

## A HISTORY OF SAUDI ARABIA

This updated edition analyses the challenges, both internal and external, facing Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century. Two new chapters discuss the political, economic and social developments in the aftermath of 9/11, painting a vivid picture of a country shocked by terrorism and condemned by the international community. Madawi Al-Rasheed reveals that fragmentation of royal politics, a failing economy and fermenting Islamist dissent posed serious threats to state and society in 2001. She assesses the consequent state reforms introduced under pressure of terrorism, international scrutiny and a social mobilisation of men, women and minorities struggling to shape their future against the background of repression and authoritarian rule. While Saudi Arabia is still far from establishing a fourth state, there are signs that the people are ready for a serious change that will lead them to a state of institutions rather than princes.

MADAWI AL-RASHEED is Professor of Anthropology of Religion at King's College, London. She specialises in Saudi history, politics, religion and society. Her recent publications include *Contesting the Saudi State* (2007) and *Kingdom without Borders* (2008).

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-74754-7 - A History of Saudi Arabia, Second Edition  
Madawi al-Rasheed  
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A HISTORY OF  
SAUDI ARABIA  
Second Edition

MADAWI AL-RASHEED  
*King's College, London*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi  
 Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org  
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521747547

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First edition published 2002  
 Reprinted 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007  
 Second edition 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*  
 Al-Rasheed, Madawi.

A history of Saudi Arabia / Madawi al-Rasheed. – 2nd ed.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-76128-4 (hardback)

1. Saudi Arabia – History – 20th century. 2. Saudi Arabia – History – 21st century. I. Title.

DS224.52.A43 2010

953.805 – dc22 2009043212

ISBN 978-0-521-76128-4 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-74754-7 paperback

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*In memory of 'Abta and  
her daughters Juwahir and Waṭfa*

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## *Preface*

The impact of 9/11 on Saudi Arabia was immense. It focused the attention of the international community on a regime regarded as an important economic, religious and political force in the Arab world. Throughout the twentieth century Saudi Arabia had enjoyed a friendly alliance with the USA and other European countries, in addition to amicable relations with the Muslim world. Its economic wealth and oil reserves protected it from international scrutiny and the calls for democratisation that swept the world after the end of the Cold War. The regime was able to conduct its internal affairs freely, knowing that there would be no international pressure to change its political, religious or social policies. The international community was content to accept Saudi Arabia as it was, provided that the flow of oil, investment opportunities and arms contracts were not disrupted. International calls for democratisation, the emancipation of women, religious freedom and respect for minority rights were often heard, but no serious attempts to pressurise Saudi Arabia in those directions were on the agenda of those who supported the Sa‘udi regime and guaranteed its security – mainly the USA and its major European partners. Saudi Arabia invoked Islam and tradition to block any serious political change. The Sa‘udi leadership used oil wealth and development projects to protect itself from internal criticism. Sa‘udis were brought up to appreciate security, prosperity, employment and welfare services, which they accepted as a substitute for political participation and democratisation. In return for loyalty and acquiescence, they received handouts, economic opportunities, education, shelter and other services. On a few occasions dissent, such as that of the Islamists in the 1980s and 1990s, erupted over the ideological orientation of the state and its foreign policies. Dissidents demanded greater Islamisation of the state and criticised the leadership for its intimate relations with the West. Such dissent was expressed violently in the case of the seizure of the Mecca mosque by Juhayman al-‘Utaybi in 1979, and in two major terrorist attacks in the 1990s, mainly targeting

the American presence. The state contained the dissents by deploying two strategies: first, it responded to calls for Islamisation in the public sphere; and second, it increased its security and surveillance measures. None of the dissenters, with the exception of Juhayman's movement, questioned the foundation of the Sa'udi state or the legitimacy of its leadership, or threatened its continuity.

The confrontation between the regime and a violent jihadi Islamist trend began early in the twenty-first century. It proved different from previous instances of Islamist dissent, as it questioned both the legitimacy of the house of Sa'ud and its right to rule. Although the dissidents' slogans called for the removal of infidels from the Arabian Peninsula, clear statements from Usama Bin Laden and the leaders of al-Qa'idah in the Arabian Peninsula directly attacked the leadership, and dubbed it blasphemous. This was followed by a wave of terror in Sa'udi cities that killed hundreds of Sa'udis, Westerners and Arabs. This coincided with serious economic problems, political stagnation and social unrest. The last years of the reign of the ailing King Fahd brought to the surface the changing nature of the Sa'udi state, which thenceforth began to consist of multiple actors, each competing to carve out a political space on the map of Saudi Arabia. National debt and economic slowdown plagued the country and slowed its ability to absorb the growing population. The educational infrastructure and the welfare services deteriorated, and failed to respond to the new demographic realities of the country. Oil revenues were either plundered or channelled into unproductive but prestigious construction projects. Sa'udis were desperately awaiting serious improvement of their economic situation when they came face to face with terrorism.

