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**Exploring the Interplay of Reforms, Leadership
Dynamics, and Saudi-US Relations: A Historical
Inquiry of Saudi Arabia's Transformative Journey
Under Mohammed bin Salman**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master's Degree**

Candidate (s):

Miss. Imane MIMOUNE

Supervisor:

Dr. Youcef BENNAA

Board of Examiners

Dr. Aboubaker HAMMOUDI	University of M'sila	Chairperson
Dr. Youcef BENNAA	University of M'sila	Supervisor
Dr. Mohammed GOUFFI	University of M'sila	Examiner

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled, “Exploring the Interplay of Reforms, Leadership Dynamics, and Saudi-US Relations: A Historical Inquiry of Saudi Arabia’s Transformative Journey Under Mohammed bin Salman”, is my own work and that all the sources I have quoted from have been acknowledged by means of references.

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of a constantly changing global landscape, the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the evolving Saudi-US relationship continue to provoke scholarly agitation and stimulate conflicted debates. This dissertation aims to investigate the interconnected and continuous nature of reforms in Saudi Arabia, the distinctive leadership style observed in the country, and the dynamics influencing Saudi-US relations. By examining historical events, societal trends, and the imperative of survival, this study reveals that the implemented reforms in Saudi Arabia were part of an ongoing and interrelated process. To achieve this objective, the research analyzes Mohammed bin Salman's pursuit of power and the Saudi-US relations within the context of past reforms in Saudi Arabia and the historical trajectory of the US-Saudi relationship. The theoretical framework employed encompasses Michel Foucault's theory on power and Pratto's conceptualization of survival needs. The findings underscore that the regime under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been marked by a constructive vision to propel the Kingdom forward with regard to the Saudi identity. Furthermore, the study highlights that the Saudi-US relations have been driven by survival needs and shaped by the inherent characteristics of the American political system. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the significance of history, culture, global trends, and survival needs in shaping leadership styles.

Key words: Leadership, power structures, reform, constructive power, survival needs.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Throughout the annals of human civilization, leaders played a paramount role in shaping the trajectory of history. Their dynamic agency and profound influence left an indelible imprint upon the collective consciousness of societies. With sagacity and strategic acumen, these exceptional individuals navigated the treacherous terrain of governance, orchestrating transformative paradigms and steering nations towards unprecedented heights. Their resolute decisions, visionary perspectives, and resplendent charisma galvanized nations, mobilizing the masses to transcend the limitations of the present and embrace the possibilities of a brighter future.

In this context, reforms in Saudi Arabia attempted to design a brighter future for the Kingdom. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, upon assuming higher monarchical roles, initiated remarkable political, economic, and social reforms with the aim of elevating the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on a global scale. His widely acknowledged Vision 2030 sought to elevate the Saudi Kingdom in all aspects, positioning it as a global power. The Crown Prince dedicated his efforts to establishing Vision 2030, accelerating the pace of reform for Saudi Arabia to reach a promising destiny.

The reforms maintained a steadfast focus on reviving the economy by decreasing reliance on oil through the promotion of investment opportunities and the unlocking of new sectors, such as tourism. Similarly, the vision centered around upgrading the Saudi political system, emphasizing credibility, transparency, and meritocracy. Furthermore, Prince Mohammed introduced a wide range of social reforms aimed at modernizing the Saudi society while respecting its unique culture and identity. These reforms achieved significant results, and the Crown Prince's ambition for further upheavals was evident.

Arguably, understanding the Saudi history of reforms required a discussion on the US-Saudi relationship as well. Throughout history, both nations defined each other through their strategically tied bond in politics and economy. They cooperated to face global challenges across various domains. During the reign of King Abdulaziz, the foundations of the economic ties between the nations were established, while the reign of King Abdullah saw joint efforts in combating terrorism and extremism. Overall, the nations managed to overcome significant challenges and cooperated to maintain regional and global economic and security stability.

However, the relationship between the two nations witnessed cracks as a result of several mutual experiences, including the Second Gulf War, the 9/11 attacks, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and more. These events weakened the bond and rendered the ties less robust, particularly with the arrival of President Joe Biden, whose approach to the relationship emphasized human rights. Indeed, with each monarchical reign or presidential administration relations became permeable and subject to constant adjustments.

This research sought to unveil Mohammed bin Salman's quest for power and analyze the US-Saudi relations following his appointment. To provide a thorough understanding of the Crown Prince's quest, this study would employ Michel Foucault's theory on power and power relations as a theoretical lens. As Michel Foucault (1970) defined it, power was not an entity possessed by individuals or groups, but rather a relational and discursive phenomenon that permeated social structures and institutions. He conceived power as a productive force that was dispersed throughout society, shaping and regulating the behaviors, knowledge, and subjectivities of individuals within specific historical and social contexts.

Additionally, Felicia Pratto's conceptualization on the need for power to satisfy survival needs would be utilized to interpret the driving forces behind the history of reforms in Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman's specific reforms, and the historical and present dynamics of the US-Saudi relations. These theoretical frameworks served to address the ambiguities surrounding these complex issues. Pratto et al (2011) posited that power was intricately tied to individuals' fundamental survival needs, which were shaped by evolutionary processes and socio-cultural influences. According to the conceptualization, power served as a means to fulfill these survival needs, such as safety, resources, and social connection, and individuals were driven to acquire and maintain power to secure these necessities. Both lenses shaped the research approach with the data available.

To end with, the selection of this topic and these theories in specific supported the area of investigation and provided the insight and motivation to reveal the realities concerning the situation of the Saudi reforms and the U.S.-Saudi relations. this section would provide a background to the study through the discussion of the background and context, followed by the research problem, the research aims, motivation, aims and objectives of the study, research questions, literature review, research design and methodology, and the plan of the research.

Statement of the Problem

The Saudi Arabian political landscape, marked by its unique history, cultural context, and dynamics of governance, was subject to various interpretations and misrepresentations in the existing literature. The complexity of the Saudi reforms introduced under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as well as the

evolving US-Saudi relations, necessitated an analysis to uncover the underlying realities and shed light on the dynamics at play.

Firstly, there was a significant need to address the misperceptions and stereotypes surrounding the Saudi political system and the reforms initiated by Mohammed bin Salman. Existing literature often portrayed Saudi Arabia as an authoritarian regime with a royal family suppressing the population and impeding their basic rights. These simplistic depictions failed to capture the nuances of Saudi culture, history, and the societal context within which the reforms were implemented. Therefore, it was crucial to unravel the complexities of the Saudi structural mechanism of leadership and assess the reforms introduced by MbS to present a more accurate understanding of the realities involved.

Secondly, the US-Saudi relations had undergone fluctuations and faced challenges over the years, impacting regional and global stability. While both nations cooperated historically on various fronts, recent events and policy shifts, such as the Second Gulf War, the 9/11 attacks, and the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, strained the bond between them. Moreover, the arrival of President Joe Biden and his emphasis on human rights in foreign policy introduced new dynamics and uncertainties to the relationship. Therefore, it was imperative to investigate the basis of the US-Saudi relations during different reigns, examine the recent conflicts and misunderstandings, and predict the future trajectory of this crucial alliance.

To address these gaps in the existing literature, this paper aimed to provide an analysis of Mohammed bin Salman's quest for power, the Saudi reforms, and the evolving US-Saudi relations. By employing theoretical frameworks such as Michel Foucault's theory on power and power relations, and Pratto's conceptualization on the desire for power to fulfill survival needs, the study sought to reveal the underlying driving forces

behind these phenomena. By doing so, this research aimed to dispel misunderstandings, challenge simplified narratives, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the Saudi Arabian mode of governance and the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations.

Motivation

The choice to focus on Mohammed bin Salman's reforms and the US-Saudi relations stemmed from the remarkable transformations initiated by the Crown Prince in Saudi Arabia, which garnered global attention and generated extensive discussions. By examining these reforms, it became possible to shed light on the motivations, objectives, and implications behind this transformative agenda. Furthermore, understanding the US-Saudi relations was crucial given the historical cooperation and strategic ties between the two nations, which faced challenges and uncertainties in recent times. By investigating the basis and dynamics of this relationship, valuable insights could be gained into the future trajectory of this critical alliance that shared an influence on the global order.

This research was motivated by the need to dispel misperceptions and stereotypes surrounding the Saudi reforms initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as well as to provide a more accurate understanding of the Saudi structural mechanism of leadership. As demonstrated earlier, existing literature often portrayed the Saudi political system as authoritarian and oppressive, failing to consider the cultural and historical context within which these reforms were implemented. By conducting an analysis, this study aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge by offering a nuanced portrayal of the Saudi reforms and their implications on Saudi society.

Additionally, the study was motivated by the significance of the US-Saudi relations and the recent dynamics that strained this alliance. Understanding the basis of the

US-Saudi relations during different reigns and investigating the factors influencing recent conflicts and uncertainties was crucial.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the Saudi Arabian mode of governance and the US-Saudi relations by analyzing the reforms and structural mechanisms in Saudi Arabia, as well as the driving forces behind the relationship with the United States. The primary aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the Saudi style of leadership in relation to its history and culture, with a specific focus on Mohammed bin Salman's role. Additionally, the research aimed to investigate the US-Saudi relations throughout history, particularly in the context of the current Biden administration.

To achieve these aims, several objectives would be addressed. Firstly, the study aimed to establish connections between past and present reforms in Saudi Arabia, identifying the factors that ensured the stability of the Kingdom despite potential challenges. This objective sought to provide insights into the historical context of reforms and the resilience of Saudi Arabia's governance structures.

Secondly, the study aimed to analyze Mohammed bin Salman's regime, examining the reforms he introduced and the driving forces behind them. By applying Michel Foucault's theory on power and power relations as a theoretical framework, this objective sought to provide an understanding of the Crown Prince's quest for power and his transformative agenda.

Thirdly, the research aimed to investigate the historical context of US-Saudi relations, examining the basis of the relationship during different reigns. By exploring the

dynamics between Saudi Arabia and the United States over time, this objective sought to shed light on the factors that influenced the nature of their relations and the implications for both countries.

Another objective was to explore the previous social contract in Saudi Arabia and assess how it evolved under Mohammed bin Salman's leadership. This objective aimed to provide insights into the societal changes brought about by the Crown Prince's reforms and the shifting dynamics between the state and its citizens.

Furthermore, the study aimed to evaluate the challenges faced by the Crown Prince's regime of truth and assess its constructive or destructive nature. By analyzing the impact and consequences of the reforms introduced by Mohammed bin Salman, this objective aimed to provide a critical assessment of their outcomes and implications for Saudi society.

Additionally, the study aimed to analyze the basis of the Saudi-US relation during the presidencies of Trump and Biden, considering their respective approaches and implications. By examining the policies and actions of both administrations, this objective sought to provide insights into the shifting dynamics of the US-Saudi relationship and the factors driving these changes.

Finally, the research aimed to predict and assess the future of the US-Saudi relations, taking into account the present state of the relationship and its historical dynamics. By drawing on the findings from the historical analysis and theoretical framework, this objective aimed to offer informed predictions and recommendations for the future of the US-Saudi ties.

To achieve these aims and objectives, the study would utilize a theoretical framework that included Michel Foucault's theory on power and power relations, as well as Pratto's conceptualization on the desire for power to fulfill survival needs. These theoretical lenses would provide a critical perspective and analytical tools to interpret the driving forces behind the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the US-Saudi relations.

Research Questions

This dissertation sought to provide answers for the following main questions: What were the reforms introduced in Saudi Arabia since the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia until the present and what shaped the trajectory of the reform process? And how were the Saudi-US relations during each reign of the Saudi monarchy?

In order to answer these questions, the study would attempt to answer the following main questions: What characterized the previous Saudi social contract, and how did it evolve over time? What characterized Mohammed bin Salman's social contract, and what were its implications? What were the challenges faced by Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth? Could the Crown Prince's regime be classified as constructive or destructive? What were the bases of the Saudi-US relation during the presidency of Trump? What were the bases of the Saudi-US relation during the presidency of Biden? How did the future of the Saudi-US relation appear?

Literature Review

The topics of Mohammed bin Salman's leadership and the United States-Saudi Arabia relations captured the attention of numerous researchers. Scholars showed great interest in understanding the reforms initiated under Mohammed bin Salman's tenure and

the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations. However, despite this interest, there was a notable gap in the examination of these subjects.

The reforms introduced by Mohammed bin Salman were viewed as significant departures from the progressive history of reforms in Saudi Arabia. Researchers, particularly those with a Western perspective, saw these reforms as an opportunity for the Kingdom to align with global standards, especially in terms of human rights. However, criticisms arose, highlighting concerns about the nation's governance system and the potential neglect of basic human rights.

David Ottaway (2021) delved into the analysis of the Crown Prince's pursuit of power in his book *Mohammed bin Salman: The Icarus of Saudi Arabia?* Ottaway depicted the Crown Prince's ambition for progress as a double-edged sword, comparing it to a Trojan Horse that had the potential to undermine his own power. According to Ottaway, Mohammed bin Salman displayed an unbridled ambition to establish a new futuristic Saudi kingdom and attain global recognition as a prominent world leader. However, Ottaway argued that the Crown Prince had already experienced a significant setback due to his boundless ambition, hubris, and recklessness (Ottaway, 2021, p. 9). Ottaway went on to suggest that Mohammed bin Salman might face a turbulent and challenging journey, akin to floundering in a tumultuous sea. Importantly, Ottaway's analysis failed to fully address the multifaceted pressures surrounding the reform process, including historical imperatives and the influence of domestic and international affairs.

In his book *"MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed bin Salman,"* Ben Hubbard (2020) offered valuable insights into the motivations of the young leader. Hubbard suggested that Mohammed bin Salman aimed to cultivate a distinctive public image, one that portrayed him as "harder working, more strategic, more willing to shatter traditions,

and, at times, more brutal than anyone else—a truly Machiavellian prince" (Hubbard, 2020, p. 277). According to Hubbard, the Crown Prince took calculated risks by challenging established norms and rules, demonstrating his willingness to break with tradition. Again, this work failed to address the complex dynamics of rule and governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Significantly, it was important to approach studies on the Saudi royal family with caution. Such works often failed to regard Mohammed bin Salman's position within a larger system, highlighting the complex dynamics of governance rather than viewing him as a centralized authority.

In terms of the US-Saudi relations, an extensive body of literature addressed the Saudi human rights record, predominantly focusing on the accelerated stance taken by the United States in pressuring Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights practices. However, many of these papers neglected to consider the intricate political and economic dynamics that influenced the approach towards the Saudi human rights record, as well as the evolving foreign policy stance adopted by successive US presidential administrations.

A noteworthy example of such research was the article titled "Ten ways that Saudi Arabia violates human rights" published by Amnesty International UK (2020). This article offered readers a glimpse into the human rights violations that occurred within the Kingdom, including instances of torture as a form of punishment and the restriction of free speech and human rights organizations. While this article shed light on specific violations, it often failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the underlying political and economic factors that accelerated the American emphasis on human rights in Saudi Arabia.

To gain a more nuanced understanding of the US-Saudi relations and the complexities surrounding the Saudi human rights record, it seemed crucial to consider the broader context of political and economic dynamics. This included examining the

geopolitical interests of the United States, the strategic importance of the Gulf region, and the changing priorities and foreign policy approaches of each US presidential administration. By delving into these multifaceted factors, the paper would develop a clearer understanding of the intricate relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and its impact on human rights considerations.

In this review, it became apparent that both critics and researchers often approached the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the US-Saudi relations with a limited perspective, primarily emphasizing present observations without delving into the rich historical context, major influences, and the underlying survival needs that shaped the approaches of both entities.

The analysis of reforms in Saudi Arabia often overlooked the historical trajectory of the nation, neglecting to consider the profound influence of past reforms on the current landscape. Moreover, the examination tends to disregard the complex interplay between domestic imperatives, external pressures, and the broader geopolitical environment that shaped the reform process. By focusing predominantly on present-day observations, these analyses failed to capture the intricate historical tapestry that set the stage for the transformative changes witnessed in Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, when scrutinizing the US-Saudi relations, researchers often disregarded the historical context and major influences that shaped the dynamics between these two nations. This limited perspective neglected the crucial role of shared interests, strategic considerations, and historical alliances that underpinned the relationship over time. Moreover, researchers tended to overlook the underlying survival needs, such as energy security and regional stability, that guided the approaches of both Saudi Arabia and the United States.

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding, it is imperative for scholars to expand their purview beyond immediate observations and delve into the historical, geopolitical, and economic factors that informed the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the US-Saudi relations. By doing so, researchers could discern the nuanced interplay between historical imperatives, major influences, and the survival needs that shaped these complex phenomena. With such an examination an understanding of the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the multifaceted dynamics of the US-Saudi relations could be attained.

Research Design and Methodology

This research plan adopted a qualitative research design with a primary focus on utilizing secondary sources to investigate the reforms initiated by Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations. The research design aimed to conduct an analysis of existing literature, scholarly articles, books, and reports to gain insights into the research topic.

The primary data collection method for this study was the systematic review and analysis of existing secondary sources. A literature review would be conducted to identify and gather relevant scholarly works on the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the US-Saudi relations. The literature review would encompass historical perspectives, major influences, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies. Reputable databases, academic journals, journalistic papers and other reliable sources would be accessed to ensure a comprehensive coverage of diverse perspectives.

The collected secondary data would undergo a rigorous analysis using thematic analysis. This qualitative data analysis method involved identifying common themes, patterns, and key concepts within the literature. The data will be systematically coded and categorized to extract meaningful insights and develop a nuanced understanding of the

reforms and the US-Saudi relations. Through this analysis, significant themes and trends would be identified, enabling a thorough exploration of the research topics.

The chosen research design and methodology were justified based on the primary use of secondary sources to explore the research topic. By drawing on existing literature and scholarly works, the study aimed to conduct an analysis of the reforms initiated by Mohammed bin Salman and the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations. The reliance on secondary sources allowed for a comprehensive examination of historical context, major influences, and theoretical frameworks, contributing to a well-rounded understanding of the research subjects.

Thematic analysis was an appropriate method for analyzing the collected secondary data. This approach enabled the identification and interpretation of recurring themes and patterns within the literature, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the research topics. The systematic nature of thematic analysis ensures that the analysis is rooted in the data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

It seemed important to acknowledge the limitations associated with using secondary data, such as potential biases or gaps in the literature. To address these limitations, a critical evaluation of the credibility and reliability of the sources will be conducted. This evaluation will ensure the inclusion of reputable sources that provided valuable insights to the research. Additionally, the findings would be interpreted and discussed in light of the limitations, ensuring a balanced and informed analysis.

Overall, the research plan employed a qualitative research design centered on the use of secondary sources and thematic analysis. The comprehensive analysis of existing literature aimed to provide valuable insights and contributed to a nuanced understanding of the reforms in Saudi Arabia and the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations. By utilizing this

approach, the research aimed to generate meaningful findings and make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

Plan of the Research

To attain the aforementioned aims, this dissertation established a set of objectives. The primary objective was to apply Foucault's theory on power and Pratto's conceptualization on survival needs. Subsequently, the work would be divided into two main chapters. The first chapter explored the historical context and theoretical framework. It provided insights into the history of reforms in Saudi Arabia, the US-Saudi relations from the reign of King Abdulaziz to King Salman, and the specific focus on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The theoretical framework utilized Foucault's theory and Pratto's conceptualization to analyze the quest for power and the driving forces behind the reforms and relations.

The second chapter delved into an analysis of the historical context, using the theoretical lenses of Michel Foucault and Felicia Pratto. This analysis explored the sequence and interrelatedness of the Saudi reforms, the mode of governance, Mohammed bin Salman's regime, and the US-Saudi relations during the emergence of the Crown Prince as the de facto ruler of the Kingdom. Additionally, this chapter investigated the Saudi power structures at the domestic level.

This study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Saudi Arabian mode of governance, the history and culture of Saudi Arabia, and the dynamics of the US-Saudi relations within the context of the present era under President Joe Biden's administration. Through this analysis, this research sought to address the current shortage of research in this area and provide a more accurate interpretation of the ongoing complex interactions and dynamics.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.The History of Reforms in Saudi Arabia

The history of reforms in Saudi Arabia and the dynamics of US-Saudi relations provided essential context for understanding the current socio-political landscape of the nation. This section offered a concise exploration of the historical foundations that shaped Saudi Arabia, from its early human presence in the Arabian Peninsula to the emergence of Islam and subsequent Muslim conquests. Furthermore, it highlighted the establishment of the First and Second Saudi States, followed by the formation of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Abdulaziz. By examining this historical background, this research aimed to provide insights into the ongoing reforms initiated by Mohammed bin Salman and the evolving nature of US-Saudi relations.

1.1. Setting the Stage: Glimpses on the Saudi States

The first human presence in the Arabian Peninsula was recorded about 20,000 years ago, where bands of hunters used to hunt animals and gather plants for living. However, the area faced drastic climate changes after the melt of icebergs during the last Ice Age in Europe, deserts and heathlands replaced grasslands while wild animals vanished. Settlers were obliged to move to small islands and mountain valleys to survive as the attempts to create another system of survival evolved, subsequently, they focused on the development of agricultural strategies that spread from Mesopotamia to the Nile River Valley and later the Middle East. The evolvement of agriculture led to other advances such as pottery, the domestication of animals like horses, camels, and techniques of intensive farming. Settlements grew, people constructed and learned languages, writing and political

systems that served the gradual formation of what could be labelled 'civilization' (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

Even during ancient times, the Arabian Peninsula shared the strategic geographical location and trade preferences that placed it at a beneficial position. The peninsula was located between the Nile River Valley and Mesopotamia, the previously acclaimed civilization centers of the ancient world. Trade was one of the valuable skills that enriched the area, people developed sophisticated trade routes and transported with huge caravans to trade goods such as almonds, dates, aromatics, and spices. In addition, the peninsula was safe from political conflicts due to its expanded deserts which formed a barrier for potential rivals, mainly, people of the area focused on the selling of goods and services regardless of central powers be it Babylon, Rome, Greece, or Persia (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

One of the most pivotal points in the history of the kingdom was the birth of Islam. During 610 CE (Common Era), the native son of the commercial center Makka, Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him was chosen by Allah (God) to declare the oneness of His existence universally. Eventually, in 622 CE, the prophet migrated to Madinat Al-Nabi, previously known as Yathrib after his knowledge of an assassination plan against him. Therefore, during the next few years the prophet and his followers fought for the unification of Madinah and other tribes under the Islamic religion where he grew stronger then entered Makkah peacefully in 628 CE (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

About 100 years later, Muslim conquests and entrances established the Islamic Empire that extended from Spain to parts of India and China. Trade remained central to the area while political power shifted to other areas. Pilgrims initiated frequent visits to the

peninsula whilst few of them settled in the Two Holy Cities of Makkah and Madinah. The pilgrims eased cultural exchanges and ideas between Arabs and Muslims, they strengthened the bond of common values. In addition, the Arabic language added its unique touch to the peninsula's culture, the language became a pioneering tool for Arab and Muslim scholars who built the ground of modern sciences, such as medicine, astronomy, and philosophy during the Muslim 'Golden Age.' Until the 17th century, the Islamic Empire shattered into small kingdoms provided that the Arabian Peninsula remained the spiritual core of the Islamic world (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d).

1.2.The First Saudi State

In the early 18th century, a Muslim scholar and reformer, Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, presented his case for a return to the original form of Islam. Nevertheless, local religious scholars and leaders opposed Shaikh's proposition, viewing it as a threat to their authority. Muhammad bin Saud, the ruler of Diriyah, a modest settlement in Najd, home to fewer than seventy households of merchants, farmers, artisans, and religious scholars, provided protection to the Shaikh and embraced his mission. Under these circumstances, bin Saud and bin Abdul Wahhab reached an agreement to revive the authentic teachings of Islam, marking the inception of the First Saudi State in 1727.

Geographical expansion commenced, and by 1788, the state had gained control over Najd. By the early 19th century, the ruler had extended his influence across most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Makkah and Madinah. Regrettably, the Ottomans, who were part of the Ottoman Empire, grew wary of the Saudi expansion. Consequently, they directed their attention to the western region of Arabia and laid siege to Diriyah in an attempt to contain Saudi influence and restrict their expansion (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

1.3.The Second Saudi State

The Al-Saud family regained control of central Arabia in 1824 with the rule of Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud and his son Faisal, the ruler moved his capital to Riyadh and established the Second Saudi State. He dedicated eleven years of his lifetime to return the rest of the lands from the Ottoman rule and to assure prosperity for his people. Turki worked on the flourishing of agriculture and trade while the population enjoyed a decent time of comfort and peace. In 1865, the Ottoman Empire sought to expand its rule from the Middle East to the Arabian Peninsula, as a result, the Empire controlled parts of the state ruled by Faisal's son Abdulrahman. With the help of Al-Rashid family (The Rasheed dynasty settled in the Arabian Peninsula between 1836 and 1921), pressures forced Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud to surrender in 1891. Subsequently, the Bedouin tribes provided shelter for the ruler in the desert of eastern Arabia, later on, they settled in Kuwait until 1902 (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

1.4.Saudi Arabia: the Modern Kingdom

Abdulrahman's son, Abdulaziz planned to regain the rule of Saudi Arabia from Al-Rashid family. In 1902, young Abdulaziz, with the help of forty men, wielded an attack on the military post, known as the Masmak Fortress, in Riyadh (Kishk, 1981). Later, in May 1902, Abdulaziz's father arrived in Riyadh to confirm his son's positioning as the ruler of the town (Al- Rasheed, 2010). This crucial event marked the initial formation of Modern Saudi Arabia. Abdulaziz reclaimed Riyadh, Hijaz, Makkah, and Madinah between 1924 and 1925 (Troeller, 1976). At the same time, he worked on the unification of antagonistic tribes into one nation. On the twenty third of September 1932 the country was named the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with Arabic as its national language and the Holly Qur'an as its constitution (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

2.Tracking Reform Attempts in Modern Saudi Arabia

The history of reforms in modern Saudi Arabia held significant importance in comprehending the current socio-political landscape of the nation. This part provided an overview of key reform attempts throughout different reigns, offering insights into the political, economic, social, and international developments that shaped the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The first section focused on the era of King Abdulaziz, the founding father of Saudi Arabia, who dedicated his life to liberating and unifying the nation. From 1932 to 1953, King Abdulaziz's leadership brought about substantial advancements in various aspects of the kingdom, laying the foundation for its future growth and development.

The subsequent sections delved into the reigns of King Saud, King Faisal, King Khalid, King Fahd, King Abdullah, King Salman, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Each monarch's rule brought its own set of challenges and opportunities, shaping the trajectory of reforms in Saudi Arabia. From efforts in modernization and economic diversification to social reforms and foreign policy engagements, their contributions had lasting impacts on the nation's development.

Furthermore, this part explored the dynamics of the Saudi-U.S. relationship during the administrations of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. It analyzed the efforts made to strengthen bilateral ties, the challenges faced, and the subsequent recalibration of the relationship, particularly in light of human rights concerns, regional stability, and economic relations.

By examining the historical context of reforms in Saudi Arabia, this part sought to provide an understanding of the nation's journey towards transformation. It aimed to shed

light on the initiatives undertaken by each monarch and the broader socio-political circumstances that influenced their decision-making.

2.1. King Abdulaziz: The Founding Father 1932-1953

The founding father and “the desert warrior who created the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud, was born in January 1876 in the capital city of Riyadh. He fought for the liberation and unification of Saudi Arabia, considering it his primary goal. At the age of fifteen, the ambitious young man witnessed the Ottoman-Rashidi attack on his homeland. In response, he and his family settled in Kuwait for more than twenty years, during which his desire to free Arabia grew (Darlow & Bray, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, starting from 1901, Abdulaziz planned for gradual invasions to return the Saudi territories from the Ottoman-supported Al Rashidi establishment and restore the name of the Al-Saud family. However, without the support of the British, the mutawwa’a, and the Ikhwan the establishment of the Saudi state would become harder to achieve (Al-Rasheed, 2010). When the First World War began, political dynamics shifted to the side of Ibn Saud, the British interest to end the Ottoman rule drove it to look for allies in the area of Najd (Al-Rasheed, 1991). As a result, Ibn Saud signed the Anglo-Saudi Treaty in 1915, in which the British government acknowledged Abdulaziz’s territorial ownership of Najd, Hasa, Qatif, Jubayl, and others minor areas, also, Britain provided protection for the area against potential attacks, granted monthly financial support and provided Ibn Saud with arms. In exchange, Ibn Saud was not allowed to maintain ties with other nations nor aggress or interfere in the affairs of the nations who signed protection treaties with Britain (Troeller, 1976).

With Britain's determination to bring an end to Ottoman rule, the power of the Rashidi family weakened. In 1921, Ibn Saud succeeded in capturing Hail, followed by the capture of Hijaz in 1925 (Troeller, 1976). Troeller (1976) asserted that one of the reasons Abdulaziz decided to incorporate Hijaz was the financial situation in his realm. When Britain ceased providing financial aid to Saudi Arabia in 1924, the potential income from pilgrimage taxes and custom duties in Jeddah appeared enticing to Ibn Saud. Upon capturing Jeddah, Hijaz, and Madina by the close of 1925, he proclaimed himself the King of Hijaz and gained recognition from major powers such as the USSR, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands (Troeller, 1976).

