia is able to engage in more philanthropic work than any other Muslim country. A former official of the American State Department estimates that the House of Saud donates between \$3 billion and \$4 billion to Islamic causes every year. Between 1973 and 2002, the Saudi government spent \$80 billion on mosques and Islamic institutions, colleges and schools. Because of the secretive nature of the Saudi ruling family, commentators who analyze the financing of terrorism have failed to say exactly how much of those funds has been put aside for terrorism and extremist causes. A conservative estimate would put the percentage at ten percent, but that would still be \$8 billion. The real figure could be much higher.<sup>50</sup>

Even though Saudis initially condemned the financing of terrorism and US Treasury experts have praised Saudi cooperation, it is felt that the House of Saud could do more to combat it. But the US government's ability to control terrorist financing is severely limited. Saudi individuals, and many others in other Arab and Islamic countries, will continue to support terrorist organizations, and governments elsewhere can only do a limited amount to counter such funding. Merrill Lynch estimates that wealthy individuals in the Middle East control approximately \$1 trillion dollars of capital (a rise of 29 percent from 2003 to 2004), and that this means there is very little the US government can do. This is compounded by the fact that much of this money is

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<sup>50</sup> Schanzer, J. (2011): Saudi Arabia's Terror Finance Problem. On-line text:

[http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/saudi-arabia-s-terror-finance-problem\\_592744.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/saudi-arabia-s-terror-finance-problem_592744.html)

in private accounts outside Saudi Arabia and terrorist operations are not expensive to run. Lynch predicts a further 9 percent rise, annually, from 2004 to 2009.<sup>51</sup>

Saudi society has also been criticized for having a corrupt and backward political system.

Further, it is felt that in a country of such intolerance and authoritarianism, it is only natural – a foregone conclusion – for its inhabitants to resort to violence.<sup>52</sup> Another flashpoint concerns al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, who was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and went to fight with other *mujahidin*<sup>53</sup> (holy warriors) in Afghanistan in the 1980s. On returning to Saudi Arabia, and before transferring to Sudan, bin Laden began to organize and recruit followers for his extremist version of Islam. Partly because bin-Laden is himself a Saudi, and perhaps partly because of the influence of hard-line Wahhabis in the Kingdom, many of his supporters and operatives have been Saudis. (Congressional Quarterly, 2005: 171)

Wahhabism was introduced to the Horn of Africa and East Africa in the early 1950s. Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation and the International Islamic Relief Organization (associated with Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law) are Saudi-sponsored charities that have built numerous mosques and madrassas (religious schools) and offered education, humanitarian aid and other charitable programs. Both of the organizations have, however, been accused of supporting and financing terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda.<sup>54</sup>

The influence of this 'export' of finance and conservative Islam probably had its greatest effect in Pakistan, where conservative Islamic scholars began to promote and propagate an extreme view of Islam in the madrassas there. Among the students at these religious schools were Afghans exiled by the Soviet invasion. They became known as the Taliban (students), and they returned to Afghanistan to take control of the country and impose their extreme religious views. In the late 1990s, the Taliban welcomed Osama bin Laden, and al-Qaeda, to take up residence in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda is not, as many believe, a true representation of Wahhabism: its

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<sup>51</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies: Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the war on terror, p.8: On-line text: [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/congress/ts051108\\_cordesman.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/congress/ts051108_cordesman.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Moaddel.M, (2007): Values and Perceptions of the Islamic and Middle Eastern Publics, Printed in U.S, p.209

<sup>53</sup> Mujahid. Arabic plural: mujahidin. One who wages jihad. Used in modern political discourse to denote nationalist and Islamist fighters, e.g. during the Algerian war of Independence (1954-62), the anti-monarchical resistance against the Shah (1971-79) and the Afghan anti-communist war (1978- 92). Cf. Ijtihad, Jihad. (Halliday, 2005, p.230)

<sup>54</sup> Price.J (2012): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Wahhabism and Oil Exports. On-line text: <http://www.ambassadorjohnprice.com/the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-wahhabism-and-oil-exports/1925/>

ideological and theological development derives equally from other Salafi and non-Wahhabi extremist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the al-jihad from Egypt. These movements' ideologies press the need for a "defensive" jihad against the West. The term jihad has as many meanings as the English word "crusade". It can mean a "holy war," a campaign to "do good", or simply striving to be a better person. Extremist Mujahedeen are often called "jihadists" due to their belief in jihad as holy war. (Congressional Quarterly, 2005: 171) One of Al-Qaeda's ideological leaders and the leader of the Jihad movement, Ayyman al-Zawahiri, states that of the main issues facing the Islamist movement, in order of priority, Palestine is at the top of the list. (Azzam, 2003: 3) For example he says the Saudi regime is "traitorous" because of its links with the US government which supports Israel. Until now, people have assumed that Islamists rank the application of *Sharia* at the top of their list of priorities, but, by stressing the issue of Palestine, al-Zawahiri is able to justify saying that the Saudis, who apply *Sharia* law, are "outside the fold of Islam". Furthermore, al-Zawahiri suggests that Saudi and US support for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan is merely a "ploy" to distract Arab Mujahedeen from the goal of transformation in the Muslim world. He also suggests that the Mujahedeen understood what was happening and established al-Qaeda as their operational base in Afghanistan, from where they could carry out their worldwide "struggle". This reference to al-Qaeda is one of the earliest and comes from al-Zawahiri's book of 1996, when he was still a leader within the Jihad movement. (Ibid)

Many members of al-Qaeda, including the majority of the 9/11 hijackers, have been Saudi, but until recently the network has been quiet inside Saudi Arabia itself. However, angered by the excesses of the Saudi royal family and its deviation from al-Qaeda's vision of Islam, and by the presence of "infidel" US troops on "holy" soil, since early 2003, as many as a thousand jihadists have carried out a campaign of terror in the kingdom, targeting housing compounds and government buildings. They also attacked the US consulate in Jeddah. Al-Qaeda operatives have also kidnapped or killed foreigners in the kingdom. The Saudi government has reacted strongly and forcefully and its security forces have fought a number of battles with the extremists. By early 2005, most of al-Qaeda's leaders had been killed and the movement appeared to have lost much of its strength. (Congressional Quarterly, 2005: 171).

Many Saudi terror financing activities have been neutralized, but radical Wahhabi ideology continues to thrive in the country and there is little the US government can do to counteract it. Although the Saudis now see combating the financing of terror as being in their own best interests, Saudi Arabia is itself still plays a large part in the problem. Theoretically, even if Saudi

Arabia managed to halve the terrorism funding problem, the amount of money would still be vast.<sup>55</sup> The preventative steps that Saudi Arabia has taken preventive include the following:

- Since September 26, 2001, all Saudi banks have been required to identify and freeze all assets relating to terrorist suspects and entities in response to a list issued by the US government.
- In August 2003, the Council of Ministers approved new legislation that puts in place harsh penalties for the crimes of money laundering and terror financing.
- A joint task force on terror financing: American and Saudi officials work side-by-side in this area and the USA is providing training programs for Saudi officials.
- Saudi Arabia has frozen all charitable activity outside the Kingdom. Charities cannot withdraw cash from their accounts.
- Charities cannot collect cash donations in public places.<sup>56</sup>

The Kingdom is establishing a National Commission for Charitable Activities Abroad which will oversee all private charitable activities. Until this commission is established, no Saudi charity can send money abroad. Exceptions were made for the Tsunami and Darfur tragedies but under the strict oversight of the Saudi Red Crescent Society, which is an arm of the Saudi government. In the case of Palestine, funds are delivered by Saudi government institutions to legitimate recipients (for example, Aid to Palestinians). Because people say that Saudi charities raise money for suicide bombers, the Saudi Red Crescent Society no longer provides funds directly to organizations in the Palestinian territories, but to the Palestinian Authority via official channels. (Ibid) The use of aid to “win friends and influence people” is not a new phenomenon. The USA and the Soviet Union used aid as a weapon in the Cold War and a 21st-century equivalent is now emerging. Saudi Arabia’s foreign aid for 2007 was estimated at \$2 billion. But it fluctuates as much as the oil price (see chart). Total “authorized aid” amounts to \$10 billion a year and may be more. It is a large amount of aid: almost 10 percent of the total amount of aid from rich countries, and equivalent to the amount of aid donated by Britain or Japan together.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Schanzer,J, (2011): Saudi Arabia’s Terror Finance Problem. On-line text:  
[http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/saudi-arabia-s-terror-finance-problem\\_592744.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/saudi-arabia-s-terror-finance-problem_592744.html)