The participation of fifteen Sa'udis in the attack on the World Trade Center in New York forced the international community to see Saudi Arabia through a new lens. The previous silence over its internal political affairs, religious tradition and social norms was lifted, subjecting its leadership and society to outside scrutiny. The Sa'udi leadership felt compelled to address international scrutiny and respond to an unprecedented internal mobilisation. It had no choice but to appropriate the rhetoric of reform before it was either imposed from outside or hijacked by active Sa'udi constituencies. Serious political reform remained unattainable, while the leadership engaged in economic liberalisation and timid social and religious change. Opening up the economy proved easier than anticipated, as the country started benefiting from the rise in oil prices that began in 2003. Taming the religious sphere and curbing the influence of radical preachers and texts also proved easier than formulating a political reform

agenda. The state remained resistant to civil society's calls for greater political participation in anticipation of the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.

The leadership was active on two fronts. First, it increased its security measures to contain terrorism, and launched a campaign to restrict the propagation of radical religious ideas, believed to be the mobilising ideological weapon of al-Qa'idah. Second, it set a social and religious reform agenda, promising to increase consultation and respond to the demands of the constituency. In most cases, however, these demands were contradictory: Sa'udi society was polarised along ideological lines, with Islamists and liberals imagining reform in different ways. Islamists envisaged greater respect for the country's Islamic heritage and tradition. They remained resistant to the idea of social liberalisation and moderation. Liberals identified the causes of terrorism as emanating from strict religious interpretations and restrictions on freedoms. Their reform agenda envisaged less religious indoctrination and preaching. The task of the leadership was to reconcile the two opposed views and extract loyalty from both. By 2008 the state had managed to contain terrorism and project itself as the champion of reform.

This second edition captures in two additional chapters the challenges, both internal and external, facing Saudi Arabia in the twenty-first century. Chapter 8 deals with the political, economic, security and international pressures that coincided with 9/11. This was a time when neither the leadership nor society was prepared for the outcomes of global terrorism, which turned into a serious local problem. The Sa'udi leadership suddenly found itself in an advantageous position after its oil revenues more than doubled as a result of the dramatic increase in oil prices. Part of this new wealth, dubbed 'the second period of affluence', was invested in projects designed to improve the Sa'udi economy, increase employment opportunities and contain dissent.

Chapter 9 discusses how modernising authoritarian rule became a substitute for serious political reforms. This modernisation involved reforming the royal house, establishing National Dialogue Forums, instituting municipal elections in Sa'udi cities and engaging with human rights. The chapter also highlights the internal social and political mobilisation of Sa'udis themselves, whose voices, petitions, literary productions and activism reached new frontiers and stretched the boundaries of official tolerance. A newly formed political trend calling for constitutional monarchy drew on the participation of academics, intellectuals and professionals from both sides of the ideological divide, both Islamists and liberals. Minorities

*Preface*

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aspired towards greater inclusion under new slogans calling for respect of religious freedom, human rights and greater political participation in government and civil society. Slogans promoting the idea of *wataniyya* (citizenship) replaced ambiguous global solidarities such as the Muslim *umma*. Women began to be more visible and articulate in pressing for equality and recognition. Novelists, writers and bloggers benefited from globalisation and new communication technologies, using them to open up Sa'udi society and challenge its political, religious and social authoritarian tradition and history of secrecy. Reform and repression progressed hand in hand. The rhetoric of reform succeeded in enlisting society in formulating a vision of its future, under the patronage of the state. Repression deterred those who aspired towards real political change. With the advent of the twenty-first century, Sa'udis seem to be heading towards a fourth state, as authoritarianism undergoes serious cosmetic changes. It remains to be seen whether this change will eventually lead to a new polity, founded on solid representative institutions. Such drastic change is unlikely to materialise in the short term, yet it cannot be ruled out in the future.