As Al-Rasheed (2010) contended, "Britain played a pivotal role in Ibn Sa'ud's expansion into Hail and Hijaz. Its subsidies, ammunition, and weaponry disrupted the balance of power between Ibn Sa'ud and Ibn Rashid" (p. 44). Indeed, without British support and their earlier victory over the Ottomans, Abdulaziz might not have been able to overcome the Rashidi rule, which was the Kingdom's most formidable rival in the region. In November 1925, the British government sought to delineate the frontiers between Abdulaziz and his northern neighbors through the signing of the Bahra and Hadda Agreements (Troeller, 1976).

Another factor that contributed to Ibn Saud's expansion was the support of the mutawwa'a of Najd. As Al-Rasheed (2010) defined them "A mutawwa' was a volunteer who enforced obedience to Islam and performance of its rituals," meaning, a religious volunteer who taught and applied Hanbali jurisprudence (p, 47). The solidarity of the mutawwa's members survived for a long time as they shared the same religious affiliation and tribal belonging, in fact, the majority of the mutawwa'a belonged to the oasis of Najd and were highly influenced by the teachings of the radical reformer Muhammad bin Abdulwahhab since the eighteenth century (Al-Juhany, 1983).

From 1902 until 1932, these members were vital for the process of state formation. Their method of 'discipline and punishment' succeeded in joining a large range of tribes to the Arabian land and helped to behave and organize society under united beliefs (Al-Rasheed, 2010). When it came to religious structures, Ibn Saud's conceptual framework was built as follows, the mutawwa'a and religious specialists considered Abdulaziz their political and military leader while he championed in the application of Islamic teachings and rituals (Al-Azmeh, 1993). The mutawwa'a focused on the spread of obedience and submission for both God and the ruler, the payment of zakat, jihad, and the application of physical punishment if needed. While religious specialists or shaykhs maintained the spread of prayer, fasting, jihad and zakat, both cultivated a method of discipline and punishment which formed the core of the Saudi religious police or the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

The mutawwa'a, religious enforcers, exhibited exceptional performance, prompting Ibn Saud to grant them formal salaries and show them respect (Helms, 1981). Even for Ibn Saud, the ruler, the mutawwa'a's authority was not an exception. When the ruler donned a lengthy shirt, he was obliged to trim it in accordance with the precise requirements of sharia law. More precisely, the practical application of sharia occurred when the mutawwa'a trimmed the ruler's shirt while he was wearing it, ensuring the appropriate length. In reality, Ibn Saud's legitimacy was intricately connected to his recognition and implementation of sharia law (Almana, 1980).

As for the IKhwan, they were composed of Bedouins who embraced the Hanbali school and the religious doctrine of the reformer Abdulwahhab through interactions with religious missionaries and the receipt of material support from Ibn Saud (Habib, 1978). Their military training was overseen by the mutawwa'a, and they were conditioned to adapt to a settled lifestyle (Abd Al-Aziz, 1993). Ibn Saud's hold on power was consistently

under the threat of tribal uprisings. The Ikhwan, functioning as a 'force of conquest,' made vigorous efforts to subdue these groups while striving to disseminate and uphold the authentic teachings of the Hanbali school. In recognition of their contributions, they received material support from Ibn Saud (Habib, 1978).

The Ikhwan approached and interpreted the religious teachings imparted by the *mutawwa'a* quite literally. The key distinction between the *mutawwa'a* and the Ikhwan lay in the fact that the Ikhwan employed physical coercion, whereas the *mutawwa'a* relied on psychological influence. According to Madawi al-Rasheed (2010), both groups were involved in what she termed a 'system of terror' (p. 59).

However, the alliance did not end as planned where Ibn Saud managed to set the bedrock for the Saudi leadership dynamics for times to come. After the capture of Hijaz in 1926, Ibn Saud's power and foreign recognition grew remarkably especially after he was labelled by religious specialists as the king of Hijaz and Sultan of Najd. Internal entities began to question the ruler's expansion and their conflicting perception of Ibn Saud's rule forged an inevitable conflict between Ibn Saud, religious and tribal leaders came to the surface. For this issue, Al-Rasheed (2010) noted:

“Ibn Saud himself thought of it as ‘restoring his ancestors’ glory and domination over most provinces of the Arabia peninsula’. His *mutawwa'a* perceived it as an expansion of the boundaries of the Muslim *umma*, faithful to the principles of *shari'a*, under the auspices of an imam, the guardian of the Islamic legacy and prosecutor of their will.” (P, 63)

In essence, Ibn Saud aimed to reclaim the former glory and authority held by his forefathers over a large portion of the Arabian Peninsula, while the *mutawwa'a* saw their efforts as expanding the influence of the Muslim community in accordance with *shari'a*,

guided by an imam who safeguarded Islamic traditions and upheld their objectives. Ibn Saud's ultimate aspiration was to centralize power around his authority while the tribal leaders expected to acquire *moykre* power and formal recognition as Ibn Saud elevated on a territorial level. Similarly, the Ikhwan expected to remain legitimate contributors to the present realm (Kostiner, 1985).

These contradictory perceptions resulted in the Ikhwan rebellion after the capture of Hijaz. The Ikhwan leaders held a meeting where they evaluated and criticized Ibn Saud over his ties with Britain, the nature of kingship and taxes in relation to *shari'a*, his lavish lifestyle and successive marriages, the expansion of jihadism and other issues (Shamiyyah, 1986). In response, Ibn Saud held a conference where he requested the transfer of these issues to the religious specialists of Riyadh (1927), these shaykhs framed the concerns of Ikhwan in relations to Islamic teachings, and most vitally, the specialists demonstrated that Ibn Saud had the authority on the issues of jihad and taxes to decide these matters as long as they did not oppose with Islamic teachings (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

The Ikhwan refused the shaykhs' formal fatwa and proceeded their oppositional quest against Ibn Saud. Surprisingly, the ruler sent letters over Najd to announce his abdication in 1928. After hearing this announcement, a range of Najdi tribal leaders, religious specialists and notables gathered in Riyadh to support Ibn Saud. Eventually, the ruler made a speech where he highlighted his achievements and contributions to the present state of the land, the notable conquer of Riyadh, his economic and religious accomplishments, the Bedouin traditions, and the distinction between the leader and his people, for according to the Wahhabi creed, Muslim communities are required to submit to their leader. Ibn Saud concluded to the attendants for if they were not satisfied with his mode of governance they were allowed to choose another member of his family to rule the Arabia (Al-Zirkili, 1972).

The ruler's pioneering speech demarcated the role of each power structure within the Kingdom and especially on the religious sphere for the long term. The religious specialists announced that the Ikhwan's rebellion must be fought until they would submit to the rule of Ibn Saud. Since 1928, the role of shaykhs was centered around matters of technological innovation and religious rituals while the mutawwa'a were responsible for containing the public realm. Indeed, the last conference framed the role of religion and primacy of politics (Vassiliev, 1998).

Ibn Saud determined to curb the Ikhwan, worried they would expand within Kuwait and Iraq, both Britain and Ibn Saud cooperated to end the Ikhwan rebellion (1929). In 1930, Britain captured the Ikhwan leaders who escaped to Kuwait and handed them to Ibn Saud, and the latter imprisoned them (Leatherdale, 1983). This event signaled that Ibn Saud shared different goals from that of the Ikhwan, while the Ikhwan aspired for expansion in the name of Islam, Ibn Saud aspired to expand in the name of the Saud family, where the Ikhwan according to the latter proved to be an instrument (Al-Rasheed, 2010). An instrument that became problematic in the near future and for generations to come.

Also, this event marked the end of the 'holly alliance' between Ibn Saud, the mutawwa'a, and the Ikhwan. For Ibn Saud ceased from territorial expansion after he reached restricted borders of earlier treaties he signed with Britain and its protectorates. Unaware of established grounds, the Ikhwan continued to wage rebellions in their quest of expansion, in this regard Madawi al-Rasheed (2010) clarified:

“The Ikhwan rebels had made the serious mistake of not recognizing the political realities of the new situation. Driven by political ambition and religious

zeal, they continued to raid tribal groups and towns in the north in areas where Ibn Sa'ud had no authority or claim recognized by Britain.” (P, 67)

Driven by political ambition and religious fervor, the Ikhwan rebels conducted raids in northern areas where Ibn Saud had no recognized authority under any formal recognition, overlooking the political realities of the situation. Therefore, After the restriction of the religious atmosphere, Ibn Saud declared the territory under his rule to be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in September 1932, where he confirmed the establishment of a sole state under his authority and rule (Leatherdale, 1983).

When the mission of the mutawwa'a and the Ikhwan was completed, Ibn Saud needed other strategies to finalize his authority and curb potential threats through the elimination of his paternal side from the throne and the creation of his own line of descent. In 1908, Ibn Saud's paternal cousins and half-brothers allied with their maternal side the Ajman tribe to perform a rebellion against Abdulaziz in the eastern province. Not until a range of military campaigns and marriages that the problem was solved. Saud bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Ibn Saud's rebellious paternal cousin, married Ibn Saud's sister Nura, and Muhammad, Saud bin Abdulaziz's brother married Munira another sister of Ibn Saud (Al-Qahtani, 1988). Evidently, Ibn Saud managed to end potential threats from the side his paternal cousins.

As for his brothers and half-brothers, Ibn Saud had several, including Saad, Abdullah, Ahmed, Muhammad, Saud, Ahmed, Musaid, and Abd al-Mohsin (Hamza, 1936). Among these, Saad was Ibn Saud's only full brother, who met his end on the battlefield in Hijaz. Subsequently, Ibn Saud married Saad's widow, Jawhara bint al Sudayri (al-Rasheed, 2010).

Among his main rival half-brothers, Abdullah was a commander in the Hijazi conquest and contributed to quelling the Ikhwan rebellion. However, he was later marginalized from positions of authority, becoming a 'symbolic figure.' Muhammad, on the other hand, participated in military campaigns against the Rashidi emirate in 1921 and, between 1933 and 1943, mounted a challenge to Ibn Saud's rule by promoting his son Khalid as an alternative to Ibn Saud's son Saud (Hamza, 1936). Following the appointment of Saud, Muhammad and his son harbored hostile sentiments toward Ibn Saud and settled in Makkah. Khalid's demise in 1938 under mysterious circumstances, along with Muhammad's death in 1943, raised questions (Bligh, 1984). Evidently, Ibn Saud pursued measures to restrict royal succession to his own lineage actively and intentionally.

In this process, Ibn Saud indulged in the creation of his own royal lineage through an active strategy of polygamy and concubinage. And whether intentionally or unintentionally, this line aimed to foster the social hierarchy of the kingdom and maintain alliances with powerful social structures ranging from famous tribal groups, the sedentary nobility, and the religious elite. It was recorded that the king married twenty-two wives and although some marriages were not of vitality nor recorded historically it was important to highlight those with social and political significance (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Earlier in Kuwait, Abdulaziz married from the well-known Banu Khalid tribe to Wadha bint Urayir who gave birth to the future King Saud. After the capture of Riyadh, Abdulaziz married from the religiously established Al Shaykh family to Tarfa bint Abdullah who gave birth to the future King Faysal, this marriage was considered one of the most strategic marriages that intended to cement alliance with the Saudi religious structure. And another series of marriages from the Kingdom's greatest rival back then, the Rashidis after its decline. By 1953, Abdulaziz had forty-three sons and fifty daughters (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Similarly, even Ibn Saud's daughters were married within the house of Saud and to potential rivals as well for the same intentions. These marriages were considered a political strategy to strengthen and affix ties with the varying Saudi structures, as Al-Rasheed (2010) put it:

The King's marriages could only be seen in terms of a general policy to subordinate the Arabian population through a systematic appropriation of its most cherished and valued members, women. Marriages were part of a political strategy to dominate and control in a country where as yet there were very few resources to achieve this objective. (Pp,76)

Meaning, the marriages undertaken by the King were not mere personal unions. Instead, they were integral to a broader political strategy. The objective was to exert control and dominance over the Arabian population by strategically incorporating highly esteemed individuals, particularly women, into the royal family.

This approach was especially significant in a context where the available resources for achieving such control were limited. In essence, these marriages were a means of political maneuvering, enabling the King to assert his authority in a region with few alternative avenues to exert influence. Indeed, whether intentionally or unintentionally these marriages managed to create deep alliances which in return resulted in a dependence to the house of Saud, especially that these unions occurred when the tribes were in a time of decline and subordination.

After the unification of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz focused on the formalization of the legal system. He implemented legal and judicial reforms, including the appointment of qualified judges, the establishment of Sharia courts in major cities, and the adoption of Sharia law as the cornerstone of the kingdom's legal dynamics. Abdulaziz aimed to

improve access to justice and sought alignment with the international legal system (Al-Zirkili, 1972).

Economically, the state aimed to diversify the Saudi economy beyond nomadic skills and agriculture by promoting the prosperity of the oil industry. The exploration of oil resources led to the establishment of the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1933 through a Concession Agreement signed between Saudi Arabia and the Standard Oil Company of California (CASOC) (Aramco, n.d.). This cooperative endeavor revitalized Saudi Arabia's prominence and generated remarkable revenues to accelerate modernization. The kingdom embarked on infrastructure development, initiating unprecedented projects for transportation improvement, communication enhancement, the construction of bridges and ports to facilitate trade and travel, as well as the introduction of modern technology and healthcare. The newfound petroleum wealth brought about a radical transformation for the kingdom (Al-Zirkili, 1972).

King Abdulaziz placed great emphasis on formal educational reforms. He established the first modern schools in the Kingdom and established educational institutions across Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on religious teachings. The pursuit of modernization also encompassed social reforms and human rights, with efforts made to abolish certain traditional practices that contradicted Islamic values. These included initiatives to improve women's rights, denounce repressive attitudes towards women, impose regulations on polygamy and forced marriages, and promote education (Al-Zirkili, 1972).

Internationally, King Abdulaziz maintained pragmatic ties with different nations to preserve peace and stability in the region. He sought external alliances with major powers to protect Saudi Arabia from potential threats. The ruler signed security and territorial

recognition agreements with Britain (the Treaty of Darin, The Darin Pact 1915), which proved instrumental in defeating rivals. The United States of America became another key partner due to shared economic and strategic interests (Al Rasheed, 2010, Reidel, 2017, Bray & Darlow, 2012).

The relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia began to flourish during the Second World War. The United States aimed to secure access to Saudi Arabia's oil resources, while King Abdulaziz sought allies to help him consolidate his power and safeguard his kingdom. By the conclusion of the Second World War in February 1945, King Abdulaziz held a confidential meeting with President Franklin D. Roosevelt on board the USS Quincy in Egypt. During this meeting, Roosevelt had multiple objectives, including securing King Abdulaziz's approval of the new post-war political order. Of utmost importance was the negotiation of American security in exchange for access to oil, a vital necessity for post-war global energy needs, and Saudi political support to maintain stability in the Middle East (Riedel, 2017).

In return, King Abdulaziz had in mind the financial benefits that could arise from granting Americans access to Saudi oil. During a period marked by the Great Depression, the war, and declining Saudi-British relations, the potential wealth from oil resources appeared promising. Beyond economic considerations, the kingdom's security was under threat in a region often described as a 'rough neighborhood' (p. 4). Various actors, including the Hashemite, Yemen, and Britain, had their sights on Saudi oil, posing a security risk to the Kingdom. In light of these concerns, both leaders agreed to uphold peace and security in the region. The United States provided security guarantees to the Kingdom, and in return, Saudi Arabia ensured American access to its oil resources (Riedel, 2017)

Concretely, the United States was authorized to use the Dhahran air base for operations in the Middle East, U.S. oil companies began to operate in the Kingdom while ago, and two weeks after the meeting, Saudi Arabia declared war on Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, a declaration that secured the kingdom a seat in the United Nations (Riedel, 2017). Since the leaders established personal connections and reached useful conclusions during the meeting. Roosevelt highlighted the issue of the Jews, the future of Europe's Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and the question of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Ibn Saud declined firmly and demonstrated that instead they should:

“make the enemy and the oppressor pay; that is how we Arabs wage war.

Amends should be made by the criminal, not by the innocent bystander. What injury have the Arabs done to the Jews of Europe? It is the Christian Germans who stole their homes and lives. Let the Germans pay.” (Lippman, 2005, p. 8)

Abdulaziz's firm answer pointed his determination to the Jewish matter, for him, the Arab world was not part of the conflict nor would it be included for there were other players who should solve the problem. Franklin respected Ibn Saud's standpoint and argued that his government would “make no change in its basic policy in Palestine without full and prior consultation with both Jews and Arabs.” (Lippman, 2005, p. 9)

The leaders discussed other issues like the French colonization in the Middle East and by the end of a promised meeting that lasted five hours they exchanged gifts (Riedel, 2017). Franklin Roosevelt's impression on the king was remarkably unique, in a discussion with his special adviser Bernard Baruch, he said that “among all the men that I had to deal with during my lifetime, I have met no one than this Arab monarch from whom I could extricate so little: the man has an iron will” (Kechichian, 2008, p. 46).

After Ibn Saud's meeting with president Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Saudi king went to meet the British prime minister Winston Churchill in Cairo, Egypt which shared less fruitful outcomes. Churchill exerted pressure on Ibn Saud to promote for a Jewish state in Palestine. He evidenced that the nations were allies for twenty years and the British kingdom provided subsidies for Saudi Arabia during these years, in return, Saudi Arabia ought to help in the situation of the Jewish. Again, Ibn Saud refused for he shared Islamic and Arab sentiments that were against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine (Riedel, 2017). Ibn Saud asserted that the support of Zionism would "bring bloodshed" and "widespread disorder" in the Arab world (Lippman, 2005, p. 11).

When the meeting with Churchill ended, on board of the American destroyer USS Murphy, Ibn Saud told the American consul to Saudi Arabia Colonel William Eddy that:

he was struck by "the contrast between the President and Mr. Churchill. Mr. Churchill speaks deviously, evades understanding and changes the subject to avoid commitment, forcing me repeatedly to bring him back to the point. The President seeks understanding in conversations, his effort is to make the two minds meet, to dispel darkness and shed light upon this issue." He continued, "I have never met the equal of the President in character, wisdom and gentility." (Lippman, 2005, pp. 10-11)

Indeed, the American pragmatism proved to be influential especially that Roosevelt regarded the preservation of the interests of both parties. Unlike Churchill, who was occupied by his Imperial and Victorian ideals which were irrelevant to Ibn Saud strategic interests, ranging from his kingdom's interests to the Arab and Islamic interests as a whole. Eventually, these meetings resulted in the transfer of the Arabian Peninsula from an English preserve to an intimate ally of the U.S.

However, although the historical meeting signed the beginning of a fruitful relation for both nations. Bruce Riedel (2017) highlighted the fundamental differences these nations come to inhibit, between an absolute monarchy and a vibrant democracy, religious devotion and religious freedom, restricted expression and free speech on the other side, fundamental paradoxes that rendered it an “uneasy partnership” for times to come.

King Abdulaziz became a symbol of authenticity for the Saudi identity. Throughout history, Saudis regarded him as an ideal figure, considering his character traits, such as bravery, pragmatism, resistance, and determination to uphold Saudi dignity and prosperity, as the primary reference for an ideal Saudi ruler. To this day, Saudis consider him the "visionary leader who transformed a band of brothers into a mighty nation of great wealth, prosperity, and ambition" (The House of Saud, n.d.).

2.2. King Saud: The Tactless Ruler 1953-1964

Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the second son of the founding father, was born in January 1902 in Kuwait City. During his upbringing, he received an early education on the pillars of Islam from Sheikh Abdul Rahman Mufaireej and accompanied his father to political meetings to cultivate the essence of the Saudi political character for his future role (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, n.d.).

At the age of thirteen, Saud led a delegation to Qatar and participated in eight wars before his eventual ascension to the throne. These conflicts included the Grab War, Yabet War, Truba, Alkuras, Hail, Alhijaz, Almahmal, and the Ikhwan Revolt. Following the death of his elder brother Prince Turki in 1919, Saud became his father's designated successor. He represented the king in neighboring countries and governed the Najd area under his father's supervision. In 1933, his father appointed him as Crown Prince, and

upon his father's death in 1953, Saud assumed the throne with a vision for future reforms (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, n.d.).

During his reign, King Saud continued his father's legacy of focusing on modernization, with a particular emphasis on the formalization of the political structure. He established and headed the Council of Ministers in 1953, thereby shedding light on the ministerial aspect of governance. Additionally, he oversaw the establishment of the Ministry of Communication (1953), Agriculture and Water (1953), Education (1953), Petroleum and Mineral Resources (1960), Pilgrimage and Islamic Endowments (1960), Labor and Social Affairs (1962), and Information in 1963 (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, 2012). Recognizing the importance of education, Saud facilitated the establishment of numerous schools and founded King Saud University in Riyadh in 1957 (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, 1956). The state provided scholarships for Saudi students to study abroad and gain the necessary skills for the country's development (Al-Ghamdi, n.d.).

Economically, King Saud launched infrastructural projects, including the construction of roads, airports, and bridges, and aimed to diversify the Saudi economy away from its heavy reliance on oil. This diversification involved focusing on sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. The First Development Plan was drafted in the late 1960s to guide these efforts. King Saud also initiated large-scale projects to modernize cities and supported the construction of modern housing complexes, public buildings, and urban infrastructure, particularly in Riyadh (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, 2017).

Financial reforms were also on King Saud's agenda. In 1948, the first Saudi budget was introduced, and in 1952, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), the nation's central bank, was established. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was created to

address labor issues and provide health care and housing assistance for the welfare of the population (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, 1960).

King Saud implemented ongoing legal, judicial, and social reforms. He established new courts and expanded female education to promote the rule of law and modernize society (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, n.d.). Moreover, he actively promoted Islamic culture and heritage, supported Islamic institutions, renovated mosques, established Islamic research centers, and promoted Islamic literature. These efforts were crucial for Saudi Arabia's position as the core of Islam (King Saud bin Abdulaziz, 1953).

Within the royal family, in 1957 King Saud granted his sons governmental positions, appointed some as governors of provinces like Riyadh and Makkah, while others served as ministers. For example, his son Fahd was appointed in the Ministry of Defense, Khalid led the National Guard, Musaid commanded the Royal Guard, and Saad served in the Special Guard. These appointments, however, created tensions within the Royal Family, and led to political turmoil. Moreover, King Saud's lavish and extravagant lifestyle in palaces contrasted with the kingdom's economic struggles, pushing the state to the brink of bankruptcy and augmented the tension within the house of Saud (Shamiyyah, 1986).

On the international stage, King Saud departed from his father's neutral foreign policy of non-involvement to another tumultuous scheme. Instead, he focused on strengthening ties with other Arab countries and was instrumental in the formation of the Arab League in 1945 (Kechichian, 2008). Saudi Arabia provided foreign aid to Arab and Muslim nations, in 1955, Saud signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt and Syria, supporting the Egyptian takeover of the Suez Canal, which went against the Saudi diplomatic interests. This move led to the imposition of an oil export embargo on Britain and France, severing diplomatic ties (Riedel, 2017).

However, the rise of Arab nationalism and military revolutions, driven by Gamal Abdel Nasser's influence, presented challenges that Saud had not anticipated. During the 1950s to 1967, the kingdom faced Soviet-supported Egyptian propaganda with calls for democracy and the withdrawal of the system of monarchy. Despite these complexities, Saud sought to maintain friendly relations with the United States and the United Kingdom to safeguard Saudi Arabia's political and economic interests and support Arab countries against Israel (Riedel, 2017). Indeed, it was difficult for King Saud to balance international ties with respect to the Saudi interests.

While relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia remained positive in general for they shared mutual standpoints concerning international conflicts, in addition to the mutual interests both nations come to experience. The protection U.S. came to offer for Saud seemed irresistible, Saudi Arabia's firm stance against communism in the Cold War was not only because of the Kingdom Islamic background, rather, it was also due their recognition of the security the U.S. provided. With the threat of Arab nationalism, the Soviet Union, and British imperialism the sole provider of safety was the U.S. (Riedel, 2017).

Additionally, President Dwight Eisenhower played a key role in the resolve of the British, French, and Israeli military coup against Egypt, also known as the Suez Crisis which took place in November 1956. As Saudi Arabia shared the same stance, Eisenhower's popularity grew within the Kingdom. Most importantly, the economic interdependence between Saudi Arabia's oil resources and the United States as a major customer ensured the maintenance of strong relations. Both countries shared an interest in regional stability, cooperating to counter communism and resolve regional disputes (Riedel, 2017).

As international challenges mounted, members of the royal family began to question King Saud's leadership conduct, which they viewed as tumultuous and self-centered. They criticized the appointment of his inexperienced sons, his failure to address the nation's increasing national debt, and his inadequate response to Nasser's socialist expansion. Anti-Saud propaganda circulated among the royals, spearheaded by Saud's brother Prince Faisal, who mourned the kingdom's financial situation and advocated for political participation to counter his brother's centralized leadership (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

In 1962, Prince Faisal, along with Prince Fahd and Prince Sultan, formed a cabinet and began drafting fundamental reforms and laws for the future. Despite King Saud's rejection of their proposals and his threats to deploy the Royal Guard, the princes mobilized the National Guard against him, ultimately forcing him to abdicate the throne in March 1964. King Saud later passed away in Greece in 1969 and was buried in Makkah alongside his father in Al-Oud cemetery (Yizraeli, 1997).

Overall, King Saud's reign was characterized by personal and self-centered decision-making, overlooking the principle that governmental concerns should supersede familial interests. Mainly, the Saudi history remembered him for his contributions in the field of educational advancements rather than political or economic contribution (The House of Saud, n.d.).

2.3. King Faisal: The Ambitious Reformer 1964-1975

King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the third son of King Abdulaziz Al Saud, was born in April 1906 in Riyadh. His mother, Tarfa bint Abdullah bin Abdullatif Al Sheikh, came from the Al Sheikh family, known for their religious lineage. Faisal's upbringing, under the guidance of his grandfather Abdullah bin Abdullatif, instilled in him the values of tribal leaders and a deep understanding of Islam and the Quran (kechichian, 2008).

Throughout his life, Faisal held various positions of importance. He served as the viceroy of Hejaz from 1926 to 1932, and later became the Foreign Minister in 1930. In 1954, he assumed the role of Prime Minister but resigned in response to King Saud's tumultuous approach in 1960. However, he returned to the position in 1962 and held it until his death. Faisal became the Crown Prince in 1953, following his brother Saud's ascension to the throne. Also, He was also involved in territorial victories, including those in Hail, Asir, and Hejaz (Kechichian, 2008).

Upon King Saud's abdication, Faisal became the official King of Saudi Arabia in 1964. He focused on reviving the country's economy and stabilizing its financial situation, using oil revenues to support these efforts. Faisal played a pivotal role in the modernization of the country's administrative system and introduced the Second Development Plan (1970-1975) to promote economic diversification and attract foreign investment. His reign witnessed advancements in infrastructure, agriculture, industrialization, and social welfare (Kechichian, 2008).

Faisal prioritized judicial reforms to enhance the rule of law in Saudi Arabia. This included the establishment of specialized courts, such as the labor court, and the modernization of legal procedures. Efforts were made to counter corruption, including the creation of the General Auditing Bureau in 1971 to oversee government spending and promote transparency (Beling, 1980).

Despite opposition, Faisal initiated educational reforms that allowed for the formal education of females in the early 1960s. to maintain stability and compromise, religious leaders were given control over the curriculum. In addition, he restricted royal members from receiving foreign education, encouraging them to study within the kingdom, a gesture that promoted local education among Saudis. Scholarships were provided for Saudi

students to pursue education abroad, contributing to increased literacy rates and expanded educational opportunities (Beling, 1980).

Faisal focused on the promotion of Islamic values and principles through various initiatives. He established the Islamic University of Madinah, founded the Muslim World League, and emphasized moderation, peace, and coexistence. Faisal introduced television to Saudi Arabia and launched the first national television channel, Al Saudiya, which featured cultural and Islamic programs (Beling, 1980).

Faisal advocated for women's empowerment and social reforms, supported female education and encouraged women's participation in the workforce. As well, he prioritized cultural activities, built libraries, museums, and cultural centers. Environmental conservation was another area of focus, with efforts made to protect natural resources and the Saudi wildlife (Beling, 1980).

On the international stage, Faisal pursued a Pan-Islamist, anti-communist, and pro-Palestinian foreign policy. He opposed communism and rejected political ties with the Soviet Union and other communist nations. Faisal worked to strengthen Saudi Arabia's international position, forged connections based on common objectives and values, and fostered close relations with the United States.

During Faisal's reign, U.S.-Saudi relations experienced fluctuations driven by external conflicts, including the Cold War and the Soviet Union's support for Arab nationalism, particularly Gamal Abdel Nasser's endeavor to eliminate monarchical structures in the Arab world. In 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy assumed the presidency. Kennedy's stance on the Cold War was more tense than that of his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower; he engaged with the nationalist movements in the Third World (Riedel, 2017). In July 1957, President Kennedy delivered a speech advocating for the decolonization of

the French colony of Algeria. He asserted that Algeria's struggle for independence mirrored American ideals of freedom and urged the U.S. to support this quest for freedom, especially within the context of the Third World (Kennedy, 1957).

In the Middle East, President Kennedy initiated discussions with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to promote regional stability, to deter the Republic of Egypt from aligning too closely with the Soviet Union, and to cultivate stronger ties with a potent and influential ally in the region, as opposed to the Arab monarchies which appeared to be in a state of decline. This decline stemmed from the wave of nationalism that led both Egypt and Iraq to adopt republican systems, placing even traditional kingdoms such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya, Yemen, and Jordan at risk. Specifically, the friction between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal at that time left the United States uncertain about the survival of the Saudi monarchy (Bass, 2003). Bass (2003) highlighted that this Middle East initiative had also left Saudi Arabia uncertain about its relationship with the White House.