<sup>56</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies: Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the war on terror, p.8-9: On-line text: [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/congress/ts051108\\_cordesman.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/congress/ts051108_cordesman.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> The Economist, (2009): Development aid from authoritarian regimes. On-line text:  
<http://www.economist.com/node/13799239>



### ***3.3 Priorities and Targets of Saudi Arabian foreign policy***

The Saudi state was first recognized by the Soviet Union in February 1926, followed by France, Britain and the Netherlands shortly afterwards.<sup>58</sup> The country plays a major diplomatic role in the Middle East and the Gulf, is a key player in OPEC and world energy policy, and, by southern Gulf standards, has a large military force; Saudi's international relations are very greatly influenced by external security issues. (Cordesman, 2002: 1).

In his book *A World Survey of Religion and the State*, Jonathan Fox categorizes and measures the separation of religion and state; Saudi Arabia belongs to the category in which religion is mandatory for all citizens, and where, arguably, religion controls the state as much or more than the state controls religion; Saudi Arabia is the only state in this category which means that, based on Fox's measures, it is closer to being a full theocracy than any other state in the world. (Fox, 2008: 227) Twenty-three of the 83 articles in Saudi Arabia's constitution of 1992 refer to religion. Article 55, for example, states that the King is responsible for implementing *Sharia* law

<sup>58</sup> Tauris, I.B. (2001): *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, p. 220.on-line: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/docDetail.action?docID=10132964&force=1&ppg=254>

and carrying out all policies in accordance with Islam, (Ibid) which has always been the most important factor determining the priorities of the Kingdom's foreign policy. Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded, it has devoted a large part of its resources to serving the Islamic World and achieving solidarity and unity based on faithfulness to one set of beliefs. Such 'Islamic symbiosis' is how Muslims seek to gain position and honor.<sup>59</sup>

Saudi Arabia has three main foreign policy priorities.

- National security
- Hegemony over the Arabian Peninsula
- Leadership in the Islamic world (Beranek, 2007: 155)

But the Kingdom, which became a major local power following the (first) Gulf War, is now facing severe security problems: political self-sufficiency is a complex issue, and military self-sufficiency is deemed to be impossible; Saudi Arabia is, furthermore, located in the eye of a "raging storm" in the Arab world. (Ibid) The country is surrounded by instability: Iraq and Syria to the north, Bahrain to the east, Yemen to the south, and Egypt to the west. A further goal of Saudi foreign policy is stability in the Arab world, which it believes is in its own best interests as well as those of the individual countries it seeks to stabilize: any upheaval in the Arab world, especially on its borders, may sooner or later strike Saudi Arabia and cause political strain, financial or military damage, and unacceptable change.<sup>60</sup> Saudi foreign policy applies to both the regional and global contexts. However, space does not permit an analysis of all Saudi's international relations, so this paper will concentrate on the challenge presented by the Islamic aspects of the country's foreign policy.

In order to achieve Islamic solidarity, the Kingdom sought and initiated, together with its allies in the Islamic world, the establishment of a system of Islamic governmental and non-governmental organizations, which includes the Muslim World League, established in 1962, and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), established in 1969; the headquarters of both organizations are in Saudi Arabia. These efforts originate from a comprehensive image of the meaning of Islamic solidarity, the collective security of Islamic countries, the peaceful settlement of disputes among Islamic countries, the provision of economic aid to Islamic countries and

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<sup>59</sup> The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2005): on-line text: <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/KingdomForeignPolicy/Pages/KingdomPolicy34645.aspx>

<sup>60</sup> Khaled Al-Dakheel. "Arab News". (2012):Для внешней политики Саудовской Аравии приоритетна стабильность. On-line text: <http://www.inosmi.ru/world/20121023/201302333.html>

societies of limited potential, the provision of emergency assistance and relief to Islamic countries affected by disaster, backing up Muslims and defending their issues, and the provision of moral and material support to Islamic groups wherever they exist through generous contributions towards the building of mosques and the establishment of Islamic civic centers.<sup>61</sup> Inside Saudi Arabia, Islamic religious dialogue has begun to develop as an integral part of the "national dialogue" established by King Abdullah in 2003. In a speech that year, the King stated that the "preservation of Islamic values" was among the top priorities of the country and that to focus on the future does mean to deny the values of past, and that tradition continues but changes direction and now has a contribution to make to the solution of new problems. Laying emphasis on these principles or "values" means development can be consistent and, more importantly, controlled by the state, enabling the elimination of sharp social stratification and, consequently, reinforcing what the King called "national unity, national security [and] social stability".<sup>62</sup>

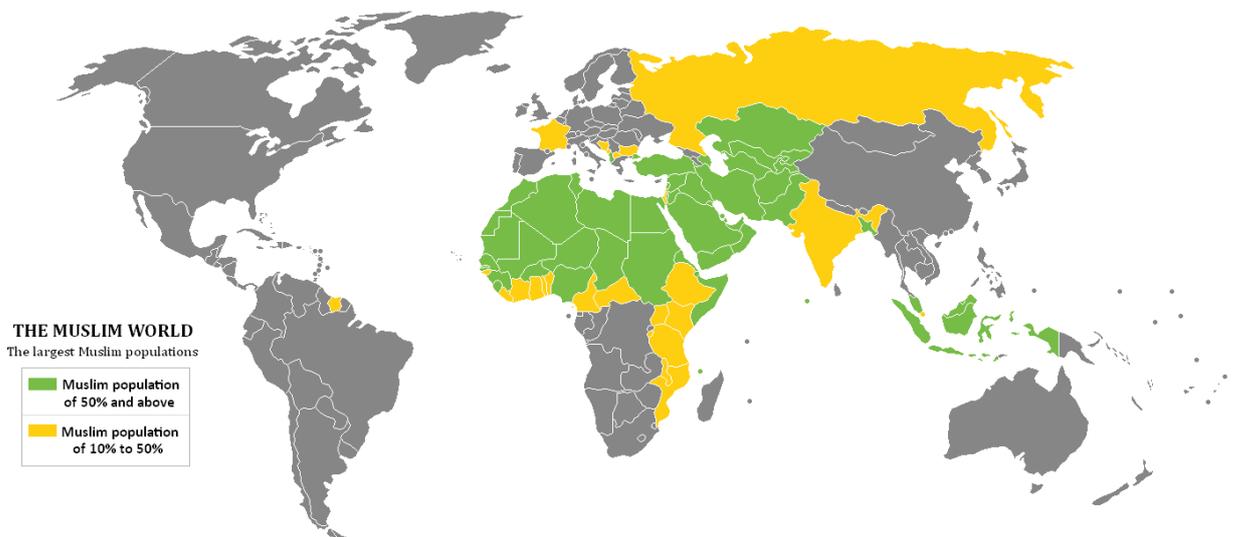
Saudi Arabia's role in global and regional international relations, especially throughout the Islamic world, is immense. Historical events and the presence of the major Muslim shrines have combined to make Saudi Arabia the center of Islam. This fact largely determines the country's foreign policy, through which it claims leadership of the Muslim world. As indicated above, one of the five pillars of Islam is to go on a *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca at least once in a lifetime, and this contributes to the desire of all Muslim states to maintain and develop their relations with Saudi Arabia. There are 1.57 billion Muslims of all ages living in the world today, in more than 200 countries, representing 23 percent of an estimated 2009 world population of 6.8 billion.<sup>63</sup> The map below shows the area of the 'Islamic world'.