## *Chronology*

- 1517 Ottoman authority established in Hijaz  
 1550 Ottoman authority established in Hasa  
 1670 Banu Khalid rebel against the Ottomans in Hasa  
 1744 Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab arrives in Dir‘iyyah  
 1780 The Sa‘udi–Wahhabi emirate expands in Qasim  
 1792 The Sa‘udi–Wahhabi emirate expands in southern Najd  
 1797 Qatar and Bahrain acknowledge Sa‘udi authority  
 1801 Sa‘udi–Wahhabi forces raid Karbala’ in Iraq  
 1802 Sa‘udi–Wahhabi emirate expands in Hijaz  
 1804 Madina acknowledges Sa‘udi authority  
 1811 Egyptian troops land in Yanbu‘  
 1818 Egyptian troops sack Dir‘iyyah  
 1824 Turki ibn ‘Abdullah re-establishes Sa‘udi authority  
 in Riyadh  
 1830 Sa‘udi rule expands into Hasa  
 1834 Turki ibn ‘Abdullah assassinated by his cousin, Mishari  
 Turki’s son Faysal becomes amir in Riyadh  
 1836 The Rashidis establish their rule in Ha’il  
 1837 Sa‘udi ruler Faysal captured by Egyptian troops and  
 sent to Cairo  
 1843 Faysal returns to Riyadh  
 1865 Faysal dies  
 Faysal’s son ‘Abdullah rules in Riyadh  
 1871 The Ottomans occupy Hasa  
 The Ottomans occupy ‘Asir  
 1891 Sa‘udi rule in Riyadh terminated by the Rashidis  
 1893 The Sa‘udis take refuge in Kuwait  
 1902 Ibn Sa‘ud captures Riyadh  
 Riyadh ‘*ulama* swear allegiance to Ibn Sa‘ud  
 1903 Ibn Sa‘ud adopts the title ‘Sultan of Najd’

*Chronology*

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- 1904 Abha in 'Asir falls under Ibn Sa'ud's authority  
 1906 Ibn Sa'ud conquers Qasim  
 1908 Ibn Sa'ud challenged by his cousins, the 'Ara'if  
 The Ottomans appoint Ḥusayn ibn 'Ali Sharif of Mecca  
 1912 Ibn Sa'ud establishes the first *ikhwan* settlement,  
 'Arṭawiyyah, for the Muṭayr tribe  
 1913 Ibn Sa'ud establishes the *ikhwan* settlement al-Ghaṭghaṭ  
 for the 'Utayba tribe  
 Ibn Sa'ud conquers Hasa  
 1915 Britain acknowledges Ibn Sa'ud as ruler of Najd and Hasa  
 1916 Sharif Ḥusayn declares himself King of the Arabs  
 1924 Ta'if in Hijaz falls under Ibn Sa'ud's authority  
 Sharif 'Ali replaces his father, Sharif Ḥusayn, in Hijaz  
 1925 Jeddah surrenders to Ibn Sa'ud  
 1926 Ibn Sa'ud declares himself 'King of Hijaz and  
 Sultan of Najd'  
 1927 The *ikhwan* rebel against Ibn Sa'ud  
 1928 Ibn Sa'ud meets the Riyadh 'ulama to solve the  
*ikhwan* crisis  
 1930 Ibn Sa'ud defeats the *ikhwan* rebels  
 1932 Ibn Sa'ud declares his realm the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
 1933 Ibn Sa'ud signs the oil concession  
 1939 The first oil tanker with Sa'udi oil leaves Ra's Tannura  
 1945 Ibn Sa'ud meets American President Franklin D. Roosevelt  
 Ibn Sa'ud meets British Prime Minister Winston Churchill  
 1946 Ibn Sa'ud visits Cairo  
 1953 The Council of Ministers established  
 Ibn Sa'ud dies; his son Sa'ud becomes King  
 Sa'udi ARAMCO workers organise the first demonstration  
 1955 A plot for a coup by Sa'udi army officers discovered  
 1956 Sa'udi ARAMCO workers riot in the eastern province  
 1961 The movement of the Free Princes established by Prince  
 Ṭalal ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz  
 1964 King Sa'ud abdicates  
 Faysal becomes King  
 1969 Sa'ud dies in Greece  
 1973 As a result of the oil embargo, oil prices increase  
 1975 King Faysal assassinated by his nephew, Prince  
 Faysal ibn Musa'id  
 Khalid becomes King