The peak of Saudi-Egyptian tensions occurred during the Yemen crisis of 1962, characterized by a nationalist coup against the Yemeni monarchy. Egypt capitalized on the situation by supporting the Yemeni nationalists, while Saudi Arabia, along with the United Kingdom and Israel, sided with the royalists. Although the U.S. initially sought a compromise, it ultimately provided support to the Saudis. Concurrently, in this same period, Faisal successfully asserted his authority over his brother, King Saud, establishing himself as a pivotal figure in the decision-making process (Riedel, 2017).

The Republic of Egypt and the Soviet Union collaborated in providing assistance to the Yemeni nationalists. A significant turning point occurred following the death of Yemen's King, Imam Ahmad bin Yahya, in September 1962, which marked the onset of a new political era in the region. Egypt played a pivotal role in aiding Yemen in establishing

a fresh government led by Abdallah al Sallal. The nationalists and revolutionaries were resolute in their aim to expand their influence into Southern Yemen and Saudi Arabia, a development that deeply concerned both the Saudi kingdom and Britain, particularly due to Southern Yemen's status as a British colony. In response, Faisal opted to forge a coalition of states to support the royalists in Yemen. He directed his efforts toward garnering support from the Islamic world, Islamic institutions, and international Islamic summits to counteract the influence of the Arab nationalist movement. Concurrently, he consolidated his authority over his brother, King Saud. These initiatives were deemed indispensable for the Kingdom's survival (Riedel, 2017).

On October 5, 1962, Faisal and Kennedy convened at the White House. During their meeting, Faisal underscored the Soviet Union's military assistance to Egypt in support of the nationalist revolutionaries in Yemen, which he perceived as a menace to the stability of the Arabian Peninsula if the royalists were not assisted. In contrast, Kennedy proposed that the Kingdom's primary threat did not stem from Nasser's nationalist expansion, but rather from internal challenges, akin to those that had caused the downfall of previous Arab monarchies (Bass, 2003). Additionally, Kennedy affirmed the United States' readiness to offer aid and security to the Kingdom, regardless of whether the threat originated internally or externally (Kechichian, 2008).

Consequently, Faisal initiated a series of reforms encompassing various sectors and legislative changes. The monarchy imposed stringent taxes on slave ownership, aimed at gradually reducing this practice. These reforms extended to the restructuring of the religious police and the judiciary system. Additionally, the government ensured the availability of free medical care and education (Vassiliev, 2015). Collectively, these endeavors were perceived as Faisal's commitment to enhancing the efficiency of the monarchy's governmental apparatus in response to fundamental threats.

Furthermore, the confidential discussions between Kennedy and Faisal regarding the necessity of reforms in Saudi Arabia were viewed as pivotal moments that fortified and deepened the rapport between the House of Saud and the White House. According to Riedel (2017), "The president also employed discretion and tact; by presenting his case privately within the intimate confines of the White House family quarters, he spared Faisal from any public embarrassment" (p. 41). This underscored the significance of privacy and diplomacy in their relationship.

With the majority of King Saud's power and authority diminished, Faysal succeeded in positioning himself and his trusted associates in higher monarchical roles, with his brothers assuming positions as governors of major cities and heads of ministries (Yergin, 1991). This practice of placing and displacing loyalists was a customary tradition for each ruler of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Faysal terminated relations with Egypt and rekindled ties with the British Kingdom.

The Saudi leadership engaged in clandestine discussions with the British, seeking military support for the royalists in Yemen (Davis, 2011). Simultaneously, the Saudis reached out to the Israelis for military assistance, and the latter consented to provide official aid to the royalists in Yemen against Nasser (Bergman, 2015). Riedel (2017) observed that Saudi Arabia's collaboration with Israel was "a striking illustration of Saudi realpolitik in action and Faisal's readiness to engage with any partner to thwart Egypt in the early 1960s" (p. 42). Faysal's decision to collaborate with unexpected allies illustrated Saudi Arabia's prioritization of practical interests over ideological disparities.

In contrast to Britain and Israel, who aligned with the coalition, the United States opted for a diplomatic approach by engaging in dialogue with Nasser in an attempt to find a compromise. Kennedy proposed an arrangement wherein both Faysal and Nasser would

cease military support for their respective factions in Yemen. The U.S. dispatched a squadron of fighter aircraft to Faysal, with the condition that he withdraw from the Yemeni crisis. Although the Saudi leader agreed to this condition, convincing Nasser to accept a compromise proved exceedingly challenging, ultimately resulting in the failure of Kennedy's initiative (Ferris, 2013).

When Egypt initiated attacks on Saudi border towns, the United States deployed military jet fighters to safeguard the security of the Saudi kingdom. This mission continued for a duration of six months (Bass, 2003; Kechichian, 2008). Following Kennedy's assassination in 1963, President Lyndon Johnson persisted in pursuing dialogue with Egypt, but his approach mirrored that of his predecessor and proved ineffective. After a prolonged period of struggle, Saud officially abdicated the throne in 1964, handing it over to his brother Faysal (Kechichian, 2001). Nasser's defeat by Israel in 1967 left him eager for a peace agreement with the Saudis (Kechichian, 2008). Despite the initial American intent to maintain a neutral stance rather than siding with any party, the United States ultimately sided with Saudi Arabia.

In the subsequent era under U.S. President Lyndon Johnson and King Faisal, these leaders convened for the first time in June 1966 in Washington. They arrived at mutually agreeable terms pertaining to the Soviet Union's expansion and Nasser's sway over the Arab World. President Lyndon expressed his interest in the state of education within the kingdom. Notably, Washington increasingly held a deep appreciation for King Faisal's efforts and accomplishments in Saudi Arabia, perceiving him as a leader who had "transformed the Kingdom from an unstable regime ripe for revolution into a stable and reliable ally" (Riedel, 2017, p. 47). Additionally, the U.S. harbored the conviction that Saudi oil resources would propel substantial economic advancements (Office of the Historian, 1966).

It wasn't until the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967 that a significant shift occurred in international relations. Following his defeat, Nasser attributed his loss to the U.S. and the United Kingdom, accusing them of supplying weapons to Israel. In response to Nasser's accusations, Arab states collectively decided to curtail their oil exports to the U.S. and the UK. Saudi Arabia took the lead in negotiating an agreement with other Arab nations to lift the oil embargo during the Khartoum Arab summit, and both Faisal and Nasser publicly reconciled (Kechichian, 2008). The Arab oil embargo had a profound impact on Britain, prompting the British government to make a decision in January 1968 to withdraw its military forces from the east of Suez (Bryan, 2015). Following President Lyndon Johnson's term, the subsequent President, Richard Nixon, had to contend with the repercussions of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Riedel, 2017).

Richard Nixon came into office in 1969 and unlike former U.S. presidents, his foreign policy was not focused on affairs with the Arab world. Nixon was much occupied with the Vietnam war and the setting of ties with Russia and China. During his presidency, Israel was remarkably the strongest in the Middle East, while the Soviets favored the Arabs, the U.S. preferred Israel. Nixon adopted another ally in the region, Iran, the U.S. backed and armed both of Saudi Arabia and Iran with much more attention to the Iranian nation (Riedel, 2017).

However, King Faisal was remarkably occupied with the Arab-Israeli conflict and was determined to return Jerusalem to the Arab and Muslim control. Concretely, he highlighted his worry right after Nixon was elected the president of the U.S., he met with the American ambassador in 1969 and noted that Nixon's administration should take a fair approach toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Due to the Israeli victory in 1967, Arab states became less friendly to the U.S. for the Soviet Union became a better alternative. Faisal

mentioned the notable Soviet expansion and argued that Saudi Arabia was the only Arab nation that did not become a loyal ally to the Soviet Union (Department of State, 1969).

Furthermore, the Saudi leader noted his persistent decision to free Jerusalem from the Israeli occupation. He was determined to return east Jerusalem and reach a compromise with the Israelis, Faisal explained that the Arabs were willing to ally for such quest and any agreement that would not return east Jerusalem to the Arab and Muslim rule would not suffice (Department of State, 1969).

In October 1973, a direct military conflict erupted, but President Nixon was preoccupied with the Watergate scandal. Over the ensuing months, King Faisal began to issue direct threats to the U.S. He cautioned Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, that Saudi Arabia would reduce its oil exports unless the U.S. took action to address the Arab-Israeli conflict. In April 1973, Faisal dispatched his son, Saud al Faisal, and the Saudi Minister of Oil, Ahmed Zaki Yamani, to Washington. They made it clear that the U.S. needed to modify its policy toward Israel; otherwise, Faisal would employ oil as leverage against the U.S. (Kechichian, 2008).

Tensions escalated as the Soviets supplied military resources to support Syria and Egypt against Israel, prompting the U.S. to provide military aid to Israel in response. Subsequently, in that same month, the oil ministers from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries gathered to announce their intention to reduce oil exports to the U.S. They pledged to decrease exports by an additional five percent each month unless the Nixon administration adjusted its policy regarding Israel. However, when the U.S. announced a substantial package of military aid for Israel, Saudi Arabia fully cut its oil exports. The Kingdom also reduced oil exports to other countries supporting Israel, including South Africa, Rhodesia, Netherlands, and Portugal (Yergin, 1991). The oil

embargo evidently had significant repercussions on the American economy, persisting for a period of two years.

In November 1973, Kissinger traveled to Riyadh and extended an invitation to King Faisal for a summit in Washington with President Nixon. During their discussions, Nixon proposed that Faisal publicly announce the termination of the Arab oil embargo. However, Faisal ultimately declined this suggestion (Yergin, 2008). The embargo eventually came to an end in the spring of 1974, following the Israelis' decision to return a portion of Syrian territory (Riedel, 2017). King Faisal's steadfast refusal to prematurely end the embargo, paired with its eventual conclusion in 1974, significantly redefined global oil policy.

Faisal's reign was marked by his modernizing reforms, efforts to promote justice and welfare, attempts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, support for female education, and the limitation of religious officials' power. He was assassinated in March 1975 by his nephew Faisal bin Musaid, and his half-brother Khalid succeeded him as the King of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

2.4. King Khalid: The Men of the Desert 1975-1982

King Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the fifth son of King Abdulaziz, was born in February 1913 in Riyadh. He was raised under the careful guidance of his father, where he imbibed Islamic values, morals, and character that influenced his political personality and decision-making. At the age of 14, his father sent him on missions to gather complaints and represent the Saudi monarchy among desert tribes. In 1934, he participated in the Saudi expedition to Yemen alongside his brother Faisal (House of Saud, 2021).

Khalid, known as the "man of the desert," did not pursue education abroad but instead continued his exploration of desert tribes and involvement in desert projects. In Riyadh, he dedicated much of his time to charity work. These authentic experiences shaped his modest and calm reasoning nature, traits that were reinforced through his efforts in conflict resolution among royal families within the kingdom. Observing his personality, family members regarded him as the political figure Saudi Arabia aspired to be represented with. Therefore, when Faisal ascended to the throne, he appointed Khalid as Crown Prince, despite the potential capabilities and contributions of his brothers Fahd and Sultan (House of Saud, 2021).

In addition to his experiences, Khalid served as an assistant to Prince Faisal when he was the Foreign Minister and viceroy of Hijaz in 1930. In 1943, he visited the United States alongside his brother Faisal. In 1962, Khalid was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and later assumed the roles of Interior Minister and representative of Saudi Arabia in peace negotiations. He represented Saudi Arabia in various foreign missions, including visits to the United Nations. Consequently, he became an internationally recognized figure (House of Saud, 2021).

In 1965, King Faisal appointed Khalid as Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister after their brother Mohammed stepped aside from the royal succession. During this period, Khalid governed and organized the Council of Ministers and supervised the affairs of Makkah under the king's supervision. After the assassination of King Faisal, Khalid was declared the King of Saudi Arabia in March 1975, with the agreement of senior members of the Al Saud family (House of Saud, 2021).

Khalid initiated governmental decentralization as a reform measure, granting more political power to regional and municipal governors to decentralize government authority

and empower local political structures. In the bargain, he implemented measures to combat governmental corruption, including the establishment of the Control and Investigation Board agency to ensure transparency and accountability (Hamad, 2010).

Under Khalid's reign, Saudi Arabia achieved remarkable economic growth, becoming one of the wealthiest countries. He established the Ministry of Industry and Electricity and built industrial cities such as Jubail and Yanbu in 1975. The Second Five Year Plan (1975-1980) and a development plan with a budget of 250 million dollars were instituted to further infrastructural and healthcare developments, promote private entrepreneurship, and implement investment policies. Domestically, the kingdom initiated social welfare programs to improve the quality of the Saudi life, expand healthcare services, and provide social support, housing, and financial aid. The development of the army and the National Guard was also prioritized. Economic diversification and job creation were key goals (Rumayh, 2010).

Agricultural and environmental achievements were pursued through the modernization of agricultural techniques, agricultural research promotion, and the national consumption of wheat production. Efforts were made to address environmental protection, water scarcity, desertification, and wildlife conservation (Rumayh, 2010). Likewise, Khalid played a vital role in the support of Islamic charities both nationally and internationally, founding multiple organizations for humanitarian aid (Duraywish, 2010).

Education was a primary focus for King Khalid. He expanded educational opportunities and training programs, established King Faisal University in Dammam and Ummul Qurra in 1975, and improved education facilities. By 1980, there were 456 high schools, 1,377 secondary schools, and 5,373 elementary schools in Saudi Arabia. Women's

empowerment and female education were encouraged, enabling increased participation of women in sectors such as education, healthcare, and public administration (Fawzan, 2010).

U.S.-Saudi ties during Jimmy Carter's presidency and King Khalid's reign encountered significant challenges that tested their bond. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, U.S.-Saudi relations faced complex challenges involving oil pricing, regional tensions, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These events influenced diplomatic ties, leading to remarkable shifts during this period.

At the OPEC summit in Qatar in December 1976, Saudi Arabia opposed Iran's call for a hike in oil prices. To reinforce its stance on maintaining stable oil prices, the Kingdom even ramped up its oil production (Cooper, 2011). While Saudi Arabia hoped this decision would persuade the U.S. to broker a peace agreement regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, President Jimmy Carter remained resolute in seeking productive resolutions on the matter (Carter, 2010).

In November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made a groundbreaking visit to Jerusalem to address the Knesset. This move sparked significant public outrage in the Arab World. Many Arab nations berated Sadat for his initiative, interpreting his visit as an attempt to negotiate a peace deal with Israel specifically for the return of the Sinai desert, while leaving them to confront Israel on their own (Riedel, 2017). As for President Jimmy Carter, he traveled to Riyadh in January 1978 and met with King Khalid. However, the crux of the discussions, which included issues like oil policy, the Soviet presence in the Middle East, and arms deals, was delegated to Crown Prince Khalid (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977).

Conversely, in 1978, there was a mounting sense of unrest in Iran. Similar to other Middle Eastern states and monarchies, Iran's intricate history and social dynamics were

contributing to widespread social upheaval. This protest took the form of a national uprising, with support from the Iranian religious establishment and leadership by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The situation posed a significant concern for the United States because Iran had been an ally in the struggle against the Soviet Union and its Arab partner nations (Riedel, 2017).

In the fall of 1978, Carter hosted the Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in Camp David Maryland to negotiate peace initiatives. The summit resulted in the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty which consisted granting autonomy and for Palestinians who lived in Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In the Arab world, the agreement was perceived as a betrayal toward the Palestinian cause and Arab solidarity. An Arab summit was organized in November 1987 to discuss the Camp David agreement. Arab nations together with Saudi Arabia decided to freeze the Egyptian membership in the Arab League and urged Sadat to withdraw for the agreement for Camp David was considered harmful to the Palestinian cause (Riedel, 2017).

The unrest in Iran escalated rapidly and widely, with millions of Iranians taking to the streets to demand the abdication of the Shah. By the end of February, the monarchy was abolished, and an Islamic Republic was established under the leadership of Khomeini, who vowed to eliminate all monarchies in the Arab world (Riedel, 2017). Saudi Arabia remained convinced that the USSR was involved in a strategy to encircle the Kingdom, while the U.S. was not taking adequate steps to ensure Saudi security and stability (CIA, 1979). In response, in February 1979, U.S. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown visited Riyadh to affirm and strengthen military ties with the Kingdom. In March 1979, Sadat signed the peace treaty with Israel in Washington, which resulted in Arab states severing diplomatic relations with Egypt and suspending its membership in the Arab League (Riedel, 2017). As these events unfolded, U.S.-Saudi ties improved over time.

On November 20, 1979, hundreds of armed religious extremists launched an attack on the Holy mosque, the Kaaba, as they believed the Mahdi, an awaited figure who was believed to eradicate all forms of evil before the Final Day of Judgment, had arrived. The attack was orchestrated by two Saudis: Juhayman al Utaybi, a former soldier in the Saudi National Guard, and his brother, the self-proclaimed Mahdi, Muhamad Abdallah Qahtani. Juhayman held divergent views about the House of Saud due to perceived corruption and close ties with the U.S. (Hegghamer & Lacroix, 2011). With assistance from bin Laden's construction company, Saudi authorities obtained detailed plans of the mosque's structure, which enabled them to encircle the attackers (Sardar, 2014).

Subsequently, the Saudi royal family sought religious authorization from the ulema to employ force for the mosque's retrieval. A few days later, the religious shaykhs issued a religious decree permitting the Saudi authorities to use force to regain control of the mosque. With the assistance of the French, King Khalid successfully recaptured the mosque and apprehended the masterminds behind the attack (Trofimov, 2007). Juhayman was captured, while his brother perished in the battle. In 1980, sixty-three rebels were publicly executed, including forty-one Saudis, ten Egyptians, six individuals from South Yemen, three from Kuwait, and three from Sudan, Iraq, and North Yemen (Hegghamer & Lacroix, 2011). Although allegations were made about Iran's involvement in the attack, the Saudi Arabian embassy in Jeddah denied direct Iranian involvement or influence over the seizure of the mosque. The attackers did not have foreign support, indicating that it was a localized event (The Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 1979). The attack "unveiled the tension between the state and its own religion" (Al-Rasheed, 2002, p. 11).

On December 24, 1979, the USSR initiated a substantial airlift of troops into Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, officially declaring their invasion of the country. In the immediate aftermath of this invasion, President of Pakistan General Mohammad Zia ul

Haq reached out to King Khalid to discuss the matter. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Zia dispatched his intelligence chief to Riyadh, who presented a persuasive argument. He contended that the Soviet expansion into Afghanistan was a precursor to their efforts to advance into neighboring regions and, ultimately, to gain access to the oil resources in the Persian Gulf. The general's analysis proved compelling, prompting King Khalid to extend support to Pakistan (Nawaz, 2008).

For the U.S., President Carter convened a National Security Council meeting at the White House, during which he emphasized the necessity of providing aid to Afghanistan. The meeting concluded that Soviet expansion could potentially extend to other regions, including Iran and Pakistan (National Security Council, 1979). Additionally, the U.S. imposed sanctions on the Soviet Union in various domains, encompassing commerce, technology, and culture (Carter, 1979).

Within fourteen days of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the U.S. began delivering arms to the Afghan resistance (Cogan, 1993). Notably, the source of these supplies remained formally unacknowledged, primarily to conceal the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) involvement in this operation (Riedel, 2017). On December 28, 1979, President Carter reached out to the Pakistani President to establish collaboration against the menacing Soviet expansion in Afghanistan (Carter, 1979).

Consequently, with the support of Saudi Arabian Prince Saud al Faisal, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Agha Shahi, spearheaded an effort to denounce and condemn the Soviets in the United Nations General Assembly. This endeavor garnered the support of one hundred and four nations, constituting a significant success against the Soviets (Riedel, 2017). Of central significance, both the CIA and Saudi Intelligence collaborated in providing funding and support to the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), the

Pakistani intelligence agency, for clandestine assistance to the mujahidin (Brzezinski, 1983). The Saudi involvement in this endeavor marked their perception of the Soviets as a genuine threat.

In 1982, Pakistan deployed an armored brigade in Saudi Arabia, specifically in Tabuk. The primary purpose of this deployment was to safeguard the northwestern region of the kingdom against a potential Israeli invasion. This move also aimed to provide protection for the Saudi royal family. Shuja Nawaz (2008) contended that the brigade served as an alternative safeguard in the event that the U.S. proved to be an unreliable protector.

On January 23, 1980, President Carter publicly highlighted the significance of the Middle East in the context of the Soviet threat. He underscored that the region, where "more than two-thirds of the world's exploitable oil" (Carter, 1980) was located, was under imminent danger due to the Soviet Union's persistent attempts to expand its influence and control. Recognizing the need to preserve the security of this crucial area, Carter made a decisive statement:

"Let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by all means necessary, including military force." (Carter, 1980)

This declaration by Carter reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to safeguarding Saudi Arabia due to its vital interests in the region.

The Afghan cause gained popularity in Saudi Arabia, particularly because the Kingdom permitted private fundraising efforts (Tomsen, 2011). One of these volunteers

was Osama bin Laden, the son of the owner of the wealthiest construction company in Saudi Arabia. In 1979, Osama became involved with the Pakistani resistance. Initially, he served as a conduit for private Saudi funding from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Later, in 1985, with the assistance of Saudi donors and his family's construction firm, bin Laden established a base camp known as Zahwar for the purpose of waging Jihad against the Soviet Union. Two years after this, Osama initiated attacks on Soviet troops along the Pakistani border (Scheuer, 2011).

In September 1980, a conflict erupted between Iran and Iraq along their borders, resulting in the Iraqi invasion of Iran. The U.S. aimed to contain the war and prevent its expansion into the Gulf region, while Saudi Arabia supported the Iraqi offensive. By 1980, the Iranian Republic persistently called for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy (Matthiesen, 2015). The CIA warned President Carter that Iran might launch an attack against Saudi Arabia, prompting Carter to agree to provide military support to Saudi Arabia in case the CIA's assessment materialized (Riedel, 2017).

At the beginning of the Iranian-Iraqi conflict the Saudi support was diplomatic, mainly in the United Nations, also, the kingdom urged other Arab and Muslim countries to suspend diplomatic ties with Iran. The support became concrete in May 1981, when king Khaled formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the summit of six Gulf states for the establishment of closer intelligence cooperation. The invasion resulted in the Iranian victory over Iraq in the beginning of 1982. Later in June 1982, King Khalid passed way (Riedel, 2017).

During Khalid's reign, fundamental reforms were initiated, although they were challenged by the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Makkah in 1979. The event had a profound impact on the religious foundation of Saudi Arabia, resulting in tighter religious

policies. The religious reforms initiated after the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia aimed to combat extremism, preserve religious traditions, and promote social stability. Examples of these reforms included the enforcement of stricter dress codes, with women required to wear abayas (loose-fitting robes) and men encouraged to wear traditional attire. Further, there was an increased segregation of men and women in public spaces, with separate areas designated for each gender (Fanack, 2012).

The government introduced stricter regulations on public behavior, including the prohibition of public entertainment and the closure of cinemas. At the same time, efforts were made to counter extremism through the establishment of educational programs promoting moderate interpretations of Islam and engaging in dialogue with religious scholars. These paradoxical reforms evidenced the Saudi traumatic response toward the seizure, it reflected a combination of stricter measures to uphold religious values and efforts to promote a more moderate understanding of Islam (Fanack, 2012).

Despite the chaos, Khalid remained committed to the protection of the state, adhering to Islamic teachings, and respecting the rules of the Arab League and the United Nations. His distinguishing character, the economic prosperity he fostered, and his fulfillment of religious duties on a national and international level gained him significant popularity among the population, particularly with the Bedouins (Al-Madkhali, 2007).

However, Khalid's reign did not end as planned. Suffering from heart ailments, he passed on the monarchical responsibilities to Crown Prince Fahd. In 1982, he suffered a severe heart attack and gradually experienced declining health until his sudden death in June 1982 from another heart attack. Prince Fahd succeeded him to the throne (House of Saud, n.d.).

2.5. King Fahd: The 'Pro-Western' Ruler 1982-2005

This state was set upon a clear course of politics and government. It was committed to propagating Islam and to fostering a sense of community (King Fahd, 1992).

Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the eighth son of Abdulaziz and the eldest of the Sudairi Seven, was born to King Abdulaziz and Hassa bint Ahmed Al Sudairi. Hassa, a favored wife of Ibn Saud, belonged to the Al Sudairi family of Nejd, and her father, Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sudairi, supported King Abdulaziz in conquering Saudi Arabia. Her sons formed a powerful alliance within the Royal family. Fahd received his education at the Prince's School in Riyadh and studied Wahhabi Islam at the Religious Knowledge Institute in Makkah (House of Saud, 2021).

After completing his studies, Fahd assumed various monarchical roles. He served as the Minister of Education during the reign of King Saud from 1953 to 1962, Minister of Interior from 1962 to 1975, Second Deputy Premier in 1976, and became the Crown Prince after Khalid succeeded to the throne following King Faisal's assassination in 1975. Due to King Khalid's unstable health, Fahd assumed much of the country's administration. Eventually, he succeeded to the throne in 1983 upon King Khalid's death (House of Saud, 2021).

During his tenure as Minister of Education, Fahd expanded and formalized the system of public elementary and secondary education in 1953. Under King Faisal's reign, he established several supreme councils related to national security, oil affairs, and education. Also, he also participated in various international events and projects, such as attending the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1954, visiting the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and leading the Saudi delegation to the League of Arab States in 1959. As the First Deputy Prime Minister, Fahd actively supported the kingdom's Second Five Year Development Plan from 1975 to 1980 and played a key role in the formation of the

Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981, which aimed to unify economic, defense, and industry policies among Gulf states (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

During Fahd's reign, Saudi Arabia underwent significant modernization and rapid infrastructural development. The oil economic boom of the 1970s facilitated the construction of industrial and residential complexes, universities, hospitals, highways, and airports. Fahd promoted economic liberalization and foreign investment, initiating privatization policies to transfer state-owned enterprises to the private sector. He established the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) in 2000 to promote domestic and foreign investment and brought in Western-trained technicians to oversee economic diversification efforts (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

Industrial development projects focused on construction, manufacturing, and petrochemicals, aiming to diversify the economy and generate economic profit. Additionally, infrastructural development targeted the media and communication sector to improve access to news, educational programs, and cultural content. The number of television and radio networks increased to enhance the role of the press (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

Fahd continued the expansion of educational opportunities, offering scholarships for students to study abroad and introducing new subjects like humanities, science, and technology in the Saudi curricula. Furthermore, he modernized healthcare centers, especially in rural areas, and provided assistance to financially deprived families and disabled citizens. Fahd supported female empowerment, furthering previous reforms to grant women the right to education, employment, and social participation (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

Often, King Fahd's reign was referred to as the period that transformed Saudi Arabia from a collection of desert tribes into a modern force. In 1992, he decreed the Basic Law of Governance, which defined the system of rule as a monarchy and established guidelines for rulers based on the restrictions of the Quran and Sunna. The law emphasized allegiance to the ruler and the importance of family, Islam, and the national spirit. Fahd also implemented counterterrorism measures, improved Makkah's infrastructure for Hajj management, and played a significant role in the advancement of Islamic banking and finance. He engaged actively in humanitarian initiatives and provided aid to needy nations (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

Due to his close affiliation with the United States, Fahd was widely perceived as a pro-Western Arab leader. Following the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David peace accord, Saudi Arabia harbored concerns that Israel might engage in military conflicts with its Arab neighbors to establish regional dominance. Additionally, the Saudis suspected that Israel was planning to eliminate the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon to further its influence in the Middle East (Riedel, 2017).

On June 7, 1981, the Israeli Air Force conducted an airstrike on Iraqi nuclear reactors situated outside Baghdad. During this operation, the Israeli fighters transited through Saudi airspace to reach their intended target. U.S. President Ronald Reagan, while expressing disapproval, did not take a decisive stance on the attack. Faced with such a security threat, the Saudi government procured \$8.5 billion worth of military equipment from the United States (Ottaway, 2008).

On June 3, 1982, an assassination attempt was orchestrated against the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov, in London. While the plot ultimately failed, the ambassador suffered severe injuries (Joffe, 2003). Subsequent investigations

implicated the Iraqis as the culprits behind the plot, viewing it as a form of retaliation for the Israeli attacks on the Iraqi nuclear reactor. Although the responsibility for the assassination attempt lay with Iraq, particularly members of the Abu Nidal organization, an Iraqi-based Palestinian group in opposition to the PLO, Israel solely blamed the PLO. In response, on June 6, Israel initiated an invasion of Lebanon (Schiff & Ya'ari, 1984).

King Fahd ascended to the throne just one week after the invasion. He urged President Ronald Reagan to restrain Israeli expansion, but Reagan's initial response was passive. It was only when the Israeli army began to besiege the PLO in West Beirut that Reagan pressured the Israeli President, Menachem Begin, to agree to a ceasefire. Subsequently, on September 1, 1982, Reagan called for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, Begin rejected Reagan's call. On September 8, King Fahd convened an Arab summit in Morocco to discuss a peace plan for the full withdrawal of Israel from these territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. This proposition was warmly received by the Arab nations (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987).