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<sup>61</sup> The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2005): on-line text:  
<http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/KingdomForeignPolicy/Pages/KingdomPolicy34645.aspx>

<sup>62</sup> Albest.ru. (2011): Внешняя политика Королевства Саудовская Аравия. Реферат. On-line text:  
[http://revolution.allbest.ru/political/00348884\\_0.html](http://revolution.allbest.ru/political/00348884_0.html)

<sup>63</sup> Pew Research Center, (2009): Mapping the Global Muslim Population., Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population , On-line text:  
<http://www.pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/muslimpopulation/muslimpopulation.pdf>



On-line source: Ahsan-academy. <http://ahsan-academy.deviantart.com/art/Muslim-world-Map-189324449>

In terms of the ‘Islamic’ aspects of its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ✚ Comprehensive Islamic solidarity.
- ✚ Opening new horizons for economic cooperation among Islamic countries, aimed at supporting their potential and resources on different levels.
- ✚ Standing against different types of cultural and intellectual invasion that threaten the Islamic World.
- ✚ Developing the Organization of Islamic Conference and supporting its activities to achieve greater effectiveness in confronting the issues encountered by the Islamic World.
- ✚ Activating the role of Islamic countries within the framework of a new world order, including providing assistance and support to Muslim minorities worldwide, and looking after their rights in accordance with the principles of international law.
- ✚ Introducing the real and true image of Islam and its tolerant *Sharia* law, and protecting Islam from all the accusations and slander addressed at Islam, such as its alleged role in terrorism and human rights violations.<sup>64</sup>

It is interesting to note that from the very beginning of independence, from the days of King Abdulaziz and continued by his sons, the Saudi government has attempted to create connections between Islam and Arab nationalism. The country has also attempted to boost its relations with Arab Gulf states and to unify and coordinate joint policies of security and defense during times of conflicts and crises. This work resulted, for example, in the founding, in 1981, of the

<sup>64</sup> The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2005): on-line text: <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/aboutKingDom/KingdomForeignPolicy/Pages/KingdomPolicy34645.aspx>

“Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf” (CCASG). King Abdullah recently called for the development of the CCACG into a unified body, or “Super-state”, which would include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman; the Saudis and their CCACG colleagues are currently discussing closer coordination, if not fusion, within the council. The perceived regional ambitions of Shiite Iran and the current chaos in Syria provide sufficient stimuli for such enhanced Gulf relationships and, possibly, complete unification. All CCASG members except Oman – the largest country of the six after Saudi Arabia – follow Sunni Islam. (Oman is unique in following Ibadhi Islam, distinct from Sunni and Shia Islam.)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Weeklystandard.com (2012): Wahhabi Internal Contradictions as Saudi Arabia Seeks Wider Gulf Leadership. online text: [http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/wahhabi-internal-contradictions-saudi-arabia-seeks-wider-gulf-leadership\\_645231.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/wahhabi-internal-contradictions-saudi-arabia-seeks-wider-gulf-leadership_645231.html)

### ***3.4 The new Middle East uprising and its effect on the Saudi government***

The ‘Arab Spring’, which has been raging in the Middle East for two years, swept away what had seemed irremovable regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt. It now appears to be the turn of Syria, where the Ba'athist elite retain a section of the army and some security forces, but are facing an expanding civil war which threatens the prospects for the regime of Bashar al-Assad. From the viewpoint of democratic transformation, more has happened in the two years of the Arab Spring than in the entire history of independence in the Middle East. One fundamentally important question in this context is whether the Middle East can balance a regional system that makes collective sense with the imperatives of global development. On the one hand the Arab Spring has removed the most militant dictators and their regimes from the arena, and this trend is likely to continue. On the other hand, regime change appears to have exacerbated ethnic and religious conflicts and brought radical Islamists more clearly into the political arena. Furthermore, the division between Sunnis and Shiites is growing and it is difficult to understand where sectarian conflicts begin and where they end – although in all likelihood they will end with external actors. Competition for territory and oil, the control of energy supply routes, religious ideologies, and the geopolitical interests of different superpowers combine to confuse an explicit understanding of the causes of these regional and national problems.<sup>66</sup>

Political reforms are taboo in Saudi Arabia, although they are commonly discussed. The question remains as to when and how fast, not if, they can be made. Political structures in the regional context have created considerable pressure for change: all of Saudi's neighbors, including some previously conservative oil-rich monarchies, have more or less joined the ranks of representative democracies. With the exception of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in all of the smaller Gulf states there is now an elected parliament and women have the right to vote and hold positions in the executive. (Beranek, 2007: 2006) The Arab uprisings have without doubt had an effect on Saudi Arabia; the younger generation is pushing for reforms, but the royal family is “buying time” by judiciously distributing its oil wealth to its subjects. Saudi conservatism has, furthermore, prevented mass demonstrations, as to many the thought of what has happened in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Egypt happening in the kingdom is deeply worrying. However, ever since the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself in December 2010, it has been

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<sup>66</sup> *Стегний..П.,(2012):* Смыслы, подтексты и повестка дня «арабской весны». On-line text: <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Blizhnii-Vostok-po-versalski-ili-po-vestfalski-15785>

impossible to separate the succession issue from the issue of reform. The challenges presented by the Arab Spring will be something the next king will certainly need to deal with.<sup>67</sup>

Following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and the uprisings in Bahrain, Yemen and Libya, angry Saudis began large-scale propaganda on 11 March 2011, and in an unprecedented move a group of political activists announced the establishment a political party. Most of them were, predictably, arrested and violently suppressed.<sup>68</sup> The Saudi regime receives billions of dollars in oil revenue, which the regime is able to use as either a carrot or a stick. Before the protests, King Abdullah was abroad for medical treatment; he immediately returned home with the promise of 35 billion dollars of financial aid to the people in the form of a 15 percent increase in salaries across the country, assistance in the paying off of the debts of prisoners, financial aid to students and the unemployed, the construction of new housing, and a budget increase for the religious police. In such a way the regime was able to regain full control and stabilize the situation. Shortly afterwards, Saudi and UAE troops entered Bahrain to suppress the revolt there, and three weeks later the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council presented a plan to take control of the crisis in Yemen. (Ibid) The map below shows the area of the Arab Spring uprising.



On-line source: Foreign Policy Association. [http://www.fpa.org/features/index.cfm?act=feature&announcement\\_id=113](http://www.fpa.org/features/index.cfm?act=feature&announcement_id=113)

<sup>67</sup> Teitelbaum, J. (2011): Saudi Succession and Stability. On-line text: <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/docs/perspectives153.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Irib World Service, (2011): Suudi Arabistan, Amerika politikalarının uygulayıcısı. On-line text: <http://turkish.irim.ir/makaleler/siyasi-makaleler/item/249992-suudi-arabistan-amerika-politikalar%C4%B1n%C4%B1n-uygulay%C4%B1c%C4%B1s%C4%B1>

We cannot say that Saudi Arabia supports the idea of revolution, but equally neither can we say that Saudi Arabia is against revolution, as proved by the cases of Libya and Syria. Generally, in terms of its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia considers what is happening in other countries as those countries' own domestic affairs. So, if a revolution happens somewhere in the Arab world, the Saudi government can try to make a difference by using their relations with the regime in that country, but if the revolution successfully overthrows or changes that regime, Saudi Arabia is likely to recognize this and begin relations with the new regime.<sup>69</sup>