- 1979 The siege of Mecca mosque  
 1980 The Shi'a riot in the eastern province  
 1981 The Gulf Cooperation Council established  
 1982 King Khalid dies; Fahd becomes King  
 1986 Oil prices decrease to their lowest level since the 1970s  
 King Fahd adopts the title 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques'  
 1990 Saddam Husayn invades Kuwait  
 Sa'udi women defy the ban on women driving in Riyadh  
 1991 The Gulf War starts  
 The liberal petition sent to King Fahd  
 The Islamist petition sent to King Fahd  
 1992 A sixty-member Consultative Council established  
 Sa'udi Islamists publish the Memorandum of Advice  
 King Fahd announces a series of reforms  
 1993 The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Saudi Arabia (CDLR) established in Riyadh  
 1996 Terrorist explosions at Khobar Towers  
 Terrorist explosions at al-'Ulaiyya American military mission, Riyadh  
 The number of members appointed to the Consultative Council increased to ninety  
 1999 Saudi Arabia starts the centennial celebrations  
 2000 Oil prices rise above \$30 per barrel  
 Two Sa'udis hijack Saudi Arabian Airline flight from Jeddah to London; they surrender in Baghdad  
 2001 Fifteen Sa'udis participate in the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington  
 2003 Sa'udi Foreign Minister Sa'ud al-Faysal says his country will not take part in the invasion of Iraq  
 Saddam's regime is toppled by the US-led invasion of Iraq  
 Sa'udi suicide bombers kill thirty-five people at an expatriate housing compound in Riyadh  
 First National Dialogue Forum is held in Riyadh  
 Sa'udi intellectuals and professionals sign the first petition calling for political reform  
 A small demonstration in Riyadh calls for respect for human rights and the release of political prisoners  
 Another major suicide attack on a residential housing compound kills seventeen people



*Chronology*

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- 2004 Suicide bombers kill four members of the security forces at their headquarters in Riyadh  
 Several constitutional reformers are arrested  
 Suicide bombers kill five foreign workers at Yanbu<sup>6</sup>  
 BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner is seriously injured and his cameraman killed in Riyadh  
 Security forces kill <sup>6</sup>Abd al-<sup>6</sup>Aziz al-Muqrin, leader of al-Qa<sup>6</sup>idah in the Arabian Peninsula  
 The American consulate in Jeddah is attacked; five members of staff and security personnel are killed
- 2005 Suicide bombers kill more than twenty people at an oil company compound in al-Khobar  
 Crown Prince <sup>6</sup>Abdullah visits the USA  
 Municipal elections held in Sa<sup>6</sup>udi cities  
 King Fahd dies and <sup>6</sup>Abdullah becomes King  
 Three security officers killed in clashes with jihadis  
 Saudi Arabia officially joins the World Trade Organisation
- 2006 Sa<sup>6</sup>udi security forces kill six al-Qa<sup>6</sup>idah activists
- 2007 Ministry of the Interior spokesman announces the arrest of 172 suspected terrorists  
 Terrorists kill four French nationals  
 King <sup>6</sup>Abdullah announces the establishment of the Committee of Allegiance, consisting of thirty-five princes  
 Intelligence services arrest fifteen intellectuals and professionals in Jeddah  
 Saudi Arabia announces the biggest budget in its history  
 King <sup>6</sup>Abdullah visits the Vatican
- 2008 Ministry of the Interior spokesman announces the arrest of more than 500 suspected terrorists  
 Oil prices reach \$143 per barrel  
 First interfaith dialogue is held in Mecca

## Glossary

<i>ahl al-bayt</i>	the Prophet's household
<i>ahl al-ḥal wa al-ʿaql</i>	Saʿudi society ('the people who tie and loose')
<i>ʿalmaniyyun</i>	secularists
<i>amin sir</i>	clerk
<i>amir</i>	ruler, prince
<i>ʿamm</i>	public
<i>al-ʿammiyya</i>	vernacular Arabic
<i>ʿarḍa</i>	sword dance
<i>ʿaṣabiyya madhhabiyya</i>	sectarian solidarity
<i>ʿaṣabiyya najdiyya</i>	Najdi solidarity
<i>ʿaṣabiyya qabaliyya</i>	tribal solidarity
<i>ʿashura</i>	anniversary of al-Ḥusayn's death
<i>badu</i>	bedouins
<i>baghi</i>	usurper
<i>bayʿa</i>	oath of allegiance
<i>bidʿa</i>	innovation, heresy
<i>daʿwa</i>	religious call, mission
<i>dira</i>	tribal territory
<i>diwan</i>	royal court
<i>duʿat al-islāh al-dusturi</i>	advocates of constitutional reform
<i>fatwa</i> (pl. <i>fatawa</i> )	religious opinion issued by <i>shariʿa</i> experts
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>fitna</i>	strife, dissent
<i>ghulat</i>	religious extremists
<i>ḥadar</i>	sedentary population
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>ḥizb siyasi</i>	political party
<i>hujjar</i>	village settlements
<i>ḥuquq</i>	rights
<i>husayniyat</i>	Shiʿi mourning houses