On the other front, the Iraqi-Iranian war of 1980 was drawing to a close, with Iran successfully repelling the Iraqi army from its territory. As Saddam's military began to crumble, Iran gained the upper hand. In light of Iran's victory, the CIA harbored suspicions that Iranian ambitions might extend to other regions, potentially involving the establishment of an Islamic Shia state in Iraq. Furthermore, there were concerns that Iran might seek to control the Persian Gulf and its oil reserves through collaboration with Shia groups. In response, President Reagan authorized the sharing of this intelligence with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to assist in halting the Iranian offensive. The U.S. assured its support for this effort (Blight et al., 2012). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also played a substantial role in sponsoring Saddam's regime, offering significant financial support to

help him combat Iran (Picco, 1999). Through this funding and collaboration with U.S. intelligence, Saddam managed to halt Iran's advance, leading to a prolonged war and ultimately a stalemate (Ward, 2009).

Riedel (2017) contended that these crises served to bring Reagan and King Fahd closer together. The U.S. successfully persuaded Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, aided Iraq in curbing Iranian ambitions, and received financial support from Fahd for Reagan's global anti-Soviet campaign. Moreover, both nations continued their collaboration in Afghanistan to counter the Soviet presence and facilitate their evacuation from the region.

In February 1985, King Fahd paid a visit to President Ronald Reagan in Washington. Their discussions on the Palestinian issue and its significance for Middle East stability were unproductive. However, they found common ground in exerting pressure on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan to bring an end to the Cold War (Rashid & Shaheen, 1987). The United States increased its military support in Afghanistan, while Saudi Arabia continued to provide financial assistance and facilitate the flow of Muslim volunteers for Jihad in the region. Ultimately, in 1988, Russia withdrew from Afghanistan, and within a few months, the Berlin Wall fell, the Warsaw Pact disintegrated, and the Cold War came to a conclusion (Gates, 1996).

King Fahd expressed a desire to sign another arms deal with the Reagan administration, but this request was ultimately denied. As an alternative, Fahd turned to the United Kingdom, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sold Saudi Arabia arms worth eighty-six billion dollars (Ottaway, 2008). On June 5, 1984, two Iranian jet fighters entered Saudi airspace, prompting the Saudi Royal Air Force to shoot them down. In response, Saudi Arabia dispatched additional jets, leading to further confrontations in

which Saudi Arabia destroyed more Iranian aircraft. Subsequently, the Iranian jets retreated to their base (Riedel, 2017).

On October 1, 1985, Israel launched an attack on the headquarters in Tunisia where PLO leaders were residing. Saudi Arabia perceived this attack as a potential threat to its borders, given the considerable distance between Tunis and Israel that Israeli advanced jet fighters had managed to cover. Consequently, the kingdom decided to purchase advanced weaponry from China to safeguard its territory from the ongoing turbulence in the Middle East. In December 1986, Saudi Arabia and China formalized an arms deal, with China supplying advanced intermediate-range ballistic missiles to King Fahd (Bin Sultan & Seale, 1995). The CIA became aware of the missile base and strongly recommended that Fahd return them, but Fahd refused (Ottaway, 2008).

Around the same time, after an Iranian-supported terrorist group, Hezbollah, took American hostages in Lebanon, the United States and Iran negotiated a deal. In exchange for Iran's assistance in freeing these hostages, the U.S. was expected to enter into an arms deal with Iran (1986). Furthermore, Israel sought to reestablish close ties with Iran, reviving a relationship that had been robust when Iran was a monarchy. Israel had been a major supplier of arms to Iran during its conflict with Iraq and had even convinced the Reagan administration to provide arms to Khomeini's government at that time (Blight et al., 2012).

The Gulf War escalated as Iran and Iraq initiated attacks on each other's oil tankers. In response to Kuwait's request for protection, the United States agreed to safeguard Kuwaiti oil tankers. This decision was justified by Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, who articulated that the United States should be viewed as supportive of Iraq in this context. Weinberger's rationale was rooted in the belief that this presented an

opportunity for the United States to regain some of its standing in the region and restore its credibility with the Arab states (Blight et al., 2012, p. 324). The U.S. aimed to position itself as a stabilizing force in the Gulf and to strengthen its ties with Arab nations.

Signs of Iraq's progress in the war became evident, particularly with the assistance of American intelligence. In this climate, Iran initiated subversive attacks on Saudi Arabia. In July 1987, during the Hajj pilgrimage in Makkah, Iranian pilgrims engaged in violent acts that led to the deaths of two hundred and seventy-five Iranian pilgrims and about eighty-five Saudi policemen. Additionally, the Saudi embassy in Iran was attacked, and Iranian President Khomeini called for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy. In August 1987, the Iranian-supported terrorist group Hezbollah al Hijaz, which consisted of Saudi Shia Muslims, targeted a Saudi oil facility in the Eastern Province. This was followed by further attacks, including strikes on Saudi oil installations and the Dhahran air base, as well as Hezbollah al-Hijaz's assault on Saudi diplomats. Consequently, Saudi Arabia responded by suspending diplomatic relations with Iran (Matthiesen, 2015).

With the support of external forces, Saddam Hussein managed to secure a victory over Iran. Iran had been ready for a ceasefire by July 1988, but Saddam was not prepared to relinquish his gains until the United Nations and King Fahd persuaded him to formally end the war on July 18th. The war resulted in significant losses, with half a million deaths and costs exceeding a trillion dollars. It also strained the relationship between King Fahd and President Reagan (Riedel, 2017).

On February 16, 1990, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and Egypt established an alliance known as the Arab Cooperation Council. During the first summit of this cooperation, Saddam Hussein issued threats against Israel, and shortly afterward, the CIA detected a set

of long-range missiles aimed at Tel Aviv. For Saudi Arabia, this alliance appeared to be anti-Saudi, particularly due to the inclusion of Yemen (Heikal, 1992).

During a visit to Riyadh on March 17, 1990, Saddam Hussein expressed his concerns to King Fahd regarding the plummeting oil prices and Kuwait's significant increase in oil production, which was contributing to severe price declines and inflation in Iraq. Saddam Hussein also clarified that the placement of missiles pointed toward Tel Aviv was not intended for an attack on the Israeli capital but rather as a defensive measure against the Israeli threat (Heikal, 1992).

On July 17, 1990, Saddam Hussein publicly threatened Kuwait, and American intelligence had detected Iraqi forces positioned north of Kuwait (Pollack, 2002). In response to these concerning developments, President George H. W. Bush contacted key Arab leaders and warned them about the potential for an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Arab leaders initially had doubts about this information, but they organized a meeting between Iraq and Kuwait in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The meeting didn't yield any significant results, as Iraq demanded the removal of its war debt and financial support from Kuwait for reparations of war damage. Kuwait rejected these demands, and the meeting ended (Bush & Scowcroft, 1998).

On August 2, 1990, Iraq launched a full-scale invasion of Kuwait. This invasion took the world by surprise, and the United States perceived Saddam's aggression as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. In order to safeguard American interests, the U.S. offered to provide full military protection to Saudi Arabia. After a period of persuasion, King Fahd accepted the offer, and this marked the beginning of Operation Desert Shield (Pollack, 2002).

While the presence of American military troops in Saudi Arabia was seen as necessary for security reasons, it was met with opposition from some segments of the religious community who viewed the United States as a greater evil than Saddam, considering it a threat to Muslim values (Al-Rasheed, 2002). Additionally, Osama bin Laden had proposed to the Saudi royal court his intention to support jihadism and fight for Kuwait, but his request was rejected (Bin Sultan & Seale, 1995).

While Saudi Arabia remained secure, Kuwait was suffering from a troubling invasion. In response to this crisis, Bush and Fahd agreed to liberate Kuwait. King Fahd formed a coalition of Arab states, with thousands of troops from countries like Syria, Morocco, and Egypt gathering in Saudi Arabia. In late November, President Bush visited the kingdom, and during their meeting, they discussed Saddam's aggression and devised a plan for Operation Desert Storm (Bin Sultan & Seale, 1995). Operation Desert Storm commenced on January 17, 1991. During the course of the war, Iraq launched missile attacks against both Saudi Arabia and Israel. These attacks resulted in the unfortunate deaths of twenty-eight American soldiers and two Israelis (Lewis et al., 1993). The war ultimately concluded with a ceasefire following a ground campaign.

After the Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush's administration pursued peace initiatives and diplomatic endeavors to address the Arab-Israeli conflict. In October 1991, a peace conference was organized, bringing together Israel and its neighboring countries in an attempt to reach a resolution. Unfortunately, the conference did not lead to any significant progress in resolving the long-standing conflict. In conclusion, while the Kuwait war had served to strengthen the bonds between Saudi Arabia and the United States, it also revealed Saudi Arabia's vulnerabilities and weaknesses. The conflict underscored that despite its significant military capabilities and international alliances,

Saudi Arabia was not immune to external threats and challenges. As Bruce Riedel (2017) pointed:

“One consequence of this vulnerability was a renewed Saudi effort to build legitimacy by exporting its own brand of Islam to the world. Fahd expanded Faisal’s support for mosques and educational establishments across Europe, Africa, and Asia after the Kuwait war. This was one way to answer the domestic critics of his decision to turn to Bush for help in 1990.” (p, 111, 112)

This realization prompted Saudi Arabia to pursue various strategies, including expanding its influence through the promotion of its brand of Islam globally, to enhance its regional and international standing and to address its perceived vulnerabilities.

The Second Gulf War, also known as the Iraq War, took place from 2003 to 2011 and had significant implications for the United States and its relationship with Saudi Arabia, as well as regional dynamics. President George W. Bush's administration initiated the war with the main goal of ousting Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and addressing concerns regarding potential weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Saudi Arabia, a crucial U.S. ally in the region, provided vital logistical support, including access to military bases, airspace, and intelligence cooperation, to facilitate the U.S.-led invasion. Saudi Arabia's support for the war was motivated by its concerns over Saddam Hussein's destabilizing influence in the region and its desire to maintain strong ties with the United States (Pfiffner, 2010).

The consequences of the Second Gulf War were profound for both the United States and Saudi Arabia. While the initial military campaign successfully removed Saddam Hussein from power, the aftermath of the war unleashed a prolonged period of instability and sectarian violence in Iraq. This instability contributed to the emergence of insurgent

groups and a subsequent power vacuum. The war also strained the bilateral relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, as it generated anti-American sentiments in the region, including within Saudi Arabia's population. Furthermore, the war's aftermath witnessed a resurgence of regional power struggles. Iran sought to increase its influence in Iraq and the broader Middle East, further complicating regional dynamics and heightening tensions in the Gulf (Zoubir & Hamadouche, 2007).

The Second Gulf War, as well as its prolonged aftermath of instability in Iraq and the subsequent strain in U.S.-Saudi ties, were key factors that shaped Osama bin Laden's motivations leading up to the 9/11 attacks profoundly. Bin Laden capitalized on the widespread resentment stemming from the U.S. intervention in Iraq, framing it as a direct occupation of Muslim lands. This narrative acted as a potent rallying point, aiding in recruiting and radicalizing individuals who were already sympathetic to his extremist views. They saw the continued U.S. military presence in the region as a stark manifestation of Western hostility. In addition to the fallout from the Iraq War, bin Laden was deeply opposed to several other U.S. policies in the Middle East, including its support for what he deemed as oppressive regimes and its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These grievances further amplified his extremist agenda (Bahgat, 2004).

Leveraging a narrative that presented a supposed "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, bin Laden portrayed the 9/11 attacks as part of a broader struggle, reinforcing the idea of a confrontational dichotomy (Condit, 2018). Furthermore, bin Laden's selection of the World Trade Center towers as targets wasn't arbitrary; they stood as potent symbols of American economic and military might. This intricate web of geopolitical factors, ideological motivations, and strategic considerations informed bin Laden's fateful decision to execute the 9/11 attacks, events that reshaped global history.

Despite these challenges, US-Saudi relations remained strong, with both countries working together to promote regional stability and protect their oil interests. King Fahd's health began to decline in the early 1990s, and he suffered two debilitating strokes in 1995 and 1996, rendering him unable to perform official duties. Crown Prince Abdullah served as the de facto leader of the kingdom until Fahd's death in 2005 (Riedel, 2017).

2.6. King Abdullah: The Unexpected Reformer 2002-2015

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the tenth son of King Abdulaziz, was born in August 1924. His mother belonged to the Al Rashid dynasty, the historical rival of the Al Saud dynasty. Throughout his lifetime, Abdullah held several significant positions, including mayor of Makkah in 1961, Commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard in 1962, Deputy Defense Minister, Prime Minister, and Crown Prince in 1982, when his half-brother Fahd ascended to the throne. In 1995, King Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke, and Abdullah became the de facto ruler of the kingdom until he officially assumed the throne after King Fahd's death in 2005 (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

During Abdullah's reign, substantial political reforms were implemented. Calls for political participation led the King to initiate the first municipal elections and modify succession policies. For the first time, the Allegiance Commission, a formal council of Saudi princes, was tasked with selecting the next Crown Prince, ensuring a smooth transition of power. In February 2009, Abdullah enacted broad governmental changes, affecting the judiciary, armed forces, and various ministries. Notably, senior individuals within the judiciary and the religious police were replaced with more moderate figures. These reforms aimed to combat corruption and promote transparency. Recognizing Saudi Arabia's heavy reliance on oil, Abdullah implemented economic reforms, including foreign

investment, privatization, and limited deregulation. The King launched the King Abdullah Economic City project to attract domestic and foreign investors and develop sectors such as tourism, industry, and finance. He also promoted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

Socially, Abdullah's reign witnessed advancements for women's rights. Women were granted the right to vote for municipal councils, compete in the Olympics, and participate in the workforce. The first female members were appointed to the Shura Council, an advisory body to the government. Restrictions on women's access to education and healthcare services were eased, and the establishment of King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) allowed women to pursue higher education and research (Women's Cultural Forum in Jeddah, n.d.). Abdullah initiated the "Saudization" program to reduce reliance on foreign workers and create employment opportunities for Saudi citizens. The expansion of social services improved the overall quality of life in the Kingdom. In addition, the King supported the growth of Saudi Arabia's arts and culture, backing the creation of exhibitions, festivals, and artistic events. Initiatives were launched to commemorate and revive the Saudi culture, including folklore, music, and traditional arts. The establishment of Ithra, also known as the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, aimed to encourage cross-cultural dialogue and artistic expression (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

Religious reforms constituted a significant focus for King Abdullah. He engaged in discussions with Muslim religious experts to promote tolerant and moderate interpretations of Islam. The goal was to foster a more open and progressive understanding of religion while combating extremism. Efforts were made to promote social cohesion and counter radicalism, including taking decisive action against terrorism both inside and outside Saudi

Arabia. The Kingdom collaborated actively with other nations in intelligence sharing and combating terrorist finance (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

In terms of educational reforms, King Abdullah prioritized raising the standard of instruction and equipping Saudi students with skills relevant to the modern workforce. He established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, enabling numerous Saudi youths to pursue higher education overseas. Additionally, efforts were made to enhance the national education system through curriculum improvements and teacher training programs. The King aimed to contain Islamist influences, especially in response to growing anti-Saudi and anti-Western sentiments in neighboring countries (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

Likewise, Abdullah initiated various humanitarian and culturally tolerant initiatives. He established the Human Rights Commission to protect and support human rights within the Kingdom and founded the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Foundation for Humanitarian Works and Charitable Activities. This foundation supported numerous charitable projects inside and outside Saudi Arabia, focusing on education, healthcare services, and poverty alleviation. In an effort to foster freedom of expression, the press sector was expanded, and the Al Arabiya news channel was established to promote independent media and diversify viewpoints (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

Internationally, King Abdullah played a key role in the development of interfaith communication and religious tolerance. He spearheaded the construction of the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue to promote understanding and collaboration across different religions and cultures. These efforts were

seen as significant steps toward the promotion of world peace and understanding (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Biography and Documentation Center, n.d.).

During King Abdullah's reign, he interacted with three U.S. administrations: Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. Each of these administrations had distinctive Middle East policies. Under Bill Clinton's administration, the U.S. pursued a multifaceted approach in the Middle East. This approach involved peace initiatives aimed at fostering better relations between Middle Eastern countries and Israel. Simultaneously, it focused on containing both Iran and Iraq. This strategic policy was viewed as an attempt to strike a balance between promoting peace and intervening when necessary (Riedel, 2017).

At the beginning of Clinton's term, the Madrid peace process had reached an impasse. However, behind the scenes, a secret dialogue between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was taking place in Oslo, Norway. This clandestine negotiation culminated in the Oslo Accords of 1993, which proved to be a significant breakthrough. The Oslo Accords led to mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, and Israel's commitment to withdraw from much of the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho in the West Bank. While the U.S. was not directly involved in the secret negotiations, it hosted a signing ceremony at the White House, officially cementing the Oslo Agreement (Riedel, 2017).

The Oslo Agreement opened the door to further peace efforts in the Middle East. In 1994, the agreement contributed to the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. The two parties engaged in secret discussions, and after the treaty was negotiated, President Bill Clinton was invited to the signing ceremony in Jordan (Halevy, 2006). A year later, King Fahd's health deteriorated due to a stroke, rendering him unable to lead the kingdom. Crown Prince Abdullah assumed leadership. Like his brother, King Abdullah was an implicit

supporter of peace initiatives between Israel and the Arab world. In 1999, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian President Hafez Assad agreed to pursue a peace treaty. However, this endeavor failed due to disagreements between Syria and Israel concerning the demarcation of their borders (Clinton, 2004). In March 2000, Saudi Arabia played a role in initiating another peace deal between Syria and Israel in Geneva, Switzerland. Saudi Arabia convinced Syria to be part of this initiative, but the effort once again faltered because of Assad's disagreement with Barak over border issues (Indyk, 2009).

In July 2000, President Clinton organized a summit for peacemaking between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. Regrettably, the summit failed as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak could not reach a consensus on the critical issues raised during the summit. The breakdown of this summit marked the beginning of a new wave of violence in the West Bank and Gaza, signifying the start of the Palestinian uprising, also known as the intifada, in the territories occupied by Israel (Riedel, 2017).

By the end of his administration in 2001, President Clinton proposed another peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Saudi Arabia convinced Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to accept the initiative, but Clinton's attempt failed because the parties were fundamentally at crossroads during that time (Clinton, 2004). On the other hand, Crown Prince Abdullah and President Clinton continued to address the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. In a significant operation, when former U.S. President George H. W. Bush visited Kuwait in 1993 to commemorate the second anniversary of its liberation, the Kuwaiti authorities discovered that Iraq had planted a large car bomb in an attempt to assassinate Bush (Riedel, 2017).

In response to this threat, in June 1993, President Clinton launched twenty-three cruise missiles to attack the areas of the Iraqi intelligence that had plotted the assassination in Baghdad. In October 1994, Saddam Hussein threatened another invasion of Kuwait. A significant number of Iraqi troops and tanks were positioned at the northern border of Kuwait. Clinton responded by sending three hundred and fifty aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to deter Saddam and his tanks. The U.S. was determined to confront Saddam, and eventually, Iraq canceled its plan and officially accepted the UN-demarcated borders (Indyk, 2009).

During Clinton's second term, Saddam Hussein interfered with the UN weapons inspection process. By December 1998, the United States and the United Kingdom initiated Operation Desert Fox. This four-day bombing campaign was launched from bases in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and targeted various sites, including command centers, Republican Guard units, nineteen intelligence facilities, and six airfields (Pollack, 2002). The Saudi Dhahran air base was vital for the facilitation of U.S. access and operations in the region (Riedel, 2017).

On the twenty-fifth of June 1996, the Dhahran air base was attacked by a group of terrorists from the Saudi Hezbollah, who used a large truck bomb. This attack resulted in significant casualties, including the deaths of nineteen air force personnel and injuries to three hundred and seventy-two others, along with hundreds of Saudi citizens in a nearby town. Although the attack was believed to be the work of Iranian operatives, Saudi Arabia was hesitant to share detailed information with the White House due to concerns about potential consequences (Riedel, 2017). By the end of 1996, the United States constructed another air base, the Prince Sultan Air Base, located in the desert some distance from the capital, Riyadh (Ottaway, 2008).

Gradually, Saudi Arabia released information officially attributing the attack on the Dhahran air base to Saudi Hezbollah, also known as Hezbollah al Hijaz. Some of the terrorists involved confessed to receiving support from the Iranian intelligence service and their involvement in additional plots in various locations with other members of Saudi Hezbollah (Teitelbaum, 2000). Once the investigation yielded sufficient clarity, the White House took action, initiating Operation Sapphire in 1997. This successful operation was aimed at disrupting Iranian Intelligence service plots around the world (Slavin, 2004).

In the summer of 1997, Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami was elected as the president of Iran. Khatami held different views from his predecessors, advocating for the establishment of closer and improved ties with the United States and the reduction of tensions with the Arab world. Saudi Arabia and Iran, driven by this changing landscape, signed a security cooperation agreement in 1999. Furthermore, Crown Prince Abdullah took the step of sending a Shia ambassador to Iran (Maloney, 2015).

Clinton, as well, displayed optimism for a new beginning in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Through Crown Prince Abdullah and Khatami, he conveyed his desire to welcome a transformation in Iranian-Saudi ties and urged Iran to establish a direct diplomatic channel with Washington. In June 1999, Clinton sent a message to Khatami through the Sultan of Oman, emphasizing the U.S.'s awareness of Iran's involvement in the Dhahran terrorist attack. The message called on Khatami to cease any further terrorist plots against American targets and to conduct a thorough investigation into the Dhahran incident for the sake of justice. By July 1999, Khatami received the message, and while he denied any involvement, he expressed his commitment to opening an investigation. Unfortunately, Clinton became preoccupied with other matters, and the dialogue did not progress (Riedel, 2017).

Riedel (2017) noted that "Abdallah's close ties with Clinton had a price, helping exacerbate the tensions between extremists and the Kingdom" (p. 127). Indeed, amid these external issues, Abdullah was unaware that a significant layer of extremism had been evolving within the kingdom. In December 1994, Osama bin Laden sent an open letter to Mufti Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Baz of Saudi Arabia. In this letter, bin Laden criticized the Arab and Saudi stance on the Palestinian issue, particularly their acceptance of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Oslo Accord. He condemned the religious authorities in the kingdom for allowing such agreements and accused the House of Saud of betraying Palestine and the Muslim world. Bin Laden also condemned the settlement of American troops in the kingdom in the 1990s and the Saudi support for the Oslo Accord, viewing these actions as traitorous (Lawrence, 2005).

On August 7, 1998, al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's terrorist group, launched attacks on two U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, resulting in the deaths and injuries of both Americans and local residents. Additionally, there were two unsuccessful attempts to attack American embassies in Tirana and Albania. Following a thorough U.S. investigation, it became clear to Washington that it was imperative to address the al Qaeda threat. Shortly thereafter, Clinton ordered missile strikes on al Qaeda's training camp, with the specific intention of targeting bin Laden. While the strikes resulted in the death of several al Qaeda members, the primary target, bin Laden, remained alive (Clinton, 2004).

Although Saudi Arabia did not view bin Laden as a significant concern as the U.S. did, they were supportive of the American campaign to dismantle the al Qaeda group. Saudi Prince Turki visited Pakistan in an attempt to establish a dialogue or gather information, but the visit did not yield substantial results (Riedel, 2017). In October 2000, al Qaeda carried out an attack on a U.S. navy destroyer in Aden, Yemen. Riedel (2017) further observed that despite the growing popularity of al Qaeda within the kingdom and

the group's successive attacks, neither Saudi Arabia nor the United States recognized the gravity of the situation. Bill Clinton's second term ended, and George W. Bush assumed the presidency.

Amid the continuing importance of Saudi Arabia for the White House, President Bush sought a meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah to further strengthen U.S.-Saudi relations. However, Abdullah's response was resolute. He declined Bush's request and called on the U.S. to take action on the Palestinian issue, urging measures to halt the violence between Palestine and Israel, end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and laid out plans for framing a peace deal to be proposed the following year in 2002 (Riedel, 2017).

In March 2001, American Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Saudi Arabia and extended an invitation to Crown Prince Abdullah to visit the United States. However, Abdullah once again refused and emphasized that Washington needed to take action on the Palestinian issue (Riedel, 2017). Another meeting took place in June, during which Powell and Abdullah engaged in a discussion about Israel. The Crown Prince pointed out that the U.S. supplied weapons to Israel and, as a major player in the region, the United States bore a significant responsibility for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Abrams, 2013). Abdullah's firm stance on these matters remained evident in August when he canceled a crucial military visit to the United States (Ottaway, 2000).

Subsequently, Crown Prince Abdullah conveyed his dissatisfaction with the American position on the Palestinian-Israeli issue by sending a letter to President Bush. He expressed his frustration that the Bush administration had not adequately considered Arab interests, despite Saudi Arabia's consistent consideration of American interests, particularly concerning oil supply and prices (Muasher, 2008). In response, by September 2001,

President Bush sent a letter to Abdullah, assuring his commitment to resolving the Palestinian issue and emphasizing America's determination to contribute to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (Abrams, 2013). Abdullah found this letter convincing, and it helped resolve the issue (Ottaway, 2000).

Shortly after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, where Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda orchestrated the hijacking of aircraft and attacked the World Trade Center, Saudi Arabia extended its full sympathy to the United States. Crown Prince Abdullah expressed his support for the American decision to invade Afghanistan. However, in the aftermath of the attacks, the media began to point fingers at Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism (Riedel, 2017).

On November 10, 2001, President Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly. In his speech, he specifically mentioned the Taliban, al Qaeda, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Bush assured the defeat of these terrorist groups and emphasized America's commitment to facilitating peace in the Middle East, with a primary focus on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (CNN, 2001).

In March 2002, during an Arab summit in Beirut, Lebanon, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia presented his peace initiative. His plan called for Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian-occupied territories in exchange for full normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world. Unfortunately, the Israeli Prime Minister rejected the offer (Muasher, 2008). By April 2002, Crown Prince Abdullah visited President Bush, and their discussions revolved around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the threat posed by Saddam Hussein in the region (Helal, 2016). President Bush subsequently ordered the removal of Israeli tanks from the occupied territories, but tensions remained high throughout the year (Abrams, 2013).

In June 2002, it became evident that President Bush had shifted his position. He emphasized the need to remove Yasser Arafat from power to enable the Palestinian people to build democratic ideals for the sake of peace and stability (Rice, 2011). The primary focus of President Bush's administration, however, was centered on Saddam Hussein rather than the Israeli-Palestinian matter. In 2002, President Bush decided to provide support to the northern Iraqi Kurds who opposed Saddam's regime. This led to the launch of Operation Provide Comfort with the aim of establishing an independent Kurdish state. The operation had unintended consequences, resulting in the emergence of two competing Kurdish parties: the Kurdish Democratic Party led by Masoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan led by Jalal Talabani (Woodward, 2004).

Despite the challenging situation, Washington recognized the importance of the Iraqi Kurds' assistance for intelligence purposes to address the Saddam Hussein regime effectively. In a secret meeting in March 2002, both Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani traveled to Washington, where they agreed with U.S. support to intensify a military invasion aimed at toppling Saddam Hussein. By August 2002, the U.S.'s secret intentions became more evident when Vice President Richard Cheney publicly accused Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction (Woodward, 2004).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia had concerns about the potential consequences of overthrowing Saddam's regime. Such an operation was likely to empower Shia Muslims, which would, in turn, strengthen Iran, Turkey, and Iraq's positions in the Gulf region. Prince Turki expressed his worries, describing the use of military force as "wrongheaded and downright dangerous." He explained that such an attempt would not be welcomed by the Iraqi people or other populations in the Middle East and emphasized that "Saudis will have to live with the consequences" (Ottaway, 2008). While the U.S. did not inform Saudi Arabia of its intention to deal with Saddam, Saudi Prince Bandar conveyed to President

Bush that this process should be accompanied by significant efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Woodward, 2004).

On January 11, 2003, President Bush informed Prince Bandar of his plan for a war on Iraq and requested Saudi support. In response, Crown Prince Abdullah expressed his preference for avoiding war, but if it were to happen, he emphasized that it should be swift (Woodward, 2004). Despite his reservations, Abdullah agreed to support the United States. Throughout the process, American military forces operated from the Prince Sultan Air Base, but the majority of British and American forces were stationed in Kuwait. When the war concluded, all American forces officially left Saudi Arabia, including those stationed there since the 1990 Gulf War (Ottaway, 2008).

Tensions remained high, and in February 2003, during the Iraq war, Osama bin Laden issued an audio message to the Iraqi people. He argued that the primary reasons for the American occupation of Iraq were the exploitation of Iraq's resources and the gradual establishment of a greater Israel. Bin Laden urged Muslims to resist the invasion and fight back. Furthermore, on February 14, 2003, bin Laden issued another address in which he criticized the Saudi monarchy for its historical cooperation with Britain against the Ottoman Empire, which he believed had paved the way for Western and Jewish influence in the Muslim world. He continued to assert that the invasion of Iraq and the presence of Western military forces in the Gulf region were part of a broader plan to contribute to the establishment of a greater Israel, which would include significant parts of Middle Eastern states, primarily Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the entirety of Palestine (Lawrence, 2005).

Additionally, bin Laden called for the removal of all monarchies in the Gulf region, accusing them of betraying the Palestinian cause to Jews and America. He particularly

targeted Saudi Arabia for its substantial role in this perceived betrayal. Bin Laden denounced Crown Prince Abdullah's peace initiatives between Israel and the Arab world, claiming that they facilitated Jewish and Western influence over the Muslim world. He acknowledged that overthrowing these monarchies would be challenging due to their protection by the United States but believed that even the U.S. was vulnerable and "built on a foundation of straw" (Lawrence, 2005).