Saudi Arabia has a long history of adaptation and evolutionary change and seems to be making a smooth transition towards the reign of a new king (who will be of a new generation with a different background and experience), but this century will present the Kingdom with some serious challenges: a range of potential foreign threats; foreign policy problems; a violent Islamic extremist minority that commits acts of terrorism at home and abroad; and finding ways to adapt its predominantly Wahhabi faith to the inevitable economic and social changes that will occur. (Cordesman, 2003: 19) The Kingdom has formed a number of small institutions that are beginning to facilitate wider political participation and expression, but the leadership must make sure that these institutions grow, at an acceptable rate, into useful and effective bodies. Changing from a closed political system to one which allows for greater representation and participation needs to happen gradually so as not to jeopardize the nation's stability and it is likely that conservative Islamic forces within the country will enable an appropriate rate of change. "Democratization" and the establishing of political legitimacy in the Western sense are unlikely to be important factors in Saudi Arabia's political success. More important will be economic transformation from a patriarchal welfare economy based on oil wealth and foreign labor to a private, diversified economy in which its own citizens do the work and also play a key role in shaping the nation's future. (Ibid)

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<sup>69</sup> Khaled Al-Dakheel. "Arab News". (2012): Для внешней политики Саудовской Аравии приоритетна стабильность. On-line text: <http://www.inosmi.ru/world/20121023/201302333.html>

## **4. The balance of power and struggle for influence in the Middle East**

### ***4.1 Saudi Arabia and Iran as ‘kindness’ enemies***

Saudi Arabia and Iran have never had an easy relationship: tensions have existed between Shiite and Wahhabi clerics for over two centuries. The Wahhabi movement’s founder, Muhammad abd al-Wahhab, considered Shiite Islam to be apostate. Wahhab led raids into Shiite southern Iraq in order to destroy the shrine of al-Hussein, one of the most important Shiite leaders. There have been tensions ever since and there is little prospect of this situation being resolved in the foreseeable future.<sup>70</sup>

However, the relationship between Saudi Arabia – the world's largest producer and exporter of crude oil – and Iran – with its strategic position between the Caspian Sea and the Gulf – is key to the maintenance of stability in the region. The two countries are OPEC’s first and second largest producers of oil, which means any changes in Saudi-Iranian relations (the most important bilateral relationship in Gulf, and the one which has the greatest effect the political and strategic environment in the region), will, in combination with the Regional Security System, have an important impact on the world energy market. (Beranek, 2007: 172)

Perhaps the most important year in recent Saudi-Iranian relations was 1979, which saw the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the less famous storming of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by radicals who wanted to overthrow the Saudi regime. During the thirty years before 1979, the region was dominated by secular nationalism (or what has been called ‘etatism’) and Saudi Arabia was seen as an anomaly to this system and as far from dominant. Since 1979 (or perhaps from the 1967 Arab-Israeli war which discredited Nasserism), however, religion and Saudi Arabia have become more important features in Middle Eastern politics, and now, 30 years later, we can assess how these developments have progressed.<sup>71</sup>

Saudi Arabia and Iran’s rivalry for influence in the Middle East and the Gulf has increased since the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. Both nations call themselves ‘Islamic’ but their foreign policies could not be more different. Saudi Arabia could be called a ‘regional status quo’ power; Iran on

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<sup>70</sup> Burke.A - Cordesman.A (2002): Saudi Arabia Enters The 21st Century: II. Foreign Relations and External Security. Center for Strategic and International Studies. On-line text: [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/s21\\_02.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/s21_02.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Ayoob.M - Kosebalaban.H, (2009): Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers; Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State. Summary. On-line text: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65034/madawi-al-rasheed-ed-mohammed-ayoob-and-hasan-kosebalabans-kingdom-without-borders-saudi-arabias-political-rel>

the other hand often seeks revolutionary change in the region with varying degrees of intensity. Saudi Arabia has strong ties with Western nations; Iran sees the USA as its most lethal enemy. But perhaps most importantly, Saudi Arabia is a conservative Sunni Muslim Arab state; while Iran is a Shiite state where senior politicians view the country as the defender and natural leader of Shiites throughout the region. The rivalry has further been reflected in the politics of a number of states in the region where the two powers exercise influence, including Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain and elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Terrill.A, (2011): The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of Middle East Security. Strategic Studies Institute.On-line text: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1094>

#### ***4.2 Saudi-Iranian relationships after the Iranian revolution of 1979***

While the Shah remained in power in Iran the two nations were certainly rivals, but following the Iranian Revolution of 1979 Iran became intensely and actively hostile towards Saudi Arabia. Ayatollah Khomeini and a number of other Iranian leaders started violently attacking the character and religious legitimacy of the Saudi regime. (Cordesman-Burke, 2002: 4) When the Shah of Iran fell there was speculation that the Saud family would be next. There were similarities between the two: both were monarchs and both led strongly religious nations. But the Shah's ruling base was very small, and he relied heavily on the *Savak*<sup>73</sup> (secret police) and the military for survival. Al Saud is, by contrast, a huge family, with eyes and ears in every corner of the kingdom – a benefit which it is impossible to underestimate. The family knows what is happening around the kingdom even though they do not share this knowledge with the public at large. The loyalty of the security forces is essential; all of the security ministries are headed by a senior member of the family and also dominated by family members at lower levels.<sup>74</sup>

The Iranian revolution served to highlight regional tensions between conservatism and radicalism, and tradition and modernity, and has challenged and reinforced the Islamic dimension of Saudi foreign policy. Not only has the Iranian regime been outspoken in its desire to export revolutionary Shiite ideas (which appeal to a certain extent to the Shiite minority in eastern Saudi Arabia), but it has also argued that Islam is incompatible with a monarchic system. These views, together with the Iranian model of an Islamic republic have been of interest to a number of conservative Muslims including some in Saudi Arabia. (Quandt, 1981: 10)

Another flashpoint between the two countries was Saudi support for the UAE's peaceful attempts to restore its sovereignty over the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, which Iran had occupied since 1971. The development through the 1980s of a collective framework of cooperation through organizations such as the CCASG sought to establish better relations with Iran, and several economic and security protocols and agreements were drafted in

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<sup>73</sup> "Savak" (Organisation of Intelligence and National Security of Iran) was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service established in 1957 by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the US and Israeli Central Intelligence Agencies. The organization was officially dissolved by Khomeini shortly after he came to power in 1979. On-line text: [http://lweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ir0187\)](http://lweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ir0187))

<sup>74</sup> Taylor and Francis group. (2006): The Al Saud Family and The Future of Saudi Arabia. On-line text: [http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348\\_1.pdf](http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348_1.pdf)

an attempt to settle a number of issues between Iran and the CCASG States, the most important of which was the UAE islands.<sup>75</sup>

After 1979, Iran presented a genuine challenge to the claim of Islamic leadership in the region and showed how vulnerable the Saudi regime was to radical Islamic criticism. Islamic beliefs previously seen as legitimizing Saudi power now became a threat to that power. The theocratic government produced by the Iranian revolution was different from that in Saudi Arabia: it was Shiite, and it had a radical philosophy. Iranian clerics said that monarchies were “un-Islamic” and demanded their immediate overthrow. Iran’s rhetoric, together with the presence in oil-rich eastern Saudi Arabia of a sizable Shiite minority, presented the potential for a measure of domestic vulnerability. The revolution’s destabilizing effects became even more apparent when Sunni extremists took possession of the Grand Mosque of Mecca in November 1979. The Saudi government was supposedly the guardian of the Holy Sites of Islam, yet it failed to regain control of the mosque for 10 days and concerns about Iran’s attempts at exporting Islamic revolution affected Saudi-Iranian relations throughout the 1980s.<sup>76</sup>

Further tensions arose with the diplomatic debate over how many Iranian pilgrims were allowed to make the annual *Hajj* to Mecca, and this became a fully-fledged confrontation when Iran insisted that pilgrims had not only a religious right but also an obligation to carry out political demonstrations. Saudis believed that political acts of such a nature violated the spiritual significance of the *Hajj*, and attempted to keep the demonstrations confined to certain isolated areas. Armed clashes became a feature of the pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina throughout the 1980s, and a constant potential flashpoint for Saudi-Iranian relations. Iranian pilgrims liked to spread portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and various brochures carrying Iranian propaganda. They chanted slogans such as “*Allahu Akbar va Khomeini Rahbar*”, which means “God is great and Khomeini is the leader”. Problems reached a peak on 31 July 1987 when Saudi security forces broke up an unauthorized demonstration in Mecca: more than 400 pilgrims were killed in the disturbance; two-thirds of these were Iranian. Angry crowds in Tehran responded by attacking the Saudi embassy and detaining and beating a number of Saudi diplomats (one of whom died of his injuries). Pointing to other events throughout the decade as evidence, Saudi officials accused