## Glossary

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<i>‘ibada</i>	Islamic rituals
<i>‘id al-adḥa</i>	festival marking the pilgrimage season
<i>‘id al-fiṭr</i>	festival marking the end of Ramaḍan
<i>ihṭilal</i>	occupation
<i>ikhwan</i> (sing. <i>khawī</i> )	Muslim brothers/companions, tribal force
<i>‘ilm</i>	knowledge
<i>imam</i>	prayer leader/leader of Muslim community
<i>imara</i>	emirate
<i>infiṭaḥ</i>	openness
<i>iṣlah</i>	reform
<i>al-jāhiliyya</i>	the age of ignorance
<i>al-jazīra al-‘arabiyya</i>	the Arabian Peninsula
<i>jihad</i>	holy war
<i>kafir</i>	blasphemous
<i>khadiri</i>	non-tribal people
<i>khilwa</i>	intimate encounter between an unrelated man and woman, unaccompanied by a chaperon
<i>al-khuluq</i>	morality
<i>khuṣuṣiyya</i>	the uniqueness of the Islamic tradition of Saudi Arabia
<i>khuwwa</i>	tribute
<i>kufr</i>	unbelief
<i>mahdi</i>	one who guides
<i>majlis</i> (pl. <i>majalis</i> )	council
<i>majlis ‘amm</i>	public council
<i>majlis al-dars</i>	study session
<i>majlis al-shura</i>	consultative council
<i>multazim</i>	young Muslim fighters
<i>muṭawwa‘a</i> (sing. <i>muṭawwa‘</i> )	Najdi religious specialist/volunteer
<i>nahḍa</i>	renaissance, awakening
<i>al-naksa</i>	the June 1967 humiliation
<i>naṣiḥa</i>	advice
<i>al-nawaṣib</i>	pejorative Shi‘i name for hostile Sunnis
<i>ni‘ma</i>	divine abundance
<i>qadi</i>	judge
<i>rafida</i>	rejectionists, those who distort Islam

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*Glossary*

<i>ramaḍan</i>	Ramaḍan, the fasting month
<i>shari‘a</i>	Islamic legal code and rules
<i>shaykh</i>	tribal leader/religious scholar
<i>shirk</i>	polytheism, associationism
<i>shura</i>	consultation
<i>sura</i>	Qur’anic verse
<i>al-shu‘ba al-siyasiyya</i>	political committee
<i>ta‘aṣub</i>	fanaticism
<i>taghrib</i>	Westernisation
<i>takfir</i>	the labelling of non-Wahhabi Muslims as unbelievers
<i>tawhid</i>	doctrine of the oneness of God/ unification
<i>thaqafat al-hiwar</i>	public dialogue
<i>thaqafat al-irhab</i>	the ideology of terrorism
<i>‘ulama</i> (sing. <i>‘alim</i> )	religious scholars
<i>umma</i>	Muslim community
<i>wali</i>	Ottoman governor
<i>waqf</i> (pl. <i>awqaf</i> )	religious endowment
<i>al-waṣatiyya</i>	the middle path of Islam
<i>waṭan</i>	country, fatherland
<i>waṭaniyya</i>	citizenship
<i>zakat</i>	Islamic tax

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-74754-7 - A History of Saudi Arabia, Second Edition

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Frontmatter

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Map 1 Saudi Arabia, main regions and cities. *Source:* F. Clements, *Saudi Arabia, World Bibliographical Series* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1979; reprinted 1988). Courtesy of Clio Press.



Map 2 Saudi Arabia, main tribes. *Source:* D. Schofield and R. Kemp, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (London: Stacey International, 1990). Courtesy of Stacey International.