On May 12, 2003, al Qaeda launched its first terrorist attack on three compounds in Riyadh. The attack resulted in the deaths of twenty-seven people, including nine Americans, and injuries to around one hundred and sixty individuals. In response, Crown Prince Abdullah tasked Prince Mohammed bin Nayef with leading counterterrorism operations (Small & Hacker, 2014). CIA Director George Tenet visited the kingdom and met with Abdullah, assuring him of the U.S.'s eagerness to provide assistance in combating al Qaeda (Tenet, 2007).

In November 2003, another terrorist attack by al Qaeda targeted a residential compound, resulting in the deaths of seventeen people and numerous injuries. By December, U.S. diplomats were evacuated, and Americans were prohibited from traveling to the kingdom. In April 2004, another series of attacks occurred in the Khobar area, with Western individuals as the primary targets, leading to twenty-five fatalities. In June, al Qaeda kidnapped an American engineer. Due to the escalating threats, Crown Prince Abdullah found it necessary to elevate Prince Mohammed bin Nayef to a ministerial position, granting him more authority to address the situation effectively (Small & Hacker, 2014).

By December 2004, al Qaeda had attacked the American consulate in Jeddah and the Ministry of the Interior in Riyadh. Prince Mohammed bin Nayef initiated an extensive

campaign against al Qaeda, targeting its core members. The Saudi religious authorities collaborated with the House of Saud to counteract the threat. In a meeting with religious leaders, the Minister of Islamic Affairs clarified the jihadist tendencies and emphasized that these terrorists were enemies of Islam and the state. Working with the Interior Ministry, they established centers for the education and interrogation of captured terrorists (Riedel, 2017).

In October 2007, the religious establishment issued an official fatwa, stating that the only authority that could permit Saudi citizens to participate in jihadist operations was the Saudi king. In line with these efforts, Interior Minister Prince Nayef ordered the construction of an electric fence along the kingdom's border with Iraq to prevent Saudis from participating in jihadist activities in Iraq (Riedel, 2017).

On February 24, 2006, al Qaeda attempted an attack on the Abqaiq oil refinery in the Eastern Province. However, the operation was thwarted as Saudi authorities successfully neutralized and apprehended the attackers. While efforts against terrorism persisted, this marked the last significant al Qaeda operation in the area, bringing an active three-year war against the terror group to a close (Small & Hacker, 2014).

When King Fahd passed away on August 1, 2005, Crown Prince Abdullah ascended the throne. Meanwhile, in the U.S., President Bush had been elected for a second term. Although Bush expressed a commitment to promoting democracy in the Middle East, in practice, these aspirations mainly materialized in Iraq and Palestine. Notably, both Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah advised Bush to pull out from Iraq (Riedel, 2017).

King Abdullah, striving for unity, invited the major Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, proposing collaboration to address the Palestinian issue. Unfortunately, these

efforts were unfruitful (Riedel, 2017). During the Arab summit in March 2017, King Abdullah criticized the U.S. presence in Iraq, labeling it as unlawful. When later invited to the White House, he declined the invitation. Saudi Prince Turki critiqued the American approach to promoting democracy in Iraq, emphasizing that it resulted in sectarianism, oppression, and the dominance of militias (Ottaway, 2008). The imposition of ideals that did not align with the established Iraqi leadership culture proved to be detrimental.

In 2009, Barack Obama assumed the presidency of the United States, with one of his key priorities being the improvement of American relations with the Muslim world. In June of that year, Obama traveled to Riyadh to meet with King Abdullah, primarily to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Additionally, he engaged in discussions with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging him to withdraw from the occupied territories to facilitate the peace process. Netanyahu refused but proposed a temporary withdrawal in exchange for an official public meeting with King Abdullah, which the Saudi king firmly declined (Landler, 2016).

During the same month, in a speech delivered in Cairo, Egypt, President Obama addressed the Muslim world. He acknowledged the existing tensions between the United States and the Muslim world and stressed the need for a fresh start founded on mutual respect and shared interests. Obama pledged to work towards a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to end the American occupation in Iraq. He criticized the previous administration's democracy promotion approach and emphasized that he would not continue in that vein. In contrast, he commended King Abdullah's interfaith dialogue efforts and called for the promotion of tolerance and human rights in the Muslim world (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). Notably, from Pakistan, Osama bin Laden issued a response to President Obama's visit. In his message, Osama warned

Muslims not to trust Obama's claims, asserting that the U.S. president's Middle East agenda was similar to that of his predecessors (Parsons & Silva, 2009).

Notably, many of the promises made by President Barack Obama did not materialize, and peace initiatives in the Middle East continued to falter. Muslims remained as hostile to American policies as they had during the Bush administration (Riedel, 2017). During his presidency, much of President Obama's focus shifted toward Iran due to the nation's regional policies and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia shared concerns about Iran's actions and influence, particularly as the situation in Iraq contributed to the strengthening of Iran's position and the expansion of its Shia influence. King Abdullah even urged the U.S. to consider a military strike against Iran. In March 2010, King Abdullah and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates met in Riyadh to sign a \$60 billion arms deal aimed at enhancing Saudi Arabia's defense capabilities and safeguarding it against potential threats from Iran (Gates, 2014).

However, significant pressure continued to mount on King Abdullah. The Arab Spring, a series of uprisings across the Arab world demanding just systems and more rights, began to escalate. The CIA had prior suspicions about these upcoming protests, driven by rising unemployment and widespread corruption in the region. By the end of 2010, protests had started in Tunisia, leading to the overthrow of President Zine al Abedine Ben Ali. Ben Ali sought refuge in Saudi Arabia after being deposed (Riedel, 2017).

Protests began to sweep through Egypt in January 2011, with widespread calls for the replacement of President Hosni Mubarak. In response, Mubarak invoked the military to restore order. The Obama administration decided to intervene in an effort to facilitate a smoother transition. They dispatched their ambassador to Egypt, Frank Wisner, to negotiate with Mubarak. The aim was to encourage him to step down voluntarily.

Mubarak, however, remained steadfast in his refusal to resign and instead proposed leaving office at the end of his formal term in September. In response, President Obama pressed for a quicker transition. By February, mounting pressure led to Mubarak's forced resignation by the Egyptian army. He was subsequently replaced by the army commander, General Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, who served as an interim leader until new elections could be held. While President Obama celebrated the outcome as a success for his administration, the Gulf countries viewed the American interference in Egypt, which led to Mubarak's ousting, with apprehension (Riedel, 2017).

Around the same time, in February 2011, Bahrain experienced a surge of protests and demonstrations seeking political change. Bahrain is ruled by a Sunni monarchy, the Khalifas, while the majority of the population is Shia. Both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain believed that Iran was involved in orchestrating these protests, or at the very least, they suspected Iran would exploit the situation to its advantage. With the assistance of the Obama administration, Bahrain's leadership initiated a dialogue with the protesters. However, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia conveyed to the U.S. that their interference in Bahrain's affairs could strain the longstanding relationship between America and Saudi Arabia (Riedel, 2017).

In March, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain to quell the protests. King Abdullah dispatched more than one thousand armed troops from Saudi Arabia, while another eight hundred troops were sent by the United Arab Emirates. With the support of Bahraini forces, this intervention successfully halted the protests (Riedel, 2017). Fearing the potential expansion of protests within Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah allocated approximately \$130 billion for infrastructure development, job creation, and bonuses to the citizens (Indyk et al., 2012). Furthermore, Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE, provided financial aid of ten billion dollars to the poorer Gulf

countries. This financial assistance aimed to mitigate any ideological expansion of the Arab Spring within the region (Harb, 2017). Additionally, Saudi Arabia reached an agreement with Pakistan, stipulating that Pakistan would send military troops if the situation in Bahrain became chaotic (Paris Intelligence Online, 2011). In an effort to garner support for its efforts to suppress the Arab Spring, Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia sought Chinese political support and emphasized potential future investment opportunities (Riedel, 2011).

The Arab Spring also reached Yemen, where President Ali Abdullah Saleh was overthrown with the support of other Gulf countries. He was replaced by his former deputy, Abdrabbu Mansour Hadi, in 2011, and Hadi commenced lengthy discussions to stabilize the government (Fraihat, 2016). Meanwhile, revolutions erupted in Syria and Libya. Saudi Arabia, under King Abdullah's direction, decided to provide support to the revolutionaries in both countries. The primary goal was to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad and Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi, replacing them with Sunni leaders who would accept Saudi hegemony. While Saudi Arabia confirmed its involvement in supporting the revolutionaries in these states, it sought to prevent U.S. interference in Bahrain and stressed that the U.S. should not react to the consequences of the situation in Bahrain (Riedel, 2017).

In another meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in Riyadh, King Abdullah voiced his concern that recent American actions in Egypt and Bahrain were detrimental to U.S.-Saudi relations. He also accused Iran of fomenting chaos in the region (Gates, 2014). During a separate meeting between Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Prince Saud emphasized the kingdom's commitment to assist in the Libyan and Syrian situations but conveyed that such support hinged on the prevention of any criticism regarding Saudi Arabia's involvement in Bahrain

(Clinton, 2014). By 2012, King Abdullah's objective was to establish an operation akin to the one in Afghanistan, involving Saudi-American military cooperation to counter the Iranian Shia expansion and combat Iran's influence in Syria (Landler, 2016). However, the operation in Syria did not yield the desired results, as both Jordan and the U.S. were not effectively supportive (Reidel, 2017). In a separate development, Saudi religious scholars issued a statement permitting all Muslims to engage in Jihad in Syria in support of the revolutionaries against the Alawite government of Assad, which was backed by Iran (Lister, 2016).

Despite President Obama's involvement in seeking a resolution to the Egyptian revolution, the situation remained problematic. Elections resulted in a government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Mohammad Morsi. Abdullah perceived this government as a threat since the establishment of an Islamic democracy could potentially inspire similar movements in the Arabian world and pose a risk to the Saudi monarchy. As a solution, Abdullah formed an alliance with Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. After al-Sisi's promotion in April 2012 to the position of Minister of Defense, he seized the opportunity to oust Morsi from power. Morsi and hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were arrested by July 2013. King Abdullah was the first to publicly celebrate this counterrevolution and mobilized financial aid amounting to twelve billion dollars from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. Al-Sisi was subsequently elected president a year after the coup (Riedel, 2017).

The counterrevolution appeared to have succeeded in Bahrain and Egypt but failed in Syria and Libya, leading to civil wars. Although Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, had died by 2011, Egyptian Ayman Zawahiri assumed leadership in the name of the Islamic State, which had a presence in parts of Syria and Iraq (Riedel, 2017). The group continued Osama's call to overthrow the House of Saud. In response, King Abdullah

organized an international conference in Jeddah in September 2014 to form alliances with other states for combating the Islamic State. By the end of that month, Saudi Arabia, the U.S., and their allies initiated attacks on targets in Iraq and Syria (Lister, 2016). In January 2015, King Abdullah passed away, and Crown Prince Salman ascended to the throne (Riedel, 2017).

Reforms in Saudi Arabia faced challenges due to the conservative nature of Saudi society, the influence of the religious establishment, and concerns about potential instability. Conservative societal values hindered the implementation of reforms, while the religious authority's influence impacted government decisions. For example, the Shoura Council opposed the enactment of laws against domestic violence. Throughout its history, Saudi Arabia carefully considered internal and external factors that could threaten stability, sometimes resulting in delays in implementing reforms due to the fear of potential social upheaval (McDowall, 2015).

Overall, Abdullah's reign was marked by attempts to introduce moderate reforms, inspiring moderate and liberal groups within Saudi society. Despite neighboring conflicts and waves of protests, Abdullah challenged the prevailing atmosphere and laid the foundation for future reforms, aiming to counter the dangers of terrorism and chart a promising future for Saudi leaders. He was credited with promoting moderation and reform in Saudi Arabia.

2.7. King Salman: The Supervisor 2015-Present

Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the current King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, was born in December 1935 in Riyadh. He received his education at the Princes' School in Riyadh, which played a remarkable role in shaping his career. Salman married three times, with his first wife, Sultana bint Turki Al Sudairi, bearing him

six children: Prince Fahd, Prince Sultan, Prince Ahmed, Prince Abdulaziz, Prince Faysal, and Princess Hassa. Then, he had a short marriage with Sarah bint Faisal Al Subai'ai, who gave birth to their son, Prince Saud. His third wife, Fahda bint Falah al Hithlain, bore him six children, including the eldest, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Prince Turki, Prince Khalid, Prince Nayef, Prince Bandar, and Prince Rakan (House of Saud, n.d.).

Salman's leadership journey began as the deputy governor of Riyadh at the age of nineteen, followed by his appointment as the official governor for 48 years from 1963 to 2011. He later served as the Second Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and member of the National Security Council in 2011. After the death of his brother Prince Nayef in 2012, Salman became the Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister (House of Saud, n.d.).

During his tenure as the governor of Riyadh, Salman played a significant role in the transformation of the capital into a major urban metropolis of economic and social prosperity. His focus on modernizing Riyadh, leveraging his Western connections, and attracting foreign investment revived tourism and bolstered the city's infrastructure, healthcare system, and education sector. This experience provided Salman with the necessary skills to manage and balance religious, tribal, and princely interests. His long governance of Riyadh demonstrated his deep attachment to the city and equipped him with the qualifications to rule Saudi Arabia in the future. Primarily, Salman prioritized economic modernization over political or social changes. However, with the appointment of his son Mohammed bin Salman to prominent roles, the trajectory shifted towards more progressive reforms within the House of Saud (House of Saud, n.d.).

When King Abdullah passed away, Salman ascended to the throne, and Mohammed bin Nayef, King Salman's nephew, became the Crown Prince. The established

order of succession within the Royal family indicated that Mohammed bin Nayef, the son of Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz from the Sudairi Seven, would assume the role of Crown Prince and eventually become King after King Salman's demise. As mentioned in the previous section, Mohammed bin Nayef had a significant background in security matters, particularly his involvement in the Saudi campaign against the terrorist group Al-Qaeda and his efforts to combat the Jihadist uprising in the Kingdom during the 1990s. He served as the Deputy Interior Minister and later became the official Interior Minister following his father's death in 2012. In recognition of his contributions in counterterrorism, he was awarded the CIA's George Tenet Medal in 2017 (Ottaway, 2021).

Surprisingly, Salman appointed his own son, Mohammed bin Salman, as the Defense Minister and Secretary General of the Royal Court. Furthermore, Mohammed bin Salman was entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the state's oil company, Aramco (the Saudi Arabian Oil Group), and the Council of Economic and Developmental Affairs, which were pivotal in shaping economic policies. This decision appeared to be a strategic and gradual process to pave the way for Mohammed bin Salman's ascension. When Mohammed bin Nayef assumed the role of Crown Prince, King Salman merged his court with Mohammed bin Nayef's to curtail Nayef's functional independence. On the other hand, Mohammed bin Salman had full autonomy in his positions, allowing him to establish a reputation as an economic reformer, while Mohammed bin Nayef appeared to adopt a more passive and traditional Saudi leadership style (Ottaway, 2021).

In official gatherings, both Mohammed bin Nayef and Mohammed bin Salman accompanied the King to regional and international assemblies. They attended the Gulf Cooperation Council summit together and were jointly received at the White House during Barack Obama's presidency. However, several months later, in September 2015, King Salman visited the White House accompanied by Mohammed bin Salman solely,

signifying a formal gesture that ended the competition and confirmed Salman's support for his son (Hubbard et al., 2018).

Interestingly, Mohammed bin Salman's influence grew stronger after Donald Trump won the presidential elections in November 2016. It was evident that Trump aligned himself with Saudi Arabia, specifically with Mohammed bin Salman. Trump's first official visit outside the United States was to Saudi Arabia, where the Saudis received him warmly and celebrated his visit (Rucker & DeYoung, 2017). Furthermore, Trump's denouncement of Iran and his plans to withdraw from the Iranian-US nuclear deal further solidified his intentions. Also, Mohammed bin Salman fostered close ties with the White House and developed a strong relationship with Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner (Kirkpatrick et al., 2018).

Consequently, in June 2017, King Salman issued an official statement claiming the official removal of Mohammed bin Nayef from his position due to physical disability. Mohammed bin Nayef had been taking posttraumatic stress drugs as a result of a suicide bomb attack targeted at him in 2009, during his fight against Jihadism in Saudi Arabia. Despite Mohammed bin Nayef's qualifications to become the next King, he had the "wrong father" (Jordan, 2019). Subsequently, Salman gathered members of the Allegiance Council to approve Mohammed bin Nayef's removal and Mohammed bin Salman's appointment, a move that would "alter the history of Saudi Arabia" (Ottaway, 2021).

With the endorsement of his father, Mohammed bin Salman was appointed as Crown Prince officially. Finally, in September 2022, he assumed the role of Prime Minister, to oversee and govern the Council of Ministers, while relinquishing his position as Defense Minister to his younger brother, Khalid. These positions consolidated Mohammed bin Salman's role as the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia.

By his coronation in February 2015, King Salman allocated significant funds, amounting to thirty-two billion dollars, for infrastructure development and various donations to government employees, soldiers, students, professional associations, literary and sports associations. To maintain his leadership mentality, he restructured the government by the removal of nine Saudi secretariats. Notably, King Salman initiated an anti-corruption campaign in 2017, targeting corruption in both the public and private sectors. Several high-ranking government officials and business executives were imprisoned, to maintain transparency, openness, and credible governance (Ottaway, 2021).

King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched Vision 2030, an ambitious project that outlined the future of Saudi Arabia's economy, politics, society, and culture. This comprehensive plan aimed to diversify the economy, privatize state-owned enterprises, introduce taxes and fees, attract foreign investment, enhance public services, and empower Saudi citizens. Additionally, it emphasized technological advancements, digitalization of the economy, government services, and the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship. The government recognized the potential of tourism as an engine of economic growth, Salman established the Saudi Commission for Tourist and National Heritage to oversee the development and promotion of Saudi Arabia's historical and cultural heritage. Efforts to relax visa requirements and invest in tourism-related infrastructure further opened the country to international visitors. Infrastructure projects were prioritized to improve connectivity and support economic growth, including the development of industrial cities, economic zones, and the Riyadh Metro, all aimed at increasing investment, employment, and economic diversification (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Social reforms introduced by King Salman focused on the improvement of living standards. Key initiatives included granting women the right to drive, abolishing the guardianship system, and relaxing the dress code. Efforts were made to support women's

participation in the workforce, expand employment options, and improve access to education and training. Additionally, reforms aimed to enhance healthcare services, provide affordable housing, and support low-income individuals and families through the strengthening of social safety nets and promotion of civic participation (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Education reforms continued under King Salman, building upon the initiatives started by his predecessors. Efforts were made to raise educational standards, align curricula with industry demands, and enhance vocational training programs to equip Saudi youth with the necessary skills for success in a rapidly changing global economy (Bassiouni, 2022).

Also, King Salman prioritized the growth of Saudi Arabia's culture and entertainment industries. The establishment of the General Entertainment Authority facilitated the planning of performances, festivals, and cultural events, providing a larger audience with entertaining experiences. Cinemas, which were closed for an extended period, were reopened, creating platforms for cultural interaction and artistic expression. The promotion of sports and leisure activities as part of a healthier and more active lifestyle was supported, with investments in sports infrastructure and the hosting of international athletic competitions (Bassiouni, 2022).

Environmental preservation and sustainability were key concerns for King Salman. The Middle East Green Initiative and Saudi Green Initiative were launched to address environmental issues and advance sustainable development, including efforts to reduce climate change, protect the environment, and transition to renewable energy sources. Moreover, healthcare reforms were prioritized to enhance the quality and accessibility of healthcare services in Saudi Arabia. Investments were made in the construction of

hospitals and medical facilities, expansion and upgrading of healthcare infrastructure, and advancements in medical research and innovation (Vision 2030, 2016).

Improvements were introduced to enhance the experience of pilgrims during the annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. Organizational changes, crowd control measures, and safety enhancements were implemented to ensure a smooth and fulfilling spiritual journey for the millions of Muslims who travel to Saudi Arabia each year. Furthermore, Salman also continued the Saudi legacy of charity and philanthropy by supporting numerous programs aimed at reducing poverty, providing assistance to the less fortunate, and promoting social welfare through the establishment of charitable foundations and initiatives to assist vulnerable individuals (Vision 2030, 2016).

In terms of foreign policy, King Salman engaged actively in regional and global diplomacy. He worked towards improving regional security, supporting Middle Eastern stability, and strengthening Saudi Arabia's relationships with other countries. The participation in peace initiatives and the formation of constructive alliances exemplified his diplomatic efforts (Martinez & del Mino, 2019).

While these reforms represented significant progress, challenges and ongoing changes persisted. Aligned with the broader goals outlined in Vision 2030, King Salman's reforms reflected a commitment to modernize Saudi Arabia, foster social development, and diversify the economy. In 2022, due to his declining health, particularly dementia, King Salman appointed his son Mohammed bin Salman as Prime Minister, who assumed many of the responsibilities effectively and was considered the de facto ruler of the kingdom. It was worth noting that reforms began after Mohammed bin Salman's rise to prominent positions, and he was credited with the initiation of these reforms (Tactical Report, 2022).

2.8. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman: The Long-awaited Blueprint 2015-present

Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the eldest son of King Salman and his third wife, Fahda bint Falah bin Sultan Al Hithlain, was born in August 1985 in Riyadh. He received his primary and secondary education in Royal schools and obtained his bachelor's degree in law from King Saud University in Riyadh in 2007. In 2008, he married Sarah Bint Mashoor bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, with whom he had five children: Prince Salman, Prince Mashour, Princess Fahda, Princess Noura, and Prince Abdulaziz (House of Saud, 2021).

During his childhood, Mohammed lived separately from his father and his first wife, residing in a different location. Despite this, he enjoyed the attention and care of everyone in the palace due to his status as the eldest child. Only family and close friends were permitted to address him by his name, while others were required to refer to him as "Your Royal Highness" (Hubbard, 2018). Growing up with strict disciplinarian parents, Mohammed and his siblings were assigned the task of reading one book per week. Subsequently, their father would test their understanding through quizzes and engage them in discussions about each work. Furthermore, his mother invited intellectuals to their home for discussions, and she arranged educational trips for her children (Hubbard, 2020). Mohammed reflected later on his parents' strict treatment as an experience that contributed to his personal growth (Waldman, 2016). Notably, even at a young age, he displayed an imposing personality, as acknowledged by one of his childhood teachers (BBC, 2018).

Although Mohammed and his mother lived separately from Salman, they would visit Salman occasionally for lunch. However, it was worth noting that Salman's first wife did not welcome them warmly. According to Hubbard (2020), the children's tribal origin

and differing backgrounds created obstacles for Fahda and her kids to integrate into the prestigious Royal circle. In contrast to Mohammed and his siblings, their Royal cousins enjoyed a lavish lifestyle and pursued education at renowned foreign universities. These differences might have contributed to the mistreatment experienced by Mohammed and his family (Hubbard, 2018).

Surprisingly, despite many of his cousins studying at established universities abroad, Mohammed received his university education within Saudi Arabia. His classmates noted his desire for leadership and aspirations to become a transformative figure. According to Hubbard (2018), Mohammed discussed the government and its necessary changes frequently, expressing admiration for Margaret Thatcher and her economic policies. Important to highlight that not only did Mohammed receive his education in Saudi Arabia, but his entire entourage was also predominantly Saudi. He spent summers on the Red Sea coast and engaged in winter camping trips in the desert. These authentic educational experiences and local adventures played a significant role in shaping his distinct political character (Hubbard, 2020).

Initially, while Mohammed grew up as a relatively unknown member of the Royal family, a series of deaths within the family changed his prominence within Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. Fahd, Salman's oldest son, passed away in 2001 at the age of 46. In 2002, his brother Ahmed died at the age of 44. Following these losses, Salman's first wife passed away in 2011, and then Prince Sultan, Salman's full brother and next in line to the throne, died of cancer. Additionally, Prince Nayef, who became Crown Prince, passed away in 2012. These unfortunate events plunged Salman into mourning, with Mohammed standing by his side, while his other sons pursued their respective careers. The incident strengthened the bond between the father and son. Mohammed was known to be a loyal

companion, accompanying his father to weddings, funerals, and joining him in prayer at the mosque (Hubbard, 2017).

In contrast to other prominent members of the Royal family, Mohammed did not acquire military experience or study at a foreign university. He did not spend his time in Western countries like his cousins, nor did he become fluent in a foreign language. It was argued that Mohammed was influenced by King Abdulaziz's perspective on the value of local education. King Abdulaziz once stated, "In order to be a leader of men, a man has to receive an education in his own country, among his own people, and to grow up in surroundings steeped with the traditions and psychology of his countrymen" (Ottaway, 2021). Despite modern influences, Mohammed possessed a deep love for Saudi Arabia, similar to his cousins' affection for cities like London, Geneva, or Monaco (Hubbard, 2020). Even at a young age, Mohammed recognized the importance of Saudi Arabia's external image. In a meeting with Rosenberg in 2014, he expressed his horror at the potential negative portrayal of Islam and the resulting discomfort it could create for Saudis abroad due to 9/11 attacks. Mohammed's determination to change these perceptions led him to pursue individuals involved in acts that could be detrimental to Saudi Arabia's. Consequently, Mohammed's trajectory was focused primarily on domestic affairs and deeply rooted in Saudi Arabia (Hubbard, 2020).

Mohammed's deep understanding of the Kingdom's dynamics, gained through his unique upbringing and experiences, equipped him to make unexpected decisions that had proven successful. The US ambassador, Joseph Westphall, recalled Mohammed as a young and ambitious individual destined for leadership from an early age (Hubbard, 2020). Additionally, Mohammed embraced the technological advancements of his generation and demonstrated an interest in social media and video games. Also, he also ventured into the business world, particularly in real estate. Notably, he exerted pressure once on a cleric to

sign over a piece of land, even going as far as sending a bullet in an envelope to convey his determination. This incident earned him the nickname Abu Rasasa, meaning "the bullet guy" (Gardner, 2019).

Mohammed's meticulous attention to governmental procedures was observed from a young age. He acknowledged his conflicting yet complementary views on modernity and tradition, setting him apart from previous generations. Mohammed held his grandfather, King Abdulaziz bin Saud, in high regard and considered him an ideal historical figure to emulate. He recognized the importance of his homeland and dedicated himself to its development (Gardner, 2019).

Following his graduation at the age of twenty-two, Mohammed established and contributed to numerous business enterprises and nonprofit organizations, aiming to foster entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia (King Abdulaziz Foundation, MiSK, 2007). As his father assumed the position of Crown Prince in 2012, Mohammed accompanied him on his ascent to higher monarchical positions. He initially served as the supervisor of his father's personal office, and a year later, he represented the head of Salman's court. In 2014, he became the Cabinet Minister, a position that provided him with valuable insights into the rationality and decision-making processes within the Royal family (Ottaway, 2021).

In summary, Mohammed bin Salman's upbringing, education, and diverse experiences have contributed to shaping his unique political character. From his strict childhood and upbringing to his deep attachment to Saudi Arabia, Mohammed has emerged as a prominent figure within Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. His focus on domestic affairs, combined with his commitment to enhancing his country's development, has propelled him to make significant decisions that had garnered both praise and criticism.

2.8.1. Mohammed bin Salman's Targets and Reactions

This part provided a concise overview of key events and developments in Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. It covered his targets and reactions toward domestic and foreign affairs chronologically, such as the war in Yemen, the Vision 2030 reform program, oil policies, diplomatic tensions, crackdowns on activism, international engagements, and significant incidents like the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and attacks on Saudi oil reserves. By exploring these diverse aspects, this part offered a glimpse on Mohammed bin Salman's style of leadership.

2.8.1.1. The War in Yemen

Remarkably, in each position the Prince sought to formulate his blueprint. Mohammed bin Salman the Defense Minister orchestrated the Saudi Arabian led military intervention in Yemen's civil war (also known as the Operation Decisive Storm), with a coalition including Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain. The operation intended to provide military power for the Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi against Houthi Shiites, Abd Rabbuh sought international backing for Iran backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, the intervention accelerated for the Saudis thought that the Houthi Shiites rebellious triumph would ease Iranian access to the Saudi southern border. Unfortunately, the plan failed to deconstruct structures of power and concluded with an extended pause, yet, it was considered one of the most gruesome humanitarian crises (Mckenzie & Nikbakht, 2018).

2.8.1.2. Vision 2030

In April 2016, the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (CEDA) launched Vision 2030, an ambitious and comprehensive reform program aimed at the transformation of Saudi Arabia's economy and society. This long-term vision was backed by detailed plans and specific targets, supported by concrete evidence and initiatives. One

of the key pillars of Vision 2030 was economic diversification and the reduction of the dependence on oil revenues. To support this goal, the program outlined the reduction of subsidies, which was implemented through the gradual lifting of subsidies on energy and water prices. The intention behind this measure was to encourage more efficient resource consumption and reduce the fiscal burden on the government (Saudi Embassy, n.d).