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<sup>75</sup> The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf: <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/index15af.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=48>

<sup>76</sup> Johnson.G - Lehman.G - Matthijs.M, (2002): Power and Preservation in the House of Saud. The Bologna Center Journal of International Affairs,p.6. On-line text: <http://www.jhubc.it/bcjournal/archive/print/2002/houseofsaud.pdf>

Iran of attempting to infiltrate and destabilize the Saudi state, all of which served to show that Islam had the dual role of both legitimizing and destabilizing Saudi politics. (Ibid)

After these incidents there was a dramatic deterioration in diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and between 1988 and 1991 the pilgrimage to Mecca was boycotted. (Beranek, 2007: 175) Although never ignoring the potential threat from Iran, the Saudis did nonetheless continue to diplomatic relations with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, and tried to find a way of living with Iran's revolutionary regime. (Cordesman- Burke, 2002: 4)

WikiLeaks documents revealed that not only Israel but Arab Gulf states feared the existence of an Iranian nuclear program. Some appeared even more worried than Israel. In one of the leaked memos, King Abdullah allegedly asked the US government to "cut off the head of the snake" and similar statements were made by the leaders of Jordan, Qatar and the UAE.<sup>77</sup> The Saudi king came to understand that despite the close ties between the countries he could not necessarily count on the US government to pay attention to his immediate interests. The Saudis face a double challenge: Iran's nuclear program, and the subversive activity of the Shiite population throughout the Gulf. These two matters are closely linked: as Iran's nuclear program advances, so may the boldness of Iran's allies.<sup>78</sup> The only logical solution for Saudi Arabia may be to join the arms race. The Kingdom has been maintaining relations with Pakistan on the assumption that in times of trouble the world's only Muslim nuclear power will come to the rescue of its Gulf ally, or at least help them in developing its own nuclear program if a decision is taken to develop one. The magazine *Foreign Affairs* has revealed evidence of contacts between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which includes "dealings on matters touching on nuclear weapons, nuclear technology and security assurances." According to the current geopolitical reality, it is possible that similar news items will appear over the coming months and years. (Ibid) The political situation in the region is dangerous for all countries in the Gulf and the Middle East. The continuing threat of military action by the USA concerning the Iranian nuclear program and the internal instability of a number of Arab countries could mean the region descends into a new "arms race", which will inevitably have a negative impact on countries in the region.

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<sup>77</sup> Busch.M, (2010): WikiLeaks II: Saudi Arabia on Iran "Cut off the head of the snake". Foreign Policy in Focus. On-line text: [http://www.fpiif.org/blog/wikileaks\\_ii\\_saudi\\_arabia\\_on\\_iran\\_-\\_cut\\_off\\_the\\_head\\_of\\_the\\_snake](http://www.fpiif.org/blog/wikileaks_ii_saudi_arabia_on_iran_-_cut_off_the_head_of_the_snake)

<sup>78</sup> Avidar.E, (2012): Saudi Arabia Won't Wait for the West on Iran's Nuclear Program. Almonitor. On-line text: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/01/06/saudi-arabia-wont-wait-for-the-w.html#ixzz2H7KJ65BI>

Saudi Arabia and the Iran are clearly two important centers of power and influence in the Gulf. Their rivalry has been a key factor in developments in the region for a number of decades: the Saudi government often expresses its concerns about Iran's attempts at asserting more power in the region; Iranian officials challenge Saudi relations with the USA and feel that sectarian Saudi ideology is hostile to Iran's Shiite population and its religious leadership. Despite these differences and mutual suspicions, Saud al Faisal bin Abdelaziz, the Saudi Foreign Minister, has in recent years allowed for the prospect of CCASG dialogue with Iran, even though this possibility was severely weakened when an alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to Washington was revealed in late 2011. The main factors in the development of Saudi-Iranian relations continue to be competing policies toward Syria, Saudi suspicion of Iran's nuclear program, and unrest among Arab Shiites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. All of these factors contribute to the tension and continue to present serious security implications for the region and for the USA.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Blanchard.C, (2012): Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations. Congressional Research Center, p.12, On-line text: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf>

## **5. The USA: an ideologically improbable but major ally of Saudi Arabia**

### ***5.1 Saudi-US relations before 9/11***

Saudi Arabia is among the major US allies in the region of the Gulf and the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's role as a partner of the USA increased after the fall of the Shah's regime in Iran. During and after the Iranian revolution, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the supply to Saudi Arabia of the latest military hardware from the USA and other NATO countries increased significantly, for military, political, and economic reasons.<sup>80</sup> For the first ten years after Standard Oil geologists began looking for oil in the Gulf, the US government and State Department paid little attention to Saudi Arabia and any bilateral business was conducted through the oil company. The US government recognized Abd al-Aziz's government and kept up basic diplomatic relations, but there were no US officials living in the kingdom and no diplomatic presence until late in the Second World War, when President Roosevelt's administration started to recognize the strategic potential of Saudi Arabia and its oil, (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: 128) but also for another significant reason: Saudi Arabia was a deeply religious state and therefore potentially a great ally in preventing the spread of communism and Soviet power. (Beranek, 2007:157) In this way, by oil and security, two very different nations with completely different cultures and political systems were thrown together. Saudi Arabia depended on the USA for security and much of its development. The USA began to depend on Saudi Arabia for its oil, the ability to use its spare ('swing') production capacity to help stabilize the oil market, and for providing a military base to support its power potential in the Gulf region. This mutual dependence has, over the years, benefited both nations and created a 'climate of friendship'. (Cordesman- Burke, 2002: 73). As Ayyob and Kosebalaban point out:

As for the Americans, they harvested the bounty of Saudi Arabia's oil fields and earned billions of dollars through contracts to develop the country's airports, hospitals, electric power stations and military bases. The US government under every president from Harry H. Truman to George W. Bush valued Saudi Arabia as a redoubt against Soviet penetration of the Gulf region. What made this partnership durable was a commitment by the US government and by major US businesses operating in the kingdom to accept the terms laid down by Abd al- Aziz and to refrain from interference or challenge to, or even criticism of, Saudi Arabia's domestic policies and its social and religious practices.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> SaudAr, (2012): Внешняя политика Саудовской Аравии. On-line text: <http://saudar.net/view/272/38/>

<sup>81</sup> Ayyob.M – Kosebalaban H, (2009): Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism and State, p.128, LYNNE RIENNER. London.

Despite the economics of oil the two states have been competitors as well as allies. There is, for example, a mutual intolerance of each other's social and religious practices. Saudi Arabia is a "conservative and cautious monarchy"; the USA is an "interventionist democracy". The two therefore have inevitable differences. The USA's support of Israel and Saudi support for Arab causes has also led to serious tensions and from time to time had a serious impact on Saudi security due to the USA being unwilling to help Saudi Arabia build up a modern military arsenal. (Cordesman- Burke, 2002: 73)

US-Saudi relations affect a number of US foreign policy interests, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East peace process, and energy concerns, with Saudi Arabia maintaining its strategic position and leadership roles in global Islamic affairs and international energy markets.<sup>82</sup>

The USA and Saudi Arabia have not always agreed on policy matters, however. The Saudis continue to disagree with US support for the partition of Palestine and the creation of the State of Israel. There was conflict over Saudi involvement in the 1973-1974 Arab oil embargo and over Saudi disapproval of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's decision to make peace with Israel. Furthermore, the USA reacted angrily when it discovered, in 1988, that Saudi Arabia had acquired ballistic missiles with nuclear capability from China. But none of these disagreements involved internal Saudi politics and it could be argued that one reason for the survival of the bilateral strategic and economic relationship was Saudi appreciation of the USA's policy of noninterference in Saudi home affairs. It was a policy that provided the USA with enormous benefits at very little political cost. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: 127)

During the Cold War, King Faisal laid the foundations for Saudi Arabia's global religious influence, but also sought to limit the excesses of his Abdal-Wahhabi followers. King Fahd, however, let out the reins for political reasons and allowed the clergy to promulgate radical Salafi doctrines. The increasingly fundamentalist views and the emergence of Saudi volunteers in Afghanistan, combined with revolutionary political doctrines developed through the 1960s by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, became an "explosive" cocktail, the effects of which can be seen today, not only in the Middle East. (Beranek, 2007: 161) But Saudi Arabia's religious activities abroad during the Cold War did not interfere significantly with Saudi-US relations, particularly on the political level. They were seen as an inseparable part of Saudi foreign policy,

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<sup>82</sup> Henderson.S, (2009): After King Abdullah: Succession in Saudi Arabia. On-line text: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-king-abdullah-succession-in-saudi-arabia>

but a part which the US government considered to be marginal or even as having a positive impact. After 1979, however, the situation changed. The US government began to support Saudi religious activities because, among other reasons, it helped to supply combatants in Afghanistan. During a visit to Pakistan, national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told mujahidin to fight against their enemies because “God is on your side.”<sup>83</sup> The war in Afghanistan dramatically changed Saudi society and brought to the surface a fundamentalist and strict interpretation of Islam. (Ibid)

Tension continued between the Saudi royal family and government technocrats and conservatives among the Wahhabi *Ulama* over modernization. These domestic disagreements have combined with Wahhabi and Islamist extremist resentment over the encroachment of secularism from the West in general and the USA in particular. Mainstream Wahhabi practices can be quite tolerant, but hard-line and extremist elements resented and opposed obvious Western presence in the Kingdom, particularly the presence of American and British troops. (Cordesman- Burke, 2002: 73)

During the nine-year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1988), the USA supported Osama bin Laden and the mujahedeen in their fight with the Soviet Union. After the war, the USA abandoned these alliances. In the ensuing chaos, mujahedeen warlords fought each other, while countless thousands of Afghans fled to makeshift refugee camps in Pakistan. In these camps, Islamic students, distrustful of the USA, joined forces and formed the Students of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam. After withdrawing from society, the group later evolved into the fundamentalist Taliban (‘students’), a radical Sunni Islamist political movement which came to the fore aided by Saudi money and established an extensive network of radical madrassas. Pakistan assisted in developing training schools for militia where the recruitment of students took place.<sup>84</sup> US Congressman Ron Paul, in a speech to Congress, touched on this topic, saying that during the 1980s, when the USA allied itself with Osama bin Laden in the fight against the Soviets, the CIA thought it was a good idea to radicalize the Muslim world and funded and assisted the madrassas in order to radicalize Muslims so they would fight the Soviet Union.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Youtube video.(1979): “God is in your side”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaiJtLrEwVU>

<sup>84</sup> Price.J (2012): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Wahhabism and Oil Exports. On-line text: <http://www.ambassadorjohnprice.com/the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-wahhabism-and-oil-exports/1925/>

<sup>85</sup> Youtube video. (2011): Ron Paul - Israel Created Hamas. From 2:10 up to 2:33 minute: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27esxkQtfTc>

The events of September 11, 2001 and the fallout from the Second Intifada in the Palestinian Territories combined to create the worst period in Saudi-US relations since the 1973 oil embargo. The fact that so many young Saudis in Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaida organization were involved in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon increased the tensions in Saudi-US relations to such an extent that both countries were led to ignore their history of friendship and all of the reasons for the enduring US-Saudi alliance. (Cordesman- Burke, 2002: 73)

## ***5.2 Saudi-US relations after 9/11***

The events of 9/11 marked a significant turning point in how Saudi Arabia was viewed in the West. Many people were deeply shocked when they realized that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudis as this provided a sharp contrast with the popular perception of Saudi Arabia as the West's most loyal ally in the Gulf. Journalists began to question the Saudi-US relationship and expressed sincere doubts as to whether King Fahd's regime was viable.<sup>86</sup> Serious questions arose over the social conditions that produced people capable of committing such violent acts, taking so many innocent lives, and devastating an entire city, even a whole nation. The US media were quick to answer such questions, pointing straight to the Saudi culture of brainwashing their youths with the most extreme Islamic school, Wahhabism. (Ayyob-Kosebalaban, 2009: preface)

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Wahhabism, came immediately into focus as the ideological epicenter of terror. This appeared to be paradoxical due to the strong strategic and economic relations that the USA had enjoyed with the Saudi Kingdom for more than fifty years.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Johnson.G - Lehman.G - Matthijs.M, (2002): Power and Preservation in the House of Saud. The Bologna Center Journal of International Affairs. On-line text: <http://www.jhubc.it/bcjournal/archive/print/2002/houseofsaud.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Ayoob.M – Kosebalaban.H, (2009): Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia. Published in USA, Preface.

The allegations against Wahhabism caused some critics to call for a re-evaluation of the Saudi-US relationship; some, however, maintained that American economic and security interests necessitated a continuation of the close ties. American Secretary of State Colin Powell noted in November 2003 that the Bush Administration had “encouraged our Saudi friends to do more with respect to terrorist activity, at least within the Kingdom, and they are.” President Bush had praised the Islamic religion as a whole but denounced those groups that had “hijacked a great religion.” (Armanious, 2003: 6)

A number of hearings in Congress have focused on Wahhabism, examining the relationship between “extreme” religious beliefs and the financing of terrorism, as well as Wahhabism’s alleged links with the spread of intolerance. The “Saudi Arabia Accountability Act of 2003” (S. 1888 and H.R. 3643) was introduced in November that year, listing charges against Saudi Arabia and stating that “many Saudi-funded religious institutions and the literature they distribute teach a message of hate and intolerance that provides an ideological basis for anti-Western terrorism.”<sup>88</sup> It also called on the Saudi government to cease funding to all bodies that “incite or encourage global terrorism”. H.R. 3137, introduced in September 2003, listed a number of specific charges against Saudi Arabia and called the country “the center of Wahhabism, the ultra-purist, jihadist form of Islam followed by members of Al Qaeda.” The bill called for a ban on direct aid to Saudi Arabia and five other countries. At the time Saudi Arabia annually received \$25,000 in American aid according to the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. H.Con.Res. 244 concluded that “the Government of Saudi Arabia forcefully limits the public practice or expression of religion to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam” and called on the Saudi government to protect the freedom of non-Muslims (and non-Wahhabi Muslims). The bills were then referred to committees of jurisdiction. (Ibid)

There is strong evidence that King Abdullah is willing to move away from Islamic teaching that promotes violence and extremism. Curtailing religious extremist teaching is not new to the Saudis, and the government has already begun to reform its educational system and monitor religious extremism within its schools. It is in the interests of both the US and Saudi

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<sup>88</sup> Armanious.F, (2003): The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya. CRS Report for Congress,p.6.On-line text: <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RS2169501222003.pdf>

governments to put an end to violent jihadists, who threaten both nations.<sup>89</sup> The Arab Spring has changed much of this scenario, replacing it with a new set of rules that are yet, however, to be established. The US government understands that “petro-realpolitik” is no longer viable as the “Emir” you are talking to may not be there the following year, or even the following week. And the petro-states understand that the pragmatic and long-standing “alliance-of-interests” that have underpinned their relationship with the USA might not last as long as thought it would.<sup>90</sup> A strengthening of the Saudi-US alliance will probably be a slow and mutually tentative process. The two countries clearly have opposite perspectives on Islam and government, but polls of Saudis by the Professor of Peace, Anwar Sadat in 2001, showed that although most disagree with American politics they do not disagree with its values. A common denominator must be found between the two societies and evidence suggests that the Saudis have made crucial internal reforms and policy initiatives that will help in its fight against terrorist recruitment and financing and that it will continue to assist in the War on Terror. (Lazazzero, 15)