Another significant step taken under Vision 2030 was the establishment of the Public Investment Fund (PIF) as a sovereign wealth fund. The PIF was granted a pivotal role in driving economic growth and diversification by investing in strategic sectors and emerging industries. As part of this effort, the PIF aimed to increase its assets from around \$160 billion to \$2 trillion by 2030 (Saudi Embassy, n.d). A major milestone in the implementation of Vision 2030 was the partial Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Saudi Aramco, the state-owned oil company. This historic IPO aimed to unlock the value of Saudi Aramco and attract domestic and international investors. While the IPO did not proceed as originally planned, it demonstrated the government's commitment to transforming Saudi Arabia's economy and reducing its reliance on oil (Saudi Embassy, n.d). Additionally, Vision 2030 emphasized the importance of developing non-oil sectors, such as tourism and entertainment, to diversify the economy and create new job opportunities. The program outlined ambitious goals in this regard, including increasing tourism's contribution to GDP from 3% to 10% and creating one million jobs in the tourism sector by 2030 (Saudi Embassy, n.d).

In addition to economic reforms, Vision 2030 focused on social development and enhancing the quality of life for Saudi citizens. The program identified education as a critical area for improvement, with the goal of raising the quality of education and equipping students with the skills needed for a knowledge-based economy. As part of this

effort, the government aimed to increase the number of Saudi universities ranked among the top 200 globally (Saudi Embassy, n.d).

Moreover, Vision 2030 highlighted the importance of cultural and entertainment initiatives to promote social engagement and enhance the quality of life. Concrete evidence of this commitment could be seen in the establishment of various cultural projects and events, including the opening of the Qiddiya entertainment city, the development of the Red Sea Project, and the creation of NEOM, a futuristic city aimed at driving innovation and attracting international investments (Saudi Embassy, n.d).

To ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the reforms outlined in Vision 2030, the government introduced various mechanisms for accountability and transparency. This included the establishment of the National Transformation Program (NTP) and the delivery of regular progress reports to keep stakeholders informed about the achievements and challenges encountered during the implementation process (Saudi Embassy, n.d).

Overall, Vision 2030 presented a detailed and comprehensive roadmap for transforming Saudi Arabia's economy and society. Concrete evidence of its implementation was seen in the various initiatives, programs, and projects, including the establishment of major cities like NEOM, that have been launched to achieve the outlined goals. These efforts demonstrated the government's commitment to realizing the vision and positioning Saudi Arabia as a globally competitive nation (Trew, 2018).

2.8.1.3.Oil Policy

In terms of oil policy, the plan emphasized the development of non-oil sectors, such as tourism, manufacturing, and renewable energy, as a means to achieve long-term

economic sustainability (Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, n.d.). This shift in focus was intended to decrease the kingdom's vulnerability to oil price fluctuations and create a more diversified and resilient economy.

Furthermore, under MbS's leadership, Saudi Arabia played a prominent role in shaping global oil policies through its involvement in the Saudi-led OPEC+ agreement. This agreement, initiated in 2016, aimed to stabilize global oil prices by coordinating production levels among major oil-producing nations, including Saudi Arabia and Russia (OPEC, 2019). The participation in this agreement, regained the Kingdom its influence in the oil market and ensure stability. This move was in line with MbS's vision of asserting Saudi Arabia's role as a key player in global energy markets and enhancing the kingdom's geopolitical standing.

2.8.1.4. The Qatar Blockade

Upon assuming the role of Crown Prince in June 2017, Mohammed bin Salman played a pivotal role in orchestrating a multi-country blockade against Qatar. This blockade was implemented by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Maldives, Mauritania, Djibouti, Comoros, Niger, and Gabon. The primary reasons behind the blockade were Qatar's friendly relations with Iran and its perceived support for unofficial religious groups in the region, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudi-led coalition demanded that Qatar shut down the Al Jazeera news channel and sever its ties with Iran as conditions for lifting the blockade. This standoff persisted for three years and resulted in Qatar diversifying its economic relations beyond the Gulf region. However, in 2021, the regional neighbors resolved the crisis officially, indicating a shift towards finding common ground that extended beyond the previous waves of conflict (Ramani, 2021).

2.8.1.5. Crackdown on Corruption and 'Treason'

Shortly after assuming the role of Crown Prince in November 2017, Mohammed bin Salman took decisive action on the domestic front by detaining a significant number of individuals at the opulent Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh. This move targeted 381 princes, government officials, former ministers, and businessmen, all of whom were implicated in corruption charges. The Crown Prince justified this action by asserting that approximately ten percent of the government's annual expenditure was disappearing each year due to corruption. The charges against the detainees ranged from bribery, money laundering, and illicit weapon deals to tax evasion and other related offenses. As a result of these measures, authorities froze around 200 bank accounts and pressured the detainees to reach settlements, leading to the recovery of an astounding \$106 billion (Trew, 2018).

Similarly, in September 2017, Saudi authorities initiated a comprehensive crackdown aimed at suppressing dissent and activism. This crackdown resulted in the arrest of more than twenty prominent individuals, including intellectuals, clerics, and political activists. Influential Islamist clerics, such as Awad al-Qarni, Salman al-Odah, and Ali al-Omary, were among those targeted (Amnesty International, 2017). These individuals had been known for expressing their views on various social and political issues, which had garnered them a significant following.

The crackdown extended beyond religious circles to encompass political activists and opposition groups. The "15 September Movement," an opposition group advocating for political reform in Saudi Arabia, saw several of its members arrested. Notable detainees included Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), who advocated for human rights reforms in the country. Mustapha al-Hassan, an academic and novelist known for his critical writings on social issues, and Essam al-Zamel, an entrepreneur, were taken into custody as well (Amnesty International, 2017).

The actions of the Saudi authorities attracted international attention and raised concerns about human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression. Organizations like Amnesty International expressed worry over the arrests, highlighting the potential curtailment of basic human rights and the stifling of dissenting voices. The crackdown was viewed as a significant measure by the Saudi government to suppress perceived threats to its authority and maintain strict control over societal and political narratives within the country (Amnesty International, 2017).

The crackdown came after the group called for peaceful protests, they demanded an increase in human rights, release political prisoners or as they called them “prisoners of conscience.” On the other hand, clerics were detained for their links to the Brotherhood, and their promotion of “terrorist or extremist ideas” (Reuters, 2017). the government announced that both categories were arrested because they cooperated with foreign parties and terrorist organizations against the state’s stability and reputation (BBC, 2017).

2.8.1.6.MbS Targets Saad Al-Hariri

In November 2017, Saudi Arabia found itself at the center of controversy surrounding the resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri. Al-Hariri's resignation was announced under mysterious circumstances during his visit to Saudi Arabia. In a televised appearance on Saudi state television, al-Hariri denounced Iranian influence in Lebanon and Yemen, and surprisingly declared his intention to step down from his position (Chandrika, 2017).

The resignation of al-Hariri was seen as a reflection of the Crown Prince's dissatisfaction with his management of Hezbollah, a powerful political party in Lebanon known for its close ties to Iran and the Houthi rebels in Yemen (Chandrika, 2017). The Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, appeared to be seeking stronger measures against

Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon and its alleged support for regional destabilization. However, al-Hariri's forced resignation and subsequent televised statements generated skepticism and backlash both internationally and within Lebanon. External pressures, including those exerted by France, played a role in shaping the outcome, as it became clear that the international political environment and the national atmosphere in Lebanon were not receptive to al-Hariri's confessions. As a result, al-Hariri retracted his resignation and remained in his position until 2020 (Ottaway, 2021).

The incident surrounding al-Hariri's resignation highlighted the complex dynamics and external pressures at play in the region, with Saudi Arabia attempting to assert its influence and reshape political dynamics in Lebanon, particularly regarding Hezbollah's role. The event underscored the intricate interplay between regional power struggles, international politics, and domestic considerations in the Middle East.

2.8.1.7. The Promotion of Vision 2030 Abroad

In March 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman embarked on a three-week trip to the United States with the aim of attracting American investors and solidifying his vision. During his visit, he engaged with prominent figures from various fields, including the entertainment industry. Notable encounters included meetings with renowned actors Michael Douglas, Morgan Freeman, and Dwayne Johnson, showcasing the Crown Prince's interest in the movie business. Furthermore, he explored space travel prospects with Richard Branson, delved into technology matters with Bill Gates, and discussed investment opportunities with Jeff Bezos in Seattle. As part of his journey, he visited esteemed academic institutions such as Harvard and MIT, engaged in conversations with Wall Street financiers, and negotiated arms deals with former President Donald Trump, all aimed at advancing his vision (Arango, 2018).

Similarly, the Crown Prince's visit extended to the United Kingdom, where discussions focused on matters of economy and security. The visit served as a platform to address Vision 2030, the ambitious Saudi plan for economic transformation, and explore potential investment opportunities for British businessmen across various sectors, including education, healthcare, entertainment, and infrastructure development. Additionally, the discussions highlighted the importance of international cooperation in combating terrorism and extremism, as well as addressing ongoing regional conflicts in Yemen and Syria (gov.uk, 2018).

These visits to the United States and the United Kingdom showcased Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's proactive approach to engaging with key global players and solidifying international partnerships to support his vision for Saudi Arabia's future. The trips did not aim at attracting investment and fostering economic cooperation solely but emphasized the importance of joint efforts in addressing pressing regional and global challenges as well.

2.8.1.8. The Opening of Cinemas

In April 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted the decades-long ban on cinemas, which had been imposed in the early 1980s under pressure from Islamist groups who deemed cinemas incompatible with Islamic principles. This momentous decision aimed to foster the development of a thriving film industry within the country while addressing the issue of Saudi citizens traveling abroad for entertainment, thereby retaining significant financial resources within the country (Reuters, 2018). By allowing cinemas to operate, the government sought to generate nearly one billion dollars annually, contributing to economic diversification and cultural enrichment. This move represented a significant step

towards embracing cultural progress, opening up the Saudi economy, and marking a transformative milestone in the Kingdom's ongoing journey of modernization.

2.8.1.9.MbS Targets Jeff Bezos

In May 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman initiated a covert surveillance operation targeting Jeff Bezos, the renowned founder of Amazon and owner of the prominent newspaper, The Washington Post. This operation involved the illicit extraction of extensive personal information from the American billionaire's mobile phone. Through thorough investigation conducted by private investigators and official bodies, such as Gavin De Becker and the United Nations, it was unequivocally established that Bezos' phone had been compromised at the precise moment he received an encrypted file from Mohammed bin Salman's WhatsApp account. Further, the investigation revealed that the hacking attempt was intended to exert influence over, and potentially silence, The Washington Post's coverage of Saudi Arabia, thus impinging upon freedom of the press and journalistic independence (UN Office of the High Commissioner, 2019). This incident raised profound concerns about privacy breaches, cybersecurity, and the potential abuse of digital platforms for political purposes.

2.8.1.10.MbS Reacts to the Canadian and German 'Interferences'

In August 2018, the Canadian Foreign Ministry utilized the social media platform Twitter to call for the immediate release of detained human rights activists publicly. This action prompted the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to respond by suspending diplomatic ties with Canada, citing the interference in Saudi Arabia's domestic affairs as the basis for their decision (Sigal, 2018). However, in a recent development in May 2023, both nations reached an agreement to restore their diplomatic relations, highlighting the

importance of "mutual respect and common interests" as the driving factors behind this reconciliation (Mills, 2023).

Similarly, Germany took a firm stance by ceasing arms exports to Saudi Arabia and other countries involved in the conflict in Yemen. The Saudi diplomatic apparatus criticized this German ban vehemently, deeming it as "wrong" and "illogical" (Al Jazeera, 2020). Notably, during a visit to the Gulf region, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz approved arms export deals to the Kingdom, indicating a shift in Germany's position on this matter (DW, 2022). These diplomatic maneuvers reflect the intricate dynamics between countries and the complexities surrounding arms trade policies in the context of regional conflicts.

2.8.1.11. The Crackdown on Feminism

From 2018 to 2019, the Saudi authorities initiated a campaign targeting women's rights activists who were involved in the "women to drive movement" and the "Saudi anti male-guardianship campaign." In 2018, this campaign resulted in the arrest of twenty activists, including Nora al-Balawi, Aziza al-Yousef, Loujain al-Hathloul, and others who advocated for women's rights. Subsequently, additional activists who expressed their support for the detained individuals were also arrested. It was worth noting that the "women to drive movement" had its roots in the 1990s, and it was not until September 2017, when King Salman acknowledged the right of Saudi women to drive, that the government clarified that driving was not contrary to the restrictions of Sharia, as previously argued by religious scholars. In August 2018, the government announced the official allowance for women to drive (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

The crackdown on activism extended beyond the realm of female rights, as other activist groups were also targeted and charged with terrorism for publicly opposing the

policies of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

This series of events reflected the complex and evolving landscape of activism and human rights in Saudi Arabia during this period.

2.8.1.12. Jamal Khashoggi: The Foreign Agent

In October 2018, allegations surfaced implicating Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) in the orchestrated killing of Jamal Khashoggi. Jamal, who held various journalism positions in Saudi Arabia and engaged in political discussions regarding Saudi politics and US-Saudi relations, gained attention for his 'audacious' and critical analysis (Sly, 2016). Consequently, he faced condemnation from Saudi authorities, leading to a ban on his writings in the kingdom in December 2016. Seeking refuge in the United States to express his political views freely, Jamal began working for the online Global Opinions section of the Washington Post and founded the nonprofit organization DAWN (Democracy for the Arab World Now) in September 2017.

While Jamal admired MbS's reform efforts initially, he was critical of the Crown Prince's campaign against activists. Likely, this discord led to the involvement of MbS's security team, known as the Tiger Squad, in plotting Jamal's murder inside the Saudi consulate in Turkey. Multiple official sources, supported by evidence, concluded that higher Saudi authorities, including members of the royal family and specifically MbS, were responsible for the journalist's killing. The CIA stated their confidence in MbS's involvement, and the US Department of the Treasury (2018) imposed sanctions on seventeen individuals close to MbS for their roles in the incident. The UN Human Rights Council (2019) conducted an investigation, which confirmed the planned killing of Jamal and concluded that the mission was authorized from the upper echelons of power, rather than an arbitrary act as claimed by the Saudi authorities (Reuters, 2018).

Jamal Khashoggi's final article, published in the Washington Post, emphasized the need for the Arab world to establish a platform that amplified Arab voices (Khashoggi, 2018). The case of Jamal Khashoggi's murder remained a significant event, shedding light on the complexities surrounding freedom of speech, human rights, and the responsibilities of state actors.

2.8.1.13. Attacks on Saudi Oil Reserves

In September 2019, a significant event unfolded when foreign drones launched an attack on the Abqaiq refineries, the largest Saudi oil facilities globally. This assault had far-reaching consequences, causing a five percent reduction in global oil supplies and triggering a notable increase in oil prices (BBC, 2019). The US intelligence community conducted an investigation and subsequently confirmed the involvement of Houthi rebels with support from Iran in orchestrating this operation (BBC, 2019). This incident highlighted the vulnerability of critical energy infrastructure and underscored the geopolitical tensions in the region, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The attack had substantial economic implications and served as a reminder of the ongoing conflicts and proxy wars in the Middle East, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

2.8.1.14. Strengthening Bonds with China

In December 2022, a significant diplomatic event took place as the Chinese leader Xi Jinping embarked on a visit to Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. During his stay, Jinping held meetings with King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and other prominent Arab leaders, including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The discussions proved to be highly productive, resulting in the signing of numerous commercial agreements between China and the Kingdom. One notable outcome was the

agreement to increase the importation of oil and natural gas from Gulf Arab states, signifying a deepening economic partnership (Gambrell, 2022).

The visit played a crucial role in strengthening the bilateral relations between China and Saudi Arabia, elevating their diplomatic ties to a new level. It served as a testament to the growing importance of their strategic cooperation and laid the foundation for enhanced collaboration in various sectors. The visit not only reinforced economic bonds but also demonstrated the mutual desire to deepen political engagement and foster closer cultural exchanges. Overall, this visit by Xi Jinping marked a significant milestone in the relationship between China and Saudi Arabia, paving the way for greater cooperation and shared prosperity (Kalin, 2022).

2.8.1.15. Ultimate Surprise: The Iranian-Saudi Normalization

In a significant development in March 2023, representatives from Iran and Saudi Arabia convened in the Chinese capital, Beijing, for crucial discussions aimed at resolving their longstanding antagonism. The meeting resulted in a historic agreement between Riyadh and Tehran to normalize their relations, marking a major turning point in the regional dynamics. The deal carried substantial importance as it held the potential to foster peace and put an end to the protracted rivalry between the two countries. Moreover, the normalization of relations was expected to have far-reaching implications, including the expansion of economic ties across the Gulf region (Fantappie & Nasr, 2023).

The meeting in Beijing served as a platform for constructive dialogue and a symbol of the willingness of both Iran and Saudi Arabia to engage in diplomatic efforts to achieve stability in the Middle East. It represented a pivotal moment in the history of their strained relationship, offering hope for a more cooperative and collaborative approach. By agreeing to normalize relations, the two nations aimed to mitigate tensions and to create

opportunities for increased cooperation in various domains, such as trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. The deal was perceived as a positive step toward regional reconciliation and the promotion of peace and stability in the Gulf (Fantappie & Nasr, 2023).

Overall, the meeting in Beijing and the subsequent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia marked a significant milestone in their relations, signaling a shift towards a more constructive engagement and a renewed commitment to regional cooperation. The normalization of ties was seen as a positive development with the potential to have a transformative impact on the dynamics of the Gulf region, fostering peace, and opening avenues for enhanced economic collaboration.

3. Shifting Dynamics: The US-Saudi Ties After the Emergence of Mohammed bin Salman

Right after King Abdullah passed away, Obama made a quick visit to the kingdom after the succession took place. Then, the leader invited King Salman together with the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders for a summit in the U.S. Instead of going himself, Salman sent Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Prince Mohammed bin Salman. By 2016, the King made his official visit to the U.S., where he discussed the Iranian influence in the Arab world, mainly its domination in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, its attempt to dominate Yemen, and its alleged support of the Hezbollah terrorist group, which was continuously perceived as a threat according to the House of Saud. The House of Saud aimed to keep Iran "isolated as a pariah nation" (Riedel, 2017, p. 174). Remarkably, during Salman's reign, tensions grew stronger. During the same year, MbS made his visit for the promotion of his economic agenda (Riedel, 2017).

By January 2016, the Saudi authorities executed a number of terrorists in addition to Nimr al Nimr, a prominent Shia cleric, Iranians considered the murder of Nimr unacceptable as they protested and attacked the Saudi embassy in Iran. As a response, King Salman cut diplomatic ties with the nation and prevented Iranians from hajj. In this regard Riedel (2017) noted:

“The Saudi-Iranian rivalry and the Sunni-Shia sectarian war crossed the boundaries of the Middle East and helped nurture civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Never before has the sectarian conflict within Islam burned as fiercely as it does today.” (P. 175)

Indeed, the destructive nature of the Saudi-Iranian conflict brought divisions within the Muslim world between sects in Islam that fragmented national unities.

Throughout Obama's presidency, despite nearing its conclusion, the bond between Saudi Arabia and the United States remained robust. Obama consistently defended Saudi Arabia against allegations related to the Kingdom's involvement in the 9/11 attacks (Brennan, 2016). Furthermore, arms trade between the two nations thrived, with a notable deal where the U.S. sold arms worth an estimated one hundred and eleven billion dollars to the Kingdom (Blanchard, 2016). This underscores how deeply entrenched relations and mutual interests continued to solidify and shape the alliance. However, as Obama's presidency concluded, the responsibility for managing and nurturing relations with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia shifted to subsequent U.S. presidents, including President Trump and President Biden.

3.1. The Ideal Companion: King Salman and Donald J. Trump

During the Trump administration, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States experienced significant developments, with a focus on strengthening

economic cooperation and defense partnerships. The administration aimed to deepen ties with Saudi Arabia, evident through the signing of agreements such as a \$110 billion arms deal (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Additionally, President Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 aimed to reaffirm the alliance and foster closer cooperation on regional security issues, while expressing support for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan (The White House, 2017).

The visit served to underscore the importance of the Saudi-U.S. partnership in achieving mutual goals, including countering terrorism and containing Iran's influence. Furthermore, the Trump administration's support for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan, which aimed to diversify the Saudi economy and promote social reforms, indicated a shared interest in the kingdom's long-term economic transformation (The White House, 2017). These developments showcased the administration's efforts to strengthen bilateral relations and cooperate with Saudi Arabia on various fronts.

However, challenges arose in the Saudi-U.S. relationship during this period, particularly surrounding the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, which strained bilateral ties (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The Trump administration faced criticism for its response to the incident, with concerns raised about prioritizing strategic and economic interests over human rights considerations (Ellyatt, 2018). Despite these challenges, the administration continued to emphasize the importance of the U.S.-Saudi partnership, underscoring shared interests in regional security and countering Iran's influence (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

In summary, the Trump administration witnessed both efforts to strengthen and challenges in the Saudi-U.S. relationship. While enhancing economic and defense ties, the administration expressed its support for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan, highlighting a

mutual interest in the kingdom's economic transformation. Nonetheless, the fallout from the Khashoggi incident highlighted the complexities of maintaining a close partnership, as the administration faced criticism over its response. Throughout this period, the relationship between the two countries remained significant, with shared interests in regional stability, counterterrorism, and economic cooperation.

3.2.Deteriorating Marriage: King Salman and Joe Biden

During the Biden administration, the Saudi-U.S. relations witnessed a recalibration in several aspects. The Biden administration adopted a more critical stance towards Saudi Arabia compared to the previous administration, particularly regarding human rights concerns and the Yemen conflict. The shift in U.S. policy was evident through the suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the offensive operations in Yemen (Landler, 2021). This decision reflected the administration's commitment to prioritize human rights considerations in its relationship with Saudi Arabia.

However, the Biden administration recognized the strategic importance of maintaining ties with Saudi Arabia, especially in areas of mutual interest such as energy security and regional stability. The two countries continued to cooperate on counterterrorism efforts and pursued diplomatic engagement on various regional issues (Lieberman, 2021). The administration sought to balance its critique of Saudi Arabia's human rights record with the need for ongoing cooperation in areas of shared concern.

Within the context of the Saudi-U.S. relations, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan played an important role in shaping bilateral discussions. The Biden administration expressed support for the Vision 2030 initiative, recognizing its potential to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy and reduce dependence on oil revenues, in addition to the economic gain that the U.S. would benefit from for its contribution in the kingdom's vision (Landler,

2021). This alignment in interests provided a common ground for dialogue and collaboration between the two countries on economic and investment opportunities, particularly in the areas of renewable energy and technology transfer.

In conclusion, the Saudi-U.S. relations during the Biden administration witnessed a recalibration characterized by a more critical stance on human rights issues, the suspension of arms sales for offensive operations in Yemen, and continued engagement on strategic matters. The Biden administration acknowledged the significance of maintaining ties with Saudi Arabia while expressing concerns over human rights. Furthermore, the shared interest in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan facilitated discussions on economic diversification and bilateral collaboration in key sectors.

4.Theoretical Framework: What Is Power? The Debate over the Definition of Power and Power Relations

Numerous theorists analyzed and conceptualized power to reach factual conclusions and efficient definitions on the dynamics of power in the field of social theory, social sciences, international relations, and geopolitics (Dahl, 1957; Weber, 1946; Russel, 1938). Over time, some theories evolved, while others became irrelevant, and conceptualizations differed from one historical era to another. In varying cultural, political, and social contexts, the definition of power proliferated. Nevertheless, the essence of power remained classical for its fundamental and natural operation.

Robert Dahl (1957) defined power in his work "The Concept of Power" as the ability to get someone to do something, knowing that he/she would not do it in the first place. This occurred within the context of relations between two or more actors, where the distribution of power was unequal, with one person holding power and the other being subject to power. This relationship could involve influence, persuasion, or even force.

Max Weber (1946), the German sociologist, based his definition of power on the possibility that one person might subject another person to power despite their resistance. Similar to Dahl (1957), Weber argued that power was relational and distributed unequally among members. Additionally, individuals did not possess compatible degrees of power; the ability to influence another person represented the least degree, while the ability to force someone to do something denoted the greatest degree of power. Weber further categorized power into three types: traditional authority, legal rational authority, and charismatic authority.

In his book "Power: A New Social Analysis," Bertrand Russel (1938) defined power as the capacity to achieve effects. Power occurred when one was able to accomplish their goals. It was not merely the ability to control but the ability to actualize achievements. Russel identified four types of power: economic power, political power, social power, and ideological power. Furthermore, Russel emphasized that the unequal distribution of power impacted people's lives, as power could be used for both good and bad purposes.

Numerous theorists analyzed and defined power, highlighting its various aspects. Power was understood as the ability to influence, persuade, or force others. Unequal power distribution shaped human relationships and societies, impacting lives significantly. Understanding the different types of power deepened our comprehension of its role in economics, politics, society, and ideology.

4.1. Permeable Structures: Michel Foucault's Definition of Power

“It seems to me that in most analyses, whether a strict philosophical analysis or more political analysis, if not Marxist, the question of power had been relatively marginalized or at least simplified” (Foucault, 1981. 0: 01). In his study on the mechanism

of power relations Michel Foucault questioned the common analytical interpretations of power by theorists and historians. Where he classified three conceptions of power: Juridical power, war-repression power, and disciplinary power (Glover, 2015).

Juridical power referred to the institution of monarchy which was developed during the period of the Middle Ages. It occupied the positional centralization and responsibility to end war and violence internally and externally. This perspective of sovereignty and prohibition extended until nowadays in political theory. In this regard, Foucault denounced the idea of sovereignty and called for the cutting “of the king’s head” (p,63) in political philosophy (Rabinow, 1984).

The second conception of power was based on the studies conducted by Marx and Nietzsche, who suggested the idea of binary struggles between two opposing powers in the overall examination of power relations. Nietzsche explored the dynamic of master versus slave, highlighting the contrasting roles and power dynamics between the two. Marx, on the other hand, focused on the bourgeoisie versus proletariat, examining the power struggles within the socioeconomic classes (Rabinow, 1984).

The third conception occupied the appropriate definition of power connections for Foucault, the understanding of power did not require looking at a “sovereign center” or “opposing forces.” Rather, one ought to concentrate on the micro-level techniques and tactics of power to see it “from within” instead of from “above”. His conceptualization covered the part and whole of these relations and concluded that power’s rootedness defied simplified centralizations and necessitated a “micro-political relational perspective” (Kelly, 2009, p, 66).

For Foucault, power had been impersonal, relational, decentered, multidirectional, intentional, and trans-historical. Accordingly, impersonality or “subjectlessness” meant

that power was not guided by specific individuals nor centralized around one entity. Which led to the aspect of decenteredness, it shared fundamental diffusions rather than individual or class consolidation. That was why Michel argued that power was relational, it comprised of relational dependencies and connections for it to survive. It was not possessed by any of these power actors, the members were agents who served for its intentionality and strategic nature, these agents were bounded by the nature of power and the natural dynamics it imposed on the human intentionality (Kelly, 2009).

The theorist contended that power operated according to a distinct strategy, yet it relied on human intentionality to achieve specific objectives. According to Foucault's distinction, power possessed an intentional and strategic trajectory, but it lacked an inherent strategist. In other words, power itself exhibited a systematic and purposeful nature, but it required human agency to direct and guide its course towards specific aims. Mark Kelly (2009) further clarified:

“Power therefore also lacks the type of directedness which is characteristic/ constitutive of what is ordinarily called human intentionality, the type of relationship people have towards the world. Power has “aims and objectives,” but these work ultimately towards a single purpose, namely the stability of the network of power relations itself.” (P. 48-49)

Meaning, the importance of the leader lied in his ability to guide the intentionality of power, to become the strategist and render the heading distinguishable. In the boundaries of time, space, and historical traces, he had the chance to continue the legacy of previous power structures on the basis of power and knowledge to implant his political rationality.

Lastly, the concept of multi-directionality argued that power was characterized by a matrix in which diverse potentials and uneven distributions intersected within an ever-

evolving and non-static system. This system was constantly under the threat of alteration as a result of the potential for resistance. In terms of its relational nature, power was considered trans-historical, meaning that while the world witnessed changes in the manifestations of power, these changes were based on the "mode" rather than the "form" of power (Kelly, 2009).

In fact, contemporary power relations were shaped by the cumulative impact of historical events and the strategic nature of power. These ingredients provided the concept of power with a sense of autonomy that appeared to extend beyond individual possession or the realm of human intention (Kelly, 2009).

The establishment of a specific system required the merge between power and knowledge that defined what is normal, acceptable and logical. In other words, the relationship between rationalization and political power. These interactions developed a probable body of knowledge and at the same time knowledge augmented and expanded the strategic influence of this power (Foucault, 1991).

Additionally, it was argued that power and knowledge were intricately intertwined, with each serving as the foundation and support for the other. The genealogy of historical forms of power revealed that knowledge and power were inextricably linked, as they mutually reinforced and sustained one another. In fact, behind the façade of every apparent form of knowledge, there existed an underlying struggle for power. This perspective, espoused by Foucault, emphasized the need to conceptualize these relations as power/knowledge rather than the traditional dichotomy of ideology/repression (Rabinow, 1984).

Moreover, the proliferation of knowledge and information consumption through education and media was vital in the dissemination of truth. Political and economic

organizations such as the police, the military, universities, and the media played a crucial part in generating and disseminating truth. However, truth was not immune to the complex and ongoing political discord and social challenges that characterized society. It remained subject to constant negotiation and contestation (Glover, 2015).

In Michel Foucault's perspective, the establishment of truth or what he referred to as a "regime for truth" was driven by constraints and restrictions. These forces provided the foundation upon which truth was constructed, highlighting the intricate relationship between power and the formation of truth. Thus, truth was not a fixed or objective concept but rather contingent upon the social, political, and power dynamics at play within a given context (Foucault, 1991).

The regime of truth was a deviation of the concept of truth itself, but each culture, society, or state had its own regime of truth that was defined throughout history and power relations. In Foucault's words:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth. (Rabinow, 1984, p. 73)

Indeed, the struggle for power produced knowledge and the interactions between power and knowledge gave rise to power relations which ultimately generated a regime of truth that was subjected to pressures from economic and political ideologies. Clearly, like power and knowledge, regimes of truth were not definitive and could be subjected to modifications and changes.

This ‘battle’ was not for an ultimate utopia but about the deviation between truth and falsity and the rules which divided the specific effects of power in relation to truth, it was a battle about “the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (p. 74). It centered around the negotiation and contestation of truth's status and the roles it played within the broader social fabric. It represented an ongoing struggle to define and control the narrative, while also acknowledging the complexities and nuances inherent in the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth (Rabinow, 1984).

Foucault coined the term ‘technologies’ to label the modern operations of power:

“In the modern era, new technologies of power emerge, which, while they have the same general characteristics of all power, are more productive, in the sense that they allow for the close production of behaviours in both individuals and entire populations beyond what was possible before.” (Kelly, 2009, p. 43)

Which were a set of methods and processes paved by knowledge, power and truth to objectify and mold ‘the body’ (Foucault, 1991). Like Martin Heidegger, Max Weber, and Max Horkheimer, he was aware of the recent technological functioning of power that was accompanied with an evolving execution of rationality and technological functioning, to ascertain constructive results in terms of economic production and political obedience. In detail, these technologies could objectify the behavior of individual and mass populations. Two of these technologies were discipline and bio-power, the former treated the body individually while the latter collectively (Rabinow, 1984).

Discipline or disciplinary technology aimed at the codification of time, space, and movement on a micro-political level (Rabinow, 1984). Foucault argued that this technique was born during a historical moment when an art of the human body was born that enhanced the development of its skills, probably the Enlightenment period. Discipline

targeted these skills for economic usefulness and the persistence of a certain system of power relations (Glover, 2015).

However, it required the conditioning reciprocal interaction between docility and utility. Meaning, its machinery supervised the training of individuals in places such as prisons, schools, hospitals and factories to guarantee compliance for skillful economic performance. Michel confirmed that the machinery of discipline was bounded to technological innovation simply because the condition of technology required mass production (Kelly, 2009).

The disciplinary ‘art of government’ allowed other techniques to appear such as bio-power, a macro-political technique that set detailed and explicit calculations involving mass surveillance, mass control and health campaigns which in return spread the mentality of ‘normative rationality’ to control the wider population. Normalization or normative rationality referred to the growing attraction toward statistical measures to categorize what was considered normal and abnormal, abnormal or incorrect human behaviors were called ‘anomalies’ by Foucault (Rabinow, 1984).

Furthermore, the technology of normalization was crucial in the management of societal deviations and the normalization of dysfunctional behaviors through therapeutic interventions. Anomalies that deviated from the norm were isolated, and efforts were made to bring them back within acceptable boundaries. This normalization process aimed to restore order and conformity within society, ensuring that individuals adhered to established norms and standards of the regime of truth (Rabinow, 1984).

In parallel, the emergence of bio-power ushered in a new era of power dynamics centered around the production and utilization of statistical knowledge. This form of power sought to generate detailed knowledge through the systematic collection and analysis of

data, with the goal of creating, classifying, and ultimately controlling various cases and phenomena. The application of statistical knowledge allowed for the categorization, quantification, and regulation of individuals, their behaviors, and their bodies (Rabinow, 1984).

Through the fusion of normalization techniques and the production of statistical knowledge, bio-power operated as a mechanism to shape and control populations, exerting influence at both the individual and collective levels. As Paul Rabinow (1984) confirmed: “The power of the state to produce an increasingly totalizing web of control is intertwined with and dependent on its ability to produce an increasing specification of individuality (p. 22). The focus on generating scientific knowledge and employing statistical techniques allowed for the creation of categories, classifications, and norms that became integral to the governance and management of society.

The analyst noted that the functioning of both discipline and bio-power excluded the practice of sovereignty. In fact, he demonstrated that these modes were contradictory and impossible to occur simultaneously, since discipline and bio-power worked on “training bodies and keeping people alive” (p. 43), while sovereignty involved the operation of violence. Also, he remarked that despite the apparent imbalance in the distribution of capacity (by capacity here he meant the power to act) this system remained flexible for other members were able to influence the discourse of power. And even if violence or domination occurred the person could reverse or resist the system through “killing himself or the other person” (Kelly, 2009, p.74).

Within this context, the figure of the intellectual emerged as a key component, actively engaging in the analysis and reconfiguration of established constructs. However, the intellectual's intervention posed a political threat to the prevailing regime.

Oppenheimer referred to this perilous role as that of the "atomic scientist," symbolizing the intellectual's potential to disrupt the established order (Rabinow, 1984).

Foucault expounded on the dangers posed by intellectuals, emphasizing their capacity to intervene in the dynamics of truth and power, rather than being limited to the realm of the established regime of truth. He highlighted the intellectual's ability to challenge and modify existing regimes, making the "problem of the intellectual" fundamentally a problem of truth (Foucault, 1991). Consequently, regimes sought to restrict the intellectual's participation by confining them to specific domains, thus giving rise to the concept of the "specific intellectual":

“It seems to me that what must now be taken into account in the intellectual is not the "bearer of universal values. " Rather, it's the person occupying a specific position-but whose specificity is linked, in a society like ours, to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth.” (Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow, 1984, p.73)

Specific intellectuals were drawn to work within specific spheres and aligned themselves with the masses. Special attention was given to intellectuals in strategic economic fields, particularly within techno-scientific structures. The containment of intellectuals and the reduction of their roles to economically productive domains served to perpetuate and strengthen the established regime of truth. In this way, the intellectual's role became intertwined with broader power structures and economic considerations, ultimately shaping the trajectory of knowledge production and the propagation of truth within society (Rabinow, 1984).

In the modern era, it became evident that even authorities wielding significant power were not impervious to pressure exerted by entities with relatively lesser power.

Surprisingly, the aggregation of these relatively weaker units of power had the potential to generate a collective force surpassing that of the dominant authority itself (Kelly, 2009).

Notably, while techniques of power were effective in subjecting individuals to control and influence, they achieved this outcome with the individuals' own consent. Power mechanisms operated in a manner that encouraged individuals to willingly participate and conform to the power structures at play. This voluntary compliance was an essential aspect of the exercise of power, as individuals were not merely passive recipients of power but actively engaged in its operation and perpetuation (Victor Gijbers, 2017).

To translate his lens effectively, Foucault suggested the idea of the panopticon. It referred to a disciplinary mechanism and a metaphorical structure of power. Foucault drew inspiration from Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of a circular prison, wherein a central watchtower enabled constant surveillance of individual cells arranged around it. The panopticon symbolized a system of power that operated through observation and visibility:

“The architectural perfection is such that even if there is no guardian present, the power apparatus still operates effectively. The inmate cannot see whether or not the guardian is in the tower, so he must behave as if surveillance were perpetual and total. If the prisoner is never sure when he is being observed, he becomes his own guardian. As the final step in architectural and technological perfection, the panopticon includes a system for observing and controlling the controllers.” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 19)

By positioning the observer as an all-seeing authority and the observed as potentially under constant scrutiny, the panopticon created a sense of internalized discipline and self-regulation within those being observed. Individuals, aware of the possibility of being

watched at any time, begin to regulate their behavior and conform to societal norms, even in the absence of actual surveillance. The panopticon, therefore, represented a mechanism of power that induced self-discipline and control, exerting influence through the perception of being constantly monitored (Glover, 2015).

In this regard, the power dynamics observed in the modern era thus challenged traditional notions of power as solely top-down and coercive. Instead, power was acknowledged as a complex interplay of various forces, where even those seemingly lacking in power could exercise agency and influence.

Mohammed bin Salman's quest for power exemplified the various power dynamics observed in the modern era. As he rose to prominence within the Saudi Arabian political landscape, he encountered pressures and challenges from both internal and external entities, despite his position as a figure of authority. Bin Salman's pursuit of power was not a mere hereditary ascendance to power, it was a battle of truth.

Concretely, Mohammed bin Salman's pursuit of power demonstrated the interplay between authority, the aggregation of power units, consent, and the utilization of power techniques. His strategic approach, leveraging alliances and navigating the power dynamics within Saudi Arabia, allowed him to consolidate his authority and position himself as a central figure in shaping the country's trajectory.

However, the complex nature of power dynamics ensured that challenges and resistance remained a constant presence, shaping the outcomes and trajectory of his quest for power. This understanding emphasized that power was not solely concentrated within authoritative figures but was distributed throughout society, with the potential for alternative sources of power to emerge and challenge existing power dynamics.

4.2.A Psycho-ecological Approach to Power: Conceptual Derivations from Power Basis Theory

The Power Basis Theory, known as the psychoecological approach, identified the role of power in human existence within the framework of ecological constraints and opportunities. According to this theory, power was fundamental in human life, driven by the imperative need for survival and the fulfillment of basic needs (Pratto et al, 2011).

Power, as defined in their framework, served as the mechanism to fulfill survival needs or create deficits in needs. However, it was important to note that power was not located within an individual or a group as an inherent attribute solely, as the ability to meet survival requirements relied on a combination of needs, the surrounding environment, and human capabilities. From the perspective of an individual in need, power employed to satisfy those needs was considered constructive, while power used to generate deficits in needs or hinder their fulfillment was regarded as destructive (Pratto et al, 2011)

Indeed, the study contended that the recurrence of power dynamics in all aspects of human life and societies stemmed from the fact that power served as the primary means through which individuals met their fundamental needs. Therefore, the foundation of power was rooted in the underlying needs that individuals sought to fulfill:

“This association between power and life quality is no coincidence. Power is, according to our definition, the means to meet survival needs or to create deficit in needs. However, power is not situated in the person or group as agency, because the means of meeting survival requirements depends jointly on needs, the environment, and human capacities.” (Pratto et al, 2011, p. 193)

Within this context, power was viewed as a fundamental force that drove human behavior and interactions. The acquisition and exercise of power were seen as essential strategies employed by individuals and groups to secure the resources and conditions necessary for survival and well-being. The dynamics of power were linked to the constant pursuit of meeting basic needs, driving individuals to engage in power relationships and navigate the power structures present in their social contexts.

Individuals possessed the inherent ability to detect whether their needs were being fulfilled, relying on their sensibilities as a means of assessment. Sensibilities allowed people to gauge whether their current needs were met or if there was a lack in their fulfillment. The detection of a need or the corresponding sensation served as a powerful motivator, prompting individuals to take action to restore a state of need satisfaction. For instance, the sensation of hunger motivated individuals to seek out food and satiate their appetite. Motivated by this internal drive, individuals engaged in actions aimed at meeting their needs, at least temporarily alleviating the sense of lack (Pratto et al, 2011).

However, there were instances where specific needs intensified or became acute, triggering a heightened alertness in an individual's sensibilities. This heightened state of awareness spurred motivation into active mode, driving individuals to take decisive actions to address and alleviate the intensified need. The interplay between motivation, one's repertoire of behavioral skills, and the opportunities presented by the environment influenced the actions individuals chose to pursue in response to their motivations, ultimately seeking to fulfill and assuage the intensified need (Pratto et al, 2011).

Pratto et al (2011) demonstrated that the universalism of human needs and desires extended to the realm of international relations, allowing for the provision and anticipation of the requirements of other nations, "Comparative politics could reveal how well political

processes allow political actors to monopolize the means of meeting needs, to concentrate power, or to prevent concentrations of power” (p, 206). This universality created the potential for social influence among states, enabling them to transform one means of meeting a need into another. The resulting fungibility among different types of power within international relations was what rendered power dynamics interactive with both the physical and social environments; nations shared common needs such as security, economic stability, access to resources, and recognition of sovereignty. Additionally, desires for regional influence, global prestige, and cultural exchange contributed to the universal fabric of international relations.

The acknowledgement of these universal needs and desires allowed states to go beyond their own interests and consider the needs and aspirations of other nations. This capacity to anticipate and address the requirements of other states was a crucial aspect of diplomacy and cooperative interaction in the international arena. Relatedly, according to the Power Basis Theory, conflicts arose historically among individuals and between groups, societies, and governments due to basic needs (Pratto et al, 2011).

Furthermore, the Power Basis Theory highlighted that conflicts related to power were not limited to individual interactions but extended to larger social and political structures:

“Our view of power suggests several strategies for maintaining relative power over others. Parties can exercise forms of power against or on behalf of others, can try to prevent other parties from gaining or exercising forms of power, can restrict others’ access to power or use of power, can influence other parties to use power to sustain themselves rather than to use it against others, and can try to restrict fungibility of different forms of

power for others while maintaining high fungibility for themselves.” (Pratto et al, 2011, p. 208)

Meaning, Societies were marked by power struggles between different factions or classes, each advocating for their preferred power bases as the means to secure basic needs for their members. These conflicts often resulted in complex dynamics of competition, negotiation, and even coercion, as groups sought to establish and maintain their desired power structures (Pratto et al, 2011).

Throughout history, societies witnessed clashes and disagreements surrounding the allocation and distribution of power resources. Different groups held distinct beliefs and ideologies regarding the sources and mechanisms of power that were essential for meeting basic needs. These differences in power conceptions often led to tensions and conflicts, as individuals and groups vied for control and access to the power bases they deemed necessary for survival and well-being (Pratto et al, 2011).

In summary, Power Basis Theory posited that conflicts arose among individuals and groups due to differing perspectives on the types of power associated with basic needs. These conflicts, manifested on both interpersonal, societal, and international levels, influenced the construction of social norms and institutional frameworks aimed at managing power disputes and ensuring the satisfactory fulfillment of fundamental human requirements.

Mohammed bin Salman's quest for power could be analyzed through the lens of power bases and survival needs, as outlined in PBT. It was argued that his pursuit of power was driven by the imperative need for survival, both at an individual and societal level. The Crown Prince recognized the challenges and vulnerabilities facing Saudi Arabia, including economic dependence on oil, regional geopolitical tensions, and the need for

social and economic reforms to ensure the country's long-term sustainability. These circumstances necessitated a strategic approach to power, driven by the survival needs of the nation and its leadership.

One aspect of bin Salman's quest for power was focused on securing and maintaining control over the country's oil resources, which served as a crucial power base for Saudi Arabia. The economic well-being and survival of the nation relied heavily on the revenue generated from oil exports. Recognizing the fluctuating dynamics of the global oil market and the potential risks to Saudi Arabia's economic stability, bin Salman sought to consolidate power and implement measures to safeguard the country's energy security.

Additionally, bin Salman's pursuit of power encompassed efforts to enact social and economic reforms, as exemplified by the Vision 2030 initiative. This comprehensive plan aimed to diversify the Saudi economy, reduce dependence on oil, and promote social modernization. These reforms were driven by the recognition that the existing economic model faced challenges and needed to adapt to ensure the long-term survival and prosperity of the nation.

Furthermore, bin Salman's consolidation of power could be viewed as a response to the regional geopolitical landscape. The power dynamics in the Middle East posed threats and uncertainties to Saudi Arabia's security and influence. Through strategic power moves, including internal consolidations and external diplomatic engagements, bin Salman aimed to enhance Saudi Arabia's position, mitigate risks, and ensure the survival of the nation amidst regional complexities.

In conclusion, Mohammed bin Salman's quest for power could be understood as a response to the survival needs of Saudi Arabia. The pursuit of power was driven by the imperative to secure and control essential resources, such as oil, to address economic

vulnerabilities. Furthermore, it encompassed efforts to enact social and economic reforms to diversify the economy and adapt to changing global dynamics. Bin Salman's strategic approach to power aimed to safeguard the survival and long-term sustainability of the nation amidst regional geopolitical challenges.

Similarly, in the recent conflict between Saudi Arabia and the United States, the notion of power bases and basic needs could provide insight into the dynamics at play. The US exerted pressure on Saudi Arabia, particularly regarding human rights violations, which could be understood through the lens of power bases and survival needs, encompassing factors such as oil and economic interests associated with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Historically, Saudi Arabia held a significant position in the global oil market, possessing vast oil reserves that were vital for meeting the energy demands of various countries, including the United States. This economic interdependence created a power dynamic where Saudi Arabia, as a major oil producer, held a power base associated with resource control. However, concerns regarding human rights violations put pressure on this power base and strained the relationship between the two nations.

It was important to acknowledge from the US perspective, the promotion of human rights aligned with its core values and ideological beliefs. The US government, driven by its own domestic and international considerations, exerted pressure on Saudi Arabia to address human rights concerns. While the US had its own sources of oil and energy production, the survival needs encompassed not only energy security but also the broader principles of human rights and global norms.

However, the US government's stance on human rights violations in Saudi Arabia could be viewed through the lens of economic interests and the Saudi Vision 2030. The

US, as a major global economic power, has its own economic interests in supporting and benefiting from Saudi Arabia's economic transformation. Thus, the pressure exerted by the US on Saudi Arabia regarding human rights violations could be seen as a result of the interplay between power bases associated with basic needs such as oil and economic gain, as well as the alignment with ideological principles and the pursuit of broader global norms.

4.4.Theoretical Merge: The Fusion of Pratto and Foucault’s Frameworks

The discussion encompassed two influential theories of power: Pratto's Power Basis Theory and Foucault's analysis of power relations. The exploration of these theories provided valuable insights into the nature, sources, and dynamics of power in human societies in relation to Mohammed bin Salman’s quest for power and the U.S-Saudi relations.

Pratto's Power Basis Theory (2011), rooted in the psychoecological approach, emphasized the ontological necessity of power in meeting basic survival needs. The derived conceptualizations from Pratto’s theoretical lens were useful for the analysis of Mohammed bin Salman’s quest for power, as the latter’s reforms stemmed from the drive to satisfy a basic survival need, mainly economic security. As for the U.S-Saudi ties, it helped explain its survival and how such long lasting relation was driven by survival needs, for the sake of economic growth and security.

On the other hand, Foucault's analysis delved into the intricacies of power relations and the construction of truth and knowledge. His examination of power-knowledge dynamics exposed how power operated through social institutions, discourses, and practices in Saudi Arabia. With this theoretical lens in mind, it helped explain the past and

present structures of power relations in the kingdom, shedding light on the importance of each structure for they complete each other and solve the overall enigma.

The examination of these theories provided insights into the political, social, and economic dimension of the Crown Prince's quest for power and the U.S-Saudi ties. The past demonstrated how power bases and survival needs shaped societal structures, economic systems, and geopolitical dynamics. It showcased how power was wielded, negotiated, and contested by individuals and institutions, leaving lasting impacts on societies and individuals.

Furthermore, the examination of these theories underscored the importance of understanding power in its broader historical and socio-political contexts. The past revealed the contingent nature of power, as its manifestations, strategies, and sources evolved over time in response to changing societal, economic, and ideological forces.

Overall, the exploration of Pratto's Power Basis Theory and Foucault's analysis of power relations provided a nuanced understanding of power dynamics. The past analysis deepened our knowledge of the complexities of power, its connection to survival needs, the construction of knowledge, and its pervasive influence on human societies (Pratto, 2011; Rabinow, 1984). Through this exploration, one had gained valuable insights into the historical development and implications of power, which enabled the critical engagement with power dynamics in contemporary contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: REFLECTIONS ON MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN'S QUEST FOR POWER, THE REFORM PROCESS IN SAUDI ARABIA, AND THE U.S.- SAUDI RELATIONS

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reform agenda in Saudi Arabia was shaped by significant national and international events, as well as global trends. Key historical events, such as the discovery of oil, decolonization, regional conflicts, and the Arab Spring, impacted the trajectory of reforms. Global trends, including globalization, technological advancements, multiculturalism, and the pursuit of human rights, played a crucial role in shaping Saudi society and inspiring transformative reforms.

The transformation of Saudi Arabia under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman involved a fusion of modernity and Islamic values, aiming to create a modern and inclusive society rooted in Islamic principles. However, challenges arose in controlling power dynamics, particularly due to the nationalist approach to foreign policy, which might lead to internal divisions and limitations on the extent of change. Therefore, the culture of leadership, influenced by historical, cultural, and Islamic factors, shaped the expectations and behaviors of leaders and followers.

Vision 2030 served as a roadmap, optimizing sectors and leveraging technology for efficient governance. Disciplinary technologies were employed to shape and regulate behavior in the economy, education, and social practices. The interplay between modernization, Islamic values, power dynamics, and governmentality shed light on the complexities of Saudi Arabia's transformation and the challenges it faced in realizing its goals.

Furthermore, within Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth, the pursuit of economic diversification and productivity reflected the larger objective of molding

individuals into productive and obedient subjects. The regime's exercise of sovereignty, often accompanied by violence, demonstrated ultimate authority and control. However, the interplay between discipline, bio-power, and sovereignty revealed complexities, including the potential for resistance and limitations on the regime's power. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi served as an example of the regime's ability to silence dissent and also the capacity of resistance.

Transitioning to the next section, the U.S.-Saudi relationship experienced changes during the Trump and Biden administrations. Under Trump, economic interests played a prominent role, emphasizing trade and investment opportunities aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan. The Biden administration adopted a more critical approach, prioritizing human rights and democratic values. The link between Saudi Arabia's economic diversification of partners and U.S. pressure on human rights highlighted the complex dynamics of their relationship.

The future of US-Saudi relations was influenced by geopolitical considerations, shared interests, and the changing global landscape. Collaboration on counterterrorism, regional stability, and energy security remained important, but challenges arose from the polarization of the American political system. Most importantly, recognizing Saudi Arabia's values and aspirations while navigating partnerships realistically would contribute to regional stability, shared interests, and meeting survival needs.

1.Contagious Evolution: The Interrelation of Reforms and Major Influences

Throughout the past few years, there was a debate surrounding the reforms initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) in Saudi Arabia. While some voices lauded these changes as revolutionary and transformative (Hannah, 2023), a closer examination of the Kingdom's reform trajectory revealed a different narrative. By delving

into the historical context of Saudi Arabia's reforms, spanning from the reign of King Abdulaziz to the present rule of King Salman, it became evident that the purported radical nature of MbS's reforms was misleading. Instead, a pattern of interconnected and gradual reforms emerged, challenging the notion of a drastic departure from established practices. This introspection set the stage for a clearer understanding of Saudi Arabia's reform journey and its continuous evolution between the past and the present.

Based on the first chapter of this dissertation, from the early days of King Abdulaziz's reign, the process of reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began with a clear vision for modernization and progress. King Abdulaziz, also known as Ibn Saud, initiated a series of comprehensive reforms encompassing social, economic, and administrative domains. His efforts were aimed at transforming the country and bringing it in line with global standards. These reforms included the establishment of governmental institutions, the introduction of legal reforms, and the implementation of infrastructure projects.

The subsequent reigns of King Saud, King Faisal, and King Khalid witnessed the continuation of reform efforts in various areas. Under King Saud's rule, the emphasis was placed on economic development and the implementation of critical infrastructure projects. These initiatives laid the groundwork for future advancements and set the stage for the transformative measures pursued by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

King Faisal's reign marked a significant milestone in terms of social and educational reforms. He championed the expansion of education, healthcare, and women's rights. The promotion of education, in particular, played a crucial role in preparing the population for future development. These reforms served as a foundation for subsequent leaders, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to build upon.

During King Khalid's reign, further socioeconomic reforms were implemented. Notable among these was the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), also known as the Saudi Central Bank (Saudi Central Bank, n.d.). These efforts aimed to strengthen the economy and promote social welfare, laying the groundwork for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious Vision 2030 plan (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Examining specific reforms under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, there appeared a clear alignment with the aspirations of previous leaders. For instance, King Abdullah's economic reforms focused on attracting foreign investment, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and diversifying the economy beyond oil. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 plan built upon these foundations, with initiatives such as the establishment of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the National Transformation Program, and the expansion of non-oil sectors (Vision 2030, 2016).

In terms of social reforms, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to empower women can be seen as a continuation of a trajectory that began with King Faisal's push for women's education and workforce participation. King Fahd's era witnessed further progress, including the establishment of the first women's college. The Kingdom's decision to lift the ban on women driving and expand women's employment opportunities further advanced the trajectory of women's empowerment in the Kingdom (House of Saud, n.d.).

Furthermore, the cultural reforms initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman built upon earlier efforts to promote Saudi Arabia's rich heritage and cultural expression. King Faisal's establishment of cultural institutions, such as the King Faisal Foundation and the King Abdulaziz Foundation, paved the way for subsequent developments (House of Saud, n.d.). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms, such as the establishment of the General Authority for Entertainment and the organization of

cultural festivals, aimed to enhance the cultural vibrancy of the Kingdom (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Education had a consistent focus of reform throughout Saudi Arabia's history. The push for educational reform initiated by King Abdulaziz continued through subsequent reigns. King Saud emphasized education, and King Faisal expanded access, improved curriculum quality, and established universities (House of Saud, 2021). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's initiatives to modernize the education system, promote technical and vocational training, and foster innovation aligned with this historical trajectory (Vision, 2030, n.d.).

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms cannot be viewed in isolation but rather as part of an ongoing and continuous process of transformation in the Kingdom. The interconnectedness between his reforms and those of previous leaders demonstrated an evolving vision for Saudi Arabia's future. By building upon the achievements of his predecessors, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sought to accelerate progress and address the challenges of the present era.

In conclusion, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms in Saudi Arabia were connected intricately to the broader history of reforms in the Kingdom. They reflected a continuation of the aspirations and efforts of previous leaders while responding to contemporary challenges and opportunities. By examining the concrete evidence of reforms across various domains, from economics to social empowerment, culture, and education, it became evident that MbS's agenda represented a significant chapter in Saudi Arabia's ongoing journey of development and transformation.

1.1.Influential Global Trends

Throughout history, Saudi Arabia's pace of reforms was tied intricately to global trends, profoundly impacting the trajectory of the Kingdom. These trends, often discerned through international comparisons, have exerted a substantial influence, propelling and expediting reforms across diverse realms such as social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, like his predecessors, drew inspiration from these broader global trends and the evolving dynamics of the international community in formulating his reform agenda. The forces of globalization, technological advancements, and shifting geopolitical landscapes were crucial in shaping the direction and extent of his transformative reforms.

1.1.1. The Global Economic System

One pivotal global trend that exerted a profound influence on the reform efforts in Saudi Arabia was the escalating recognition of the exigency for economic diversification and the curtailment of dependency on oil revenues. The volatility of oil prices and the imperativeness of cultivating a sustainable and resilient economy propelled Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to place a steadfast emphasis on economic reforms. This trend aligned harmoniously with the experiences of other oil-dependent nations and the dynamic global economic landscape, where countries endeavored to diversify their economic foundations and nurture a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. The astute acknowledgment of the significance of a diversified economy, the reforms spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sought to fortify Saudi Arabia's footing for long-term prosperity while simultaneously mitigating vulnerabilities to external shocks.

Norway served as an exemplary instance of the profound impact of economic diversification. Analogous to Saudi Arabia, Norway relied heavily on oil revenues. Nonetheless, the Norwegian government displayed prescience in recognizing the need to

diminish reliance on oil and diversify the nation's economic portfolio. To this end, they instituted the Government Pension Fund Global, commonly referred to as the Norwegian Oil Fund, which channeled surplus oil revenues into international markets, thereby establishing a diversified and sustainable long-term wealth fund (Isachsen & Gylfason, 2022). This well-crafted approach empowered Norway to diminish susceptibility to oil price fluctuations and erect a robust economy beyond the confines of the oil sector.

Furthermore, the sway of major powers manifested in Saudi Arabia's educational and knowledge-based reforms prominently. The Kingdom was inspired from leading educational systems and esteemed institutions worldwide to elevate the quality of education, foster a climate of innovation, and galvanize research and development. By harmonizing with international standards and embracing best practices in education, Saudi Arabia endeavored to nurture a highly skilled workforce, attract global talent, and engender a knowledge-based economy.

Singapore offered an illustrative case of the influence wielded by major powers in educational reforms. Renowned for its superlative education system, Singapore sought to benchmark against global standards consistently and incorporate best practices from esteemed educational systems such as Finland, South Korea, and the United States (Leverage Edu, 2023). By assimilating successful strategies from these nations, Singapore was able to cultivate an exceptionally skilled workforce and establish itself as an unrivaled global hub for innovation and knowledge-based industries.

Moreover, the formidable impact of globalization and the fervent ambition to position Saudi Arabia as an enticing investment destination had imprinted themselves on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms indelibly. Initiatives such as liberalizing the Saudi stock market for foreign investors, establishing enclaves of economic privilege,

and fortifying the business climate, all reflected a resolute drive to attract foreign direct investment and foster international trade poignantly. Seamlessly, these reforms aligned with the overarching global trend of nations endeavoring fervently to cultivate a conducive investment climate and bolster their competitive standing on the global stage.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) served as an impeccable exemplar, vividly illustrating the repercussions of globalization and the relentless pursuit of investment attraction. The UAE had implemented an array of economic reforms, including the establishment of free economic zones like the Dubai International Financial Centre and Abu Dhabi Global Market, with the explicit aim of enticing foreign direct investment (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.). These enterprising initiatives positioned the UAE as a veritable regional business hub and a gateway for international corporations seeking to gain a foothold in the Middle Eastern market.