Saudi Arabia cannot avoid military dependence on the USA and the complex problems that come with it, but these problems are balanced, at least partially, by the USA’s dependence on Saudi oil flowing into the global economy. What Saudi Arabia can do, however, is some better PR, explaining itself more clearly to the USA and to the West in general, and avoid being trapped into a “clash of civilizations”. (Cordesman-Burke,2002: 90)

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<sup>89</sup> Lazazzero.J: The U.S.-Saudi Alliance: A Necessary Shift toward Peace. *Wake Forest University*,p.10,On-line text: <http://www.thepresidency.org/storage/documents/Fellows2008/Lazazzero.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Levine.S, (2011): What Saudi's king has learned from Libya. *Foreign policy Journal*. On-line text: [http://oilandglory.foreignpolicy.com/category/wordpress\\_tag/king\\_abdullah](http://oilandglory.foreignpolicy.com/category/wordpress_tag/king_abdullah)

## Conclusion

Exploring the religious aspects of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and mapping theories in this context is a very controversial and difficult task. Although an assessment of the country's foreign policy can be made through a variety of approaches, I have attempted to shape the discussion largely around the religious context.

Religion can sometimes be used as a tool of power, pressure and persecution. In the case of Saudi Arabia, religion has both an external and an internal component: it affects all aspects of life in the country. Islam is practised by all Saudis and it governs their entire personal, political, economic and legal lives. Saudi Arabia is home to various sects of Islam such as Wahhabism, which is also related to Salafism. Since the foundation of modern day Saudi Arabia in 1932, the Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi religious establishment have enjoyed a very close relationship. Wahhabism does not, however, have religious roots – it was originally a political entity and the only political force of its day that strived for and completed the establishment of a single state. The Saudi monarchy is heavily dependent for its legitimacy on its alliance with the Wahhabi *Ulama*, the religious clerics who serve as consultants, and all religious organizations are institutionalized within the state structure. All of these factors demonstrate that religion is not only an external factor in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia but also derives from its history, from the governmental system in the country, and from the everyday lives of its people.

Islam has always been the most important factor in the Kingdom's foreign policy, and has been ever since the country's foundation; the Kingdom devotes the larger part of its resources to the service of the Islamic world and to achieving its goals of solidarity and unity of belief, and this Islamic 'symbiosis' gains the country its position of honor in the Muslim world. From the very beginning, Saudi rulers have sought to promote Islamic teachings and apply the *Sharia*, while at the same time seeking to modernize the country. Modernity and religiosity are not seen as conflicting but as reconcilable. King Faisal devoted himself to following Islam, by which strategy he sought to underline the integrity and legitimacy of the whole Saudi government. Faisal visited other Islamic countries, preached his pan-Islamic message, and received unprecedented support in the Islamic world. He also founded the Islamic Solidarity Fund and the Islamic Development Bank. Under King Faisal, Saudi Arabia contributed to increased political awareness of the international Muslim community. The institutional framework for the Islamic aspect of the country's foreign policy was largely established under the reign of King Faisal. For

the sake of Islamic solidarity, the Kingdom initiated, with other Islamic countries, a system of Islamic governmental and non-governmental organizations including the Muslim World League in 1962, and the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1969, both of which have their headquarters in Saudi Arabia. Foreign aid from Saudi Arabia amounts to \$10 billion a year and mostly profits Islamic countries. The "Preservation of Islamic values" remains among the country's top priorities: under King Abdullah Islamic solidarity and unity have become the main objective of Saudi foreign policy and the Kingdom continues to play a major role in the resolution of conflicts involving Muslim peoples. The presence on Saudi soil of two major Muslim shrines (Mecca and Medina) have made Saudi Arabia the self-professed center of Islam and leader in the Muslim world, and this has a huge effect on its foreign policy.

Saudi Arabia's most significant yet turbulent regional relationship has been with Iran, and tensions between Wahhabi and Shiite clerics are long-standing; Wahhabists believe Shiites to be apostate and especially among conservatives on both 'sides' tensions run high. Saudi Arabia and Iran have often been serious rivals especially since the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. Both nations are Islamic, but the differences between their foreign policies are huge. Saudi Arabia is a regional status quo power; Iran seeks revolutionary change. Saudi Arabia has strong ties with the USA who Iran considers to be their sworn enemy. Saudi Arabia is conservative, Sunni Muslim and Arab; Iran is radical, Shiite, and non-Arab. The rivalry between the two countries has overflowed into their activities in surrounding theatres such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria, and over the issue of Iran's nuclear program. The combined effect is a permanent atmosphere of tension and mutual distrust, which potentially has significant security implications for the entire region.

Saudi Arabia is one of the USA's major allies in the region. There are mutual aspects to the relationship which have over the years benefitted both countries and led to a longstanding friendship: Saudi Arabia depends on the USA for security and development; the USA depends on Saudi Arabia for oil and as a location for a military base in the Gulf. However, oil has the potential to make the countries enemies as well as friends, and in many ways the two could not be more different: Saudi Arabia is a conservative monarchy; the USA is an interventionist democracy. America is an ally of Israel; Saudis support the Arab world. The relationship improved after the fall of the Shah in Iran and during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but cooled significantly after the events of 9/11, which marked a turning point in the popular view of Saudi Arabia in the West: fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were of Saudi origin. Saudi Arabia immediately became a 'producer of terror', a fact which threatened a fifty-year relationship.

Getting back to where the two countries were before 9/11 will be a slow process but signs are promising, especially since the phenomenon of the 'Arab Spring' re-focused the foreign policies of the two nations on a single issue.

So religion is not only an unavoidable factor in Saudi Arabian domestic life but has often been used as a powerful tool in the accomplishment of its foreign policy objectives and priorities. Religion can be seen, therefore, to play a significantly important, even dominant, role in Saudi Arabian foreign policy and in its future advancement and development.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27esxkQtTc>