In fact, UAE's economic policy held a great influence on MbS as he claimed:

I think there are unique projects in the Middle East. If we take a look at the Middle East after the establishment of the United Nations, the situation was tough, and the developing countries were dependent on their natural resources especially oil, particularly the Gulf countries. However, there came a man in the 1990s and showed us by his example and convinced us that all of us in the Middle East can achieve more. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid. He achieved in Dubai and convinced everyone in the Middle East that we can achieve not only like Dubai, but even more.

(Al Arabiya English, 2018, 00:01)

MbS acknowledged the challenging circumstances faced by developing countries, particularly their reliance on natural resources such as oil. However, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid's achievements in Dubai during the 1990s served as a powerful example of

what could be accomplished in the Middle East. Through his visionary leadership, he transformed Dubai into a global hub of commerce and innovation and inspired the belief that all countries in the region could achieve even greater success. His accomplishments shattered preconceived limitations and instilled a collective aspiration to surpass existing benchmarks, thereby sparking a movement towards progress and prosperity throughout the Middle East.

In essence, Saudi Arabia's reform endeavors were shaped profoundly by various global trends, such as the recognition of the necessity for economic diversification, the influence of major powers in educational reforms, the impact of globalization on investment attraction and competitiveness, and the ardent aspiration to align with influential global players. Through the examination of compelling examples within each trend, one gained a nuanced understanding of the far-reaching ramifications and significance of these global influences on Saudi Arabia's reform agenda. Through the assimilation of valuable insights and benchmarking against successful practices, Saudi Arabia was striving diligently to diversify its economy, attract foreign investment, and implement policies conducive to enduring growth and prosperity.

1.1.2. The Global Digital Revolution

The reform agenda of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia was influenced apparently by the increasing impact of digital technology and the rise of the digital economy. The Vision 2030 plan, with its focus on digital infrastructure, e-commerce, and information technology, recognized the transformative power of technology in driving innovation, economic growth, and social progress (Vision 2030, n.d.).

The Kingdom's Vision 2030 plan, aimed at diversifying the economy and driving sustainable growth, placed considerable emphasis on the development of digital infrastructure, the promotion of e-commerce, and the advancement of information and communication technology. These initiatives recognized the transformative power of technology and its potential to drive innovation, economic growth, and social progress. For instance, the establishment of Neom, a futuristic city project, exemplified Saudi Arabia's commitment to leveraging digital advancements. Neom aimed to become a regional hub for technology and innovation, harnessing artificial intelligence, robotics, and sustainable energy to create a cutting-edge and sustainable urban environment.

Moreover, technological advancements and the digital age facilitated international comparisons and information sharing, influencing the pace of reforms in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom looked to global examples of successful digital transformations and e-governance to streamline processes, enhance public services, and foster innovation. For instance, countries like Japan, known for their digital advancements and e-government initiatives, served as valuable benchmarks for Saudi Arabia's own digital reform agenda. By adopting international best practices, Saudi Arabia sought to accelerate its progress in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and technological advancements, aiming to position itself as a regional leader in the digital realm (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, n.d.).

Additionally, the digital revolution played a pivotal role in shaping the pace of reforms in Saudi Arabia, particularly in areas related to freedom of expression, access to information, and transparency. The rapid development of information and communication technologies, along with the rise of social media platforms, had revolutionized communication channels and empowered individuals to express their opinions, advocate for social change, and raise awareness of societal issues. Platforms such as Twitter and

Instagram became influential tools for grassroots movements and societal dialogue. Indeed, it was recorded that 13.48 million of Saudis were active on Twitter in 2022 (Statista, 2023). The widespread use of these digital platforms exerted pressure for reforms in various domains, including women's rights and governance transparency. The digital landscape created new opportunities for engagement, enabling Saudi citizens to participate in public discourse and drive progressive change.

The integration of digital technology and the pursuit of digital transformation were vital in shaping Saudi Arabia's reform agenda. Through the development of digital infrastructure, adoption of international best practices, and empowerment of individuals through social media, the Kingdom sought to position itself as a regional leader in the digital realm and drive meaningful progress in areas such as governance transparency and societal engagement.

1.1.3. Multiculturalism

The influence of international examples and major powers on Saudi Arabia's social and cultural reforms could not be overlooked. The implementation of multicultural policies in countries like Canada, Australia, and the United States served as credible evidence of the positive impact of embracing cultural diversity. In Saudi Arabia, these examples influenced the shaping of the Kingdom's approach to reform, as it sought to align itself with global norms and values. Under the ambitious Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia recognized the significance of international influences and the evolving global social and cultural landscape, driving its commitment to foster inclusivity, respect for individual rights, and cultural dialogue.

International examples provided credible evidence of the positive impact of multiculturalism on societies. For instance, countries like Canada, Australia, and the

United States implemented multicultural policies that yielded significant benefits. Canada's multiculturalism model, known as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Berry, 2020), contributed to social cohesion, economic growth, and enhanced intercultural understanding within its diverse society. Likewise, Australia's multiculturalism policies fostered a vibrant and inclusive society that celebrated diverse cultural heritage, resulting in economic and social advantages (Love, 2021).

The Kingdom aspired to be recognized as a progressive and tolerant nation by the international community, which drove its commitment to aligning its reforms with global norms and values. Major powers, particularly those emphasizing human rights, gender equality, and cultural exchange, exerted considerable influence on Saudi Arabia's reform agenda. The pressure exerted through diplomatic engagements, trade relationships, and international agreements prompted the Kingdom to implement reforms that promoted inclusivity, respect for individual rights, and cultural dialogue.

Credible evidence from reputable sources, such as reports from human rights organizations and international forums, substantiated the influence of major powers on Saudi Arabia's reforms, the Kingdom was deemed a nation that “restricts almost all political rights and civil liberties through a combination of oppressive laws and the use of force.” (Freedom House, 2017). These sources outlined instances where major powers raised concerns or advocated for specific reforms in Saudi Arabia. As a response, the Kingdom introduced various initiatives aligned with international expectations. For instance, in the realm of gender equality, Saudi Arabia lifted the ban on women driving and implemented legal reforms to enhance women's rights and empower them in various sectors of society. These reforms were influenced by international pressure and exemplified SA's efforts to align with global norms.

Moreover, Vision 2030 reflected the recognition of the evolving global social and cultural landscape. The reform plan acknowledged the changing expectations and aspirations of the Saudi population, as well as the broader global movement towards greater gender equality and social inclusivity. Vision 2030 emphasized the importance of empowering women, promoting cultural exchange, and fostering a more open and inclusive society. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Quality of Life Program, which aimed to enhance entertainment and cultural offerings for Saudis, demonstrated the Kingdom's commitment to aligning with international trends and promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society (Vision 2030, 2016).

However, even though the apparent global systematic dealing with multiculturalism appeared to be neutral, it shared inner policies that promoted the adoption of a general cultural identity that aligned with the nation's welfare to reinforce economic gain, stability and authenticity. Arguably, Charles Taylor (1992) sought to provide a rationale for enacting legislation that protected and promoted culture within a diverse liberal state. He argued that even the supposedly value-neutral liberal states upheld and contributed to certain cultural values and promoted virtues specific to their society, surpassing the basic civic virtues necessary for any liberal state.

In the context of Saudi Vision 2030, Charles Taylor's argument about culture-protective and culture-promoting legislation resonated with the Kingdom's aspirations to navigate its cultural landscape while promoting inclusivity and preserving its unique cultural heritage. Saudi Arabia, like any other nation, recognized the importance of actively preserving and promoting certain cultural values within the framework of a liberal state.

Under Vision 2030, the Saudi monarchy acknowledged the significance of cultural identity and heritage as key drivers of societal development. While embracing the principles of a liberal state, Saudi Arabia recognized the need to promote its own cultural virtues and values, going beyond the basic civic virtues. It seemed evident in the Kingdom's efforts to support cultural industries, enhance entertainment and cultural activities, and preserve its cultural heritage as part of its economic diversification and societal transformation agenda:

We take immense pride in the historical and cultural legacy of our Saudi, Arab, and Islamic heritage. Our land was, and continues to be, known for its ancient civilizations and trade routes at the crossroads of global trade. This heritage has given our society the cultural richness and diversity it is known for today. We recognize the importance of preserving this sophisticated heritage in order to promote national unity and consolidate true Islamic and Arab values. (Vision 2030, 2016, p. 17)

Furthermore, the implicit expression and reinforcement of cultural directions and styles within social practices aligned with Saudi Arabia's recognition of the role that cultural exchange and dialogue played in fostering understanding and mutual respect among diverse communities. The promotion of intercultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural traditions and practices were essential aspects of Vision 2030's goal to create a more inclusive and tolerant society:

We will seek to offer a variety of cultural venues – such as libraries, arts and museums – as well as entertainment possibilities to suit tastes and preferences. These projects will also contribute to our economy and will result in the creation of many job opportunities. (Vision 2030, 2016, p. 22)

These initiatives aimed to enrich the cultural landscape and served as drivers of economic growth by creating job opportunities. By investing in cultural infrastructure and entertainment offerings, Saudi Arabia aimed to foster a vibrant society that embraced cultural diversity while reaping the economic benefits associated with the cultural and entertainment sectors and preserving the Saudi authenticity simultaneously.

1.1.4.Human Rights

The momentum of reforms in Saudi Arabia was shaped profoundly by the global wave of democratization, the dissemination of liberal values, and the intrinsic democratic principles ingrained within the fabric of Islam. The mounting pressure to address crucial aspects such as political participation, civil liberties, and women's rights stemmed from the relentless surge of democratic ideals and human rights on a global scale. Saudi Arabia's unwavering commitment to embrace international expectations while harmonizing Islamic tradition with progressive ideals was epitomized by its pivotal decisions to grant women equal rights, standing as a resolute testament to its responsiveness to global demands for inclusivity and equality.

The mounting pressure to address crucial aspects such as political participation, civil liberties, and women's rights derived from the escalating prominence of democratic principles and human rights on an international scale. Notably, the Kingdom's pivotal decision to grant women the right to participate in municipal elections in 2015 stands as a testament to its responsiveness to global demands for political inclusivity and equality. This resolute step exemplified Saudi Arabia's unwavering commitment to embracing international expectations and fostering a more participatory political landscape.

Moreover, the ever-evolving global norms and shifting perceptions surrounding gender equality exerted a profound influence on the tempo of social reforms within Saudi

Arabia. Compelling evidence indicated that international pressures and the transformative reimagining of gender roles swayed the Saudi government's trajectory towards gradual advancements in women's rights. As the Saudi Princess Ammerah Al-Taweel reflected on women's rights in the Kingdom:

...we will always be judged as a country that suppresses women because we're the only country in the world where women can't drive so it's symbolic both inside and outside, and if we want the world to look at us differently this symbolic issue must change" (Forbes, 2011, 1: 04, 1:14). She continued, "I saw a lot of young girls who said 'I want to be an architect, I wanna be an engineer,' so, we want to actually facilitate that and help them in the workforce ... we're satisfied with the way things are going but we still want more until we get our full equal rights (Forbes, 2011, 2:58, 3: 04).

She acknowledged aptly that the act of enabling women to drive held profound significance within her country as it resonated on the global stage as well, influencing perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles. Ameerah's commitment lied in empowering women, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men, as a testament to her pursuit of gender parity. Her claims corresponded intimately with the overarching paradigm shift witnessed worldwide, as societies redefined conventional gender roles progressively and advocated for equal opportunities for women.

Arguably, the landmark lifting of the driving ban on women in 2018 stood as a milestone in this progressive journey, epitomizing the Kingdom's alignment with global trends and its conscientious endeavor to empower women and enhance their autonomy. By dismantling barriers and providing newfound mobility, Saudi Arabia responded to global

expectations and sought the resolute of aspirations of Saudi women yearning for increased independence and mobility.

The impetus for reform in the Saudi context was bolstered further by comparative studies on democratic systems and political participation, compelling the government to embrace greater transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. Illustratively, the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (Nazaha) in 2011 (Al Hamrani, 2014), stood as a resolute testament to Saudi Arabia's commitment to combat corruption and foster accountable governance. This exemplar initiative adhered to globally accepted standards and showcased the Kingdom's resolute dedication to ensuring a governance framework that aligned with international benchmarks.

Additionally, the global women's rights movement, alongside rigorous comparative studies on gender equality, yielded crucial insights that fueled social reforms within Saudi Arabia. Notably, the vigilant oversight and advocacy of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) played an instrumental role in monitoring and advocating for reforms in the Kingdom (Hanley, 2019). The resolute decision to lift the ban on women's participation in sports, as well as the establishment of the groundbreaking Saudi Women's Football League, represented significant strides towards advancing gender equality within the Kingdom.

1.2. Islamic Incentives

The pace of reforms in Saudi Arabia was not only influenced by the global wave of democratization and liberal values but also by the intrinsic democratic values present within the principles of Islam. The Kingdom sought to reconcile its Islamic heritage with contemporary notions of democracy, drawing upon rich evidence and credible examples to support this perspective. Islamic principles of consultation (shura), justice (adl), and

equality (musawah) encompassed democratic ideals inherently and served as a foundation for the Kingdom's reform agenda. The establishment of the Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council) in 1993 as an advisory body, open to both male and female members, exemplified Saudi Arabia's commitment to incorporating democratic values within its unique socio-political framework (Oxford Constitutional Law, n.d.). By recognizing the compatibility between Islamic principles and democratic governance, the Saudi government demonstrated its endeavor to blend religious tradition with progressive ideals, further amplifying the momentum for comprehensive reforms.

the principle of justice (adl) appeared to be deeply ingrained in Islamic teachings. Islam emphasized the importance of fairness, equality, and the protection of individual rights. The Qur'an stated, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives" (Qur'an 4:135). This emphasis on justice and equal treatment formed the basis for Saudi Arabia's efforts to establish transparent and accountable governance.

Additionally, Islamic teachings emphasized the principle of equality (musawah) among individuals, regardless of gender, race, or social status. The Qur'an stated, "Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" (Qur'an 49:13). Apparently, that was part of MbS's attempt to return Saudi Arabia's to real Islam. Indeed, the reform agenda included significant strides towards gender equality, guided by both global trends and Islamic principles

Undeniably, the impetus for reform in Saudi Arabia was propelled by the confluence of global influences, rooted in the dynamic currents of democratization, and the timeless principles woven within the tapestry of Islam. The transformative strides witnessed in the kingdom, from the monumental lifting of the ban on women driving to the

establishment of the illustrious Saudi Women's Football League (Amnesty International, 2022), exemplified the nation's unwavering alignment with global trends and its resolute dedication to empower women. By blending the sacred threads of religious tradition with the vibrant hues of progressive ideals, Saudi Arabia responded to international expectations and strived to create an inclusive and progressive society that harmonized with both global standards and the intrinsic values of Islam.

Indeed, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reform agenda in Saudi Arabia was not influenced by the Kingdom's historical trajectory solely, but also by global trends and the evolving dynamics of the international community. The forces of globalization, economic diversification, technological advancements, and changing social norms had contributed to shaping the scope and direction of his reforms. By aligning with these broader trends and acknowledging the need for change, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms sought to position Saudi Arabia for a prosperous and sustainable future in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

2.The Saudi Leadership: Agents of Power and Power Structures in the Kingdom

An analysis of Saudi Arabia's power structures through Foucault's power concept revealed historical layers that shaped the contemporary state. Modernization in the Kingdom, spanning economics, culture, and politics, progressed gradually, influenced by domestic and international power dynamics. Contrary to some depictions (Ottaway, 2021), Saudi Arabia's leadership culture appeared decentralized, with varying pressures among different stakeholders, from most to least influential.

Power structures in Saudi Arabia included a diverse array of influential actors: the royal family, religious leaders, business elites, and prominent individuals (Chara, 2018).

Each wielded influence in their domains, contributing to complex power relationships influenced by historical legacies, regional dynamics, economics, and geopolitics.

These power structures were not static; they underwent ongoing transformation and negotiation. Actors within them exerted varying influence, and interests evolved over time. Comprehending contemporary Saudi Arabia and its decision-making relied on understanding these complex power structures.

Viewing Saudi rulers as agents of power, not omnipotent figures, was crucial. They faced influence, pressures, and potential resistance within the power structures. This necessitated moving away from a centralized view of leadership to explore the quest for leadership within the Kingdom.

The perception of the ruler as the sole possessor of power was an oversimplification. The king served as an agent through whom power was exercised intentionally. While he held a significant position, his authority was not absolute; it was shaped by relational dependencies and interactions within the intricate Saudi political, social, and economic dynamics.

Analyzing the quest for leadership meant delving into intricate power dynamics among these actors: their competing interests, alliances, rivalries, and behind-the-scenes negotiations. This approach offered a comprehensive understanding of power distribution and exercise within the Kingdom.

In essence, recognizing Saudi rulers as agents of power, subject to influence, pressure, and potential resistance, was pivotal in comprehending leadership dynamics. Shifting from a centralized view of leadership revealed that the king was not the exclusive wielder of power but rather a representative of intentional power exercises.

Acknowledging the relational dependencies and intricacies of power within Saudi Arabia facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of power's quest and exercise in the Kingdom.

2.1. Indoctrination: The Interaction of Knowledge and Power in Saudi Arabia

To illustrate, Muhammad bin Saud's collaboration with Abdulwahhab was instrumental for the successful re-establishment of Saudi Arabia and the revival of the authentic teachings of Islam. This partnership forged a strong alliance between political and religious authorities, laying the foundation for the unique relationship between the Saudi rulers and the religious foundation.

As part of their collaboration, bin Saud allocated significant authority to religious clerics, granting them the power to shape religious knowledge and interpretation within the Kingdom. This gave the religious establishment a prominent role in guiding religious practices, moral standards, and societal norms. The influence of religious clerics extended beyond matters of faith and permeated various aspects of governance, education, and public life (Ottaway, 2021).

Over time, the Saudi rulers faced pressure to uphold and adhere to a distinct path shaped by historical agreements. These agreements included the establishment of a conservative interpretation of Islam, commonly referred to as Wahhabism, as the official religious doctrine of the Kingdom. This adherence to a specific ideological framework was seen as essential for maintaining internal stability, preserving the legitimacy of the ruling family, and safeguarding the country's cultural and religious heritage (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

The allocation of considerable authority to religious clerics, coupled with the adherence to a specific religious doctrine, created a unique dynamic in Saudi Arabia.

While the rulers maintained political control and decision-making power, they recognized the influence and significance of the religious establishment in shaping the religious and social fabric of the country. This delicate balance between political authority and religious influence became a defining characteristic of Saudi Arabia's governance structure.

However, it appeared important to note that this collaboration and the authority granted to religious clerics also faced challenges and tensions. Over time, the influence of religious clerics came under scrutiny both domestically and internationally. Criticisms were raised regarding the restrictive nature of the religious establishment, limitations on individual freedoms, and the impact on human rights within the Kingdom (Ottaway, 2021). The Saudi rulers had to navigate these pressures while also balancing the need for stability and maintaining their traditional alliances.

2.2.Oil Chemistry: Outcomes of Knowledge and Power Interactions on the Saudi Power Structures

Following the discovery of oil in the kingdom, a national division of political dominance emerged, characterized by multiple groups: The Royal family, religious authority, business elites, and the middle-class bourgeoisie. The latter consisted of traders and businessmen linked to the oil economy, and they wielded influence in decision-making processes pertaining to both politics and the economy (Chara, 2018).

There existed another segment known as the middle class, distinct from the political elite and bourgeoisie, which comprised individuals from scientific, intellectual, artistic, and administrative backgrounds. They called for reforms and political participation, this middle class could be further categorized into the liberal middle class, conservative traditional middle class, and the Bedouins, and the lower who shared the possibility of resistance (Chara, 2018).

The liberal middle class advocated for greater political openness, democratic reforms, and social progress. They emphasized the importance of individual rights, freedom of expression, and women's empowerment. This group sought to modernize Saudi Arabia, aligning it with global norms and values.

In contrast, the conservative traditional middle class adhered to more traditional and conservative values. They placed a strong emphasis on preserving Saudi Arabia's cultural and religious heritage, maintaining the influence of religious authorities, and upholding traditional societal norms. This group tended to resist rapid social and political changes, preferring a gradual approach to reform.

The Bedouins, representing a distinct subset within the middle class, consisted of individuals from nomadic tribes who had settled in urban areas. They held unique cultural and social perspectives, often influenced by their tribal traditions and values. Their opinions and interests varied, ranging from conservative to more progressive, depending on individual circumstances and tribal affiliations.

The existence of these various middle-class groups with divergent viewpoints and aspirations created a dynamic and sometimes conflicting landscape within Saudi society. The tensions between liberal, conservative, and traditional perspectives reflected the broader debates and discussions surrounding the future direction of the kingdom. Seemingly, Understanding the dynamics and differing viewpoints within these middle-class groups provided insights into the complexities of Saudi Arabia's political and societal evolution.

However, while various middle-class groups held their own aspirations and perspectives, it was the Royal family and religious authorities that played the most significant roles in the ongoing debates surrounding state building. Senior princes, as well

as religious shaykhs, exerted their influence to shape the direction of the kingdom, often expressing opposition to specific social reforms. Their positions of power allowed them to exert pressure on decision-making processes and sway the course of political and social changes (Chara, 2018).

The religious clergy, in particular, held significant sway in the realm of legal and religious affairs, granting the leaders a sense of legitimacy and authority. Their role extended beyond religious matters and encompassed wider social and political issues (Ottaway, 2021). These religious scholars and shaykhs played a crucial role in shaping the social fabric of Saudi society and offering their blessings and support to the ruling elite.

These dissenters, often referred to as the ‘old guards’ who represented a significant hindrance to the implementation of reforms (Ottaway, 2021). Their conservative stance and adherence to traditional values often clashed with the aspirations of the liberal middle class and other reform-minded segments of society. The influence of the old guards was rooted in their religious and cultural authority, making it challenging to push forward with significant social and political changes without encountering resistance (Chara, 2018).

Understanding the dynamics and influence of the Royal family and religious authorities within Saudi society provided insight into the complexities of the reform process. While various middle-class groups might have called for change, the opposition from the old guards, who held positions of power and influence, presented a formidable challenge to those advocating for more progressive reforms.

Furthermore, in relation to societal structures the discovery and exploitation of oil resources played a pivotal role in shaping Saudi politics and society. The Saudi social contract revolved around the distribution of oil revenues to the population in exchange for their loyalty and allegiance to the ruling Saud clan. This arrangement ensured the support

and stability of the regime by providing economic benefits and welfare services to its citizens (Chara, 2018).

The substantial oil earnings generated by the kingdom allowed the Royal family to embark on an ambitious program of modernization and infrastructure development. These initiatives aimed to transform Saudi Arabia from a predominantly agrarian society into a modern, industrialized nation. The public sector became a primary engine of employment, with approximately two-thirds of working Saudis being employed in government-related positions. This reliance on the public sector for employment and livelihood created a sense of economic dependency on the state and reinforced the population's allegiance to the ruling family (Chara, 2018).

In return for the economic benefits and opportunities provided by the state, citizens abstained largely from engaging in politics and challenging the authority of the royal family. Political participation was limited, and power remained concentrated within the hands of the ruling elite. The distribution of oil wealth and the state's provision of essential services acted effectively as a social contract that discouraged widespread political dissent and maintained stability within the kingdom (Chara, 2018).

The centrality of oil to the Saudi political landscape resulted in a unique dynamic where economic prosperity was intricately tied to political control. Apparently, the distribution of oil revenues formed the basis of the Saudi social contract, ensuring citizen loyalty and support for the ruling Saud clan. The country's substantial oil earnings facilitated extensive modernization efforts and the development of a robust public sector. In exchange for economic benefits and welfare services, citizens refrained largely from engaging in politics, allowing the royal family to maintain a firm grip on power (Chara, 2018).

3.From Abstraction to Reality: Mohammed bin Salman’s Regime of Truth

In this context, the discourse surrounding power in Saudi Arabia centered around MbS as a key figure and agent entrusted with the strategic responsibility of protecting the Kingdom's reputation and ensuring the stability of its economy. MbS was positioned as a deliberate decision-maker and planner, whose actions and policies were seen as crucial for the long-term sustainability and success of the nation. The recognition of his role as an intentional strategist reflected the heightened awareness of the challenges and opportunities that Saudi Arabia faced on the global stage.

The interconnectedness of knowledge, power, and the economic landscape shaped Saudi Arabia's understanding of its position in the world. It necessitated a proactive approach to address the complexities of geopolitical constraints, energy transitions, and the protection of the Kingdom's interests. MbS's leadership role symbolized the intentional pursuit of strategies to safeguard the Kingdom's reputation and economy amidst an evolving global context.

Building upon the national traumatic experience and the recognition of Saudi Arabia's multicultural global influence, the Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), seized the opportunity to consolidate his regime and implement his agenda. At the core of his vision was the modification of the social contract that had governed the relationship between the Saudi people and the state. Traditionally, the population had enjoyed a lifestyle marked by tax exemptions and material comforts in exchange for their loyalty and adherence to the existing system, which had effectively maintained stability in the country for decades (Chara, 2018). However, the reforms introduced by MbS evidenced the introduction of a novel social contract (Alhoussein, 2019).

3.1. Hyper-nationalism, Meritocracy, and Moderation

MbS sought to introduce significant changes to this social contract, emphasizing meritocracy, hyper-nationalism, and moderation as the new foundations. By promoting meritocracy, he aimed to restructure the system based on the principle of rewarding individuals based on their abilities and qualifications rather than their social status or connections. This approach aimed to foster a more efficient and dynamic society, where talent and expertise played a central role in driving progress (Alhussein, 2019, 2020 & Fjoertoft, 2018).

In tandem with meritocracy, MbS emphasized hyper-nationalism, seeking to instill a strong sense of national pride and unity among the Saudi people. This emphasis on nationalism aimed to forge a collective identity rooted in loyalty to the nation and its leadership, thereby strengthening social cohesion and reinforcing a shared purpose (Alhussein, 2019).

Furthermore, moderation emerged as a key pillar of MbS's agenda, reflecting his aspiration to modernize and transform Saudi Arabia into a more open and tolerant society. These entailed initiatives such as the relaxation of certain social restrictions, the promotion of cultural and entertainment events, and efforts to improve the Kingdom's international image. By pursuing moderation, MbS aimed to align Saudi Arabia with global norms and expectations while preserving its unique cultural heritage (Alhussein, 2020).

In effect, MbS capitalized on the national trauma and the Kingdom's global influence to establish himself as a transformative leader. His agenda, centered around meritocracy, hyper-nationalism, and moderation, sought to redefine the social contract, shifting the balance between the state and its citizens. Through these proposed changes, MbS aimed to shape a more dynamic and progressive Saudi society, ushering in a new era of development and modernization (Alhussein, 2019, 2020 & Fjoertoft, 2018).

In present times, MBS implemented significant changes in the political, economic, and social spheres according to his vision for the welfare of the kingdom. These reforms were driven by economic incentives, as MbS recognized that the successful implementation of his regime required a strong foundation. The state supported a wave of jingoism to secure the loyalty of the population, signaling the credibility of the Crown Prince's aspirations and the replacement of the old social contract.

MbS's nationalist approach, building upon the foundations laid by King Abdullah, sought to address the challenges faced by Saudi Arabia in a rapidly changing global landscape. Recognizing the need for economic diversification and social cohesion, the Crown Prince adopted a more assertive and transformative stance. His vision involved engaging and empowering the Saudi youth, who represent a significant portion of the population and hold the key to the Kingdom's future (Alhusein, 2019).

To cultivate a sense of national identity, MbS encouraged Saudi citizens to prioritize their loyalty to the country over religious or tribal affiliations. This shift aimed to forge a cohesive and united society, where individuals would identify primarily as Saudi nationals rather than being divided along sectarian or tribal lines. By fostering a shared sense of belonging and purpose, the Crown Prince aimed to mobilize the nation's human capital and harness the creativity, energy, and ambition of Saudi youth in driving economic growth and social progress (Alhusein, 2019).

In practical terms, this approach translated into policies and initiatives that focused on the development of Saudi Arabia's human resources. The Crown Prince emphasized the importance of education and skill-building, aiming to equip Saudi youth with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving global economy. Efforts were made to enhance the quality of education, expand access to vocational training, and promote

entrepreneurship and innovation as vital components of the country's future success (Vision, 20030, n.d.).

3.1.1. Deepening Roots: The Saudi Nationalist Zeal

Furthermore, the Crown Prince's emphasis on empowering the Saudi youth extended beyond economic considerations. He recognized the need to address their aspirations for greater social and cultural openness, including increased opportunities for entertainment, artistic expression, and participation in public life. Reforms such as the lifting of the ban on women driving, the expansion of entertainment options, and the establishment of cultural events and festivals were intended to create a more inclusive and vibrant society that resonated with the aspirations and values of the younger generation (Chara 2018).

MbS, in his pursuit of a balanced approach, sought to navigate the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, conservatism and openness, which resonated with the aspirations and influences experienced by the Saudi youth. This approach was evident in various policies and actions undertaken by the Crown Prince. For instance, the implementation of the 2017 anti-terrorism law showcased the heightened nationalism prevailing in Saudi Arabia, as individuals who did not actively defend the Kingdom were stigmatized as 'traitors' (Alhussein, 2020).

The crackdown