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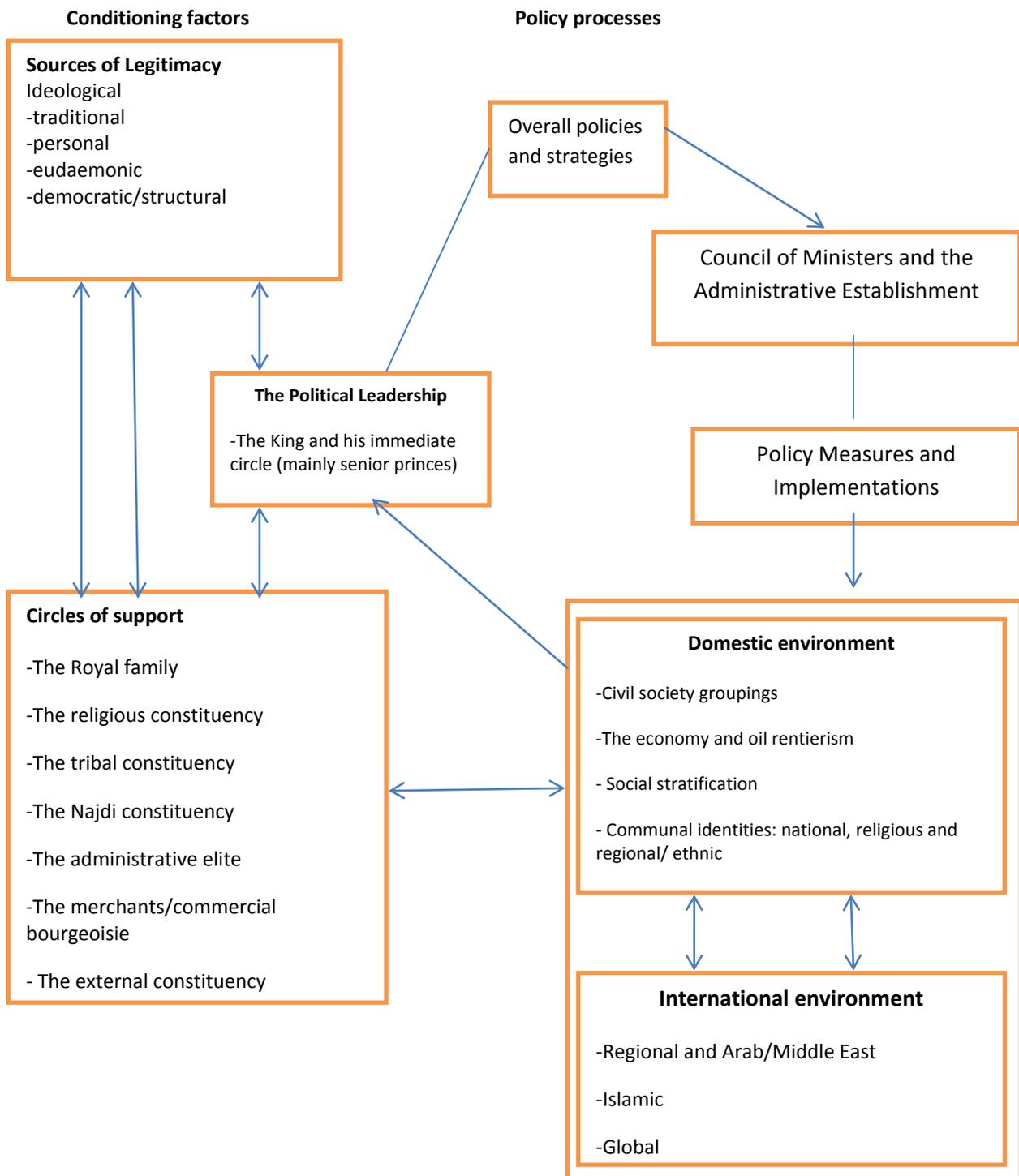
*Appendix 5. Area of the Arab Spring uprising*

## Appendices

### Appendix 1.

#### The dynamics of Saudi Arabian politics.

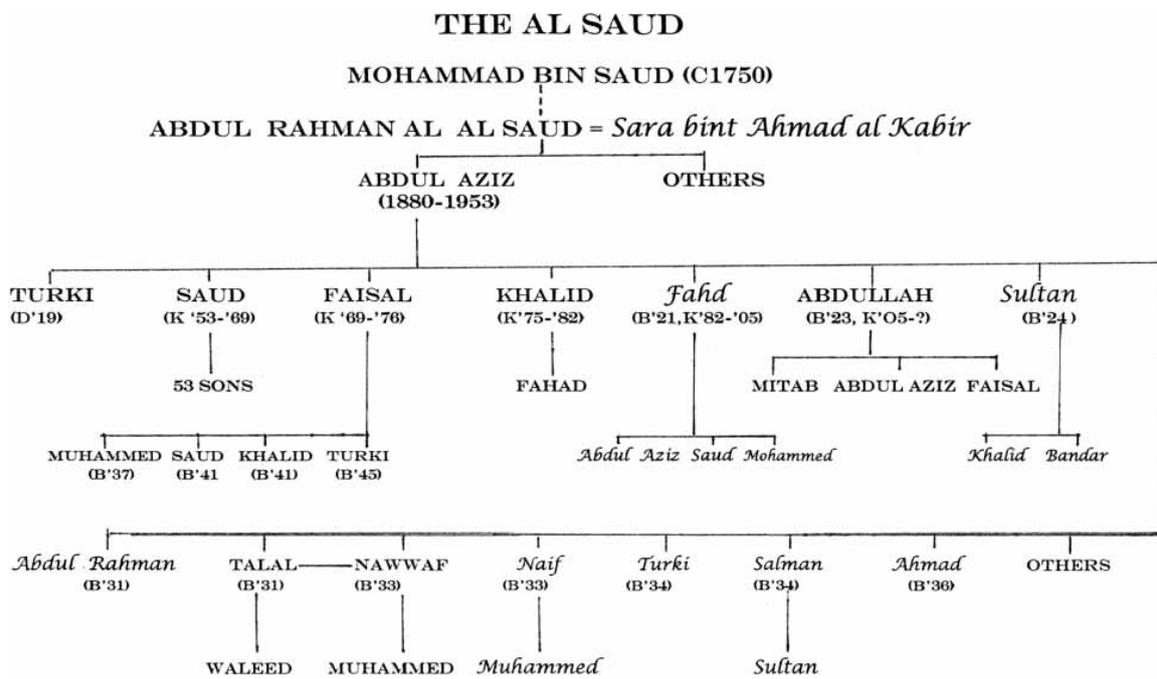
Example model. Source: Niblock.T, (2006): *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, p.9.



**Appendix 2.**

**THE AL SAUD FAMILY**

Source: Taylor and Francis group.(2006): *The Al Saud Family and The Future of Saudi Arabia*. On-line text: [http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348\\_1.pdf](http://ipac.kacst.edu.sa/eDoc/2006/157348_1.pdf)



### Appendix 3.

#### Foreign aid from Saudi Arabia.

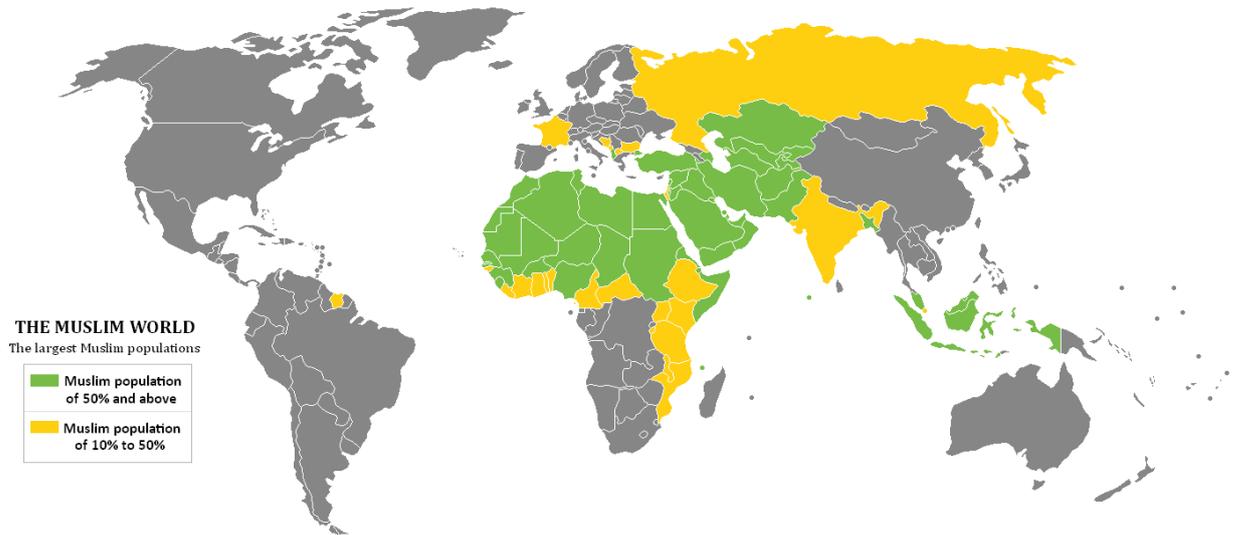
Source: *The Economist*, (2009): *Development aid from authoritarian regimes*. On-line text: <http://www.economist.com/node/13799239>



**Appendix 4.**

'Islamic world'.

On-line source: Ahsan-academy. <http://ahsan-academy.deviantart.com/art/Muslim-world-Map-189324449>



**Appendix 5.**

Area of the Arab Spring uprising.

source: Foreign Policy Association. [http://www.fpa.org/features/index.cfm?act=feature&announcement\\_id=113](http://www.fpa.org/features/index.cfm?act=feature&announcement_id=113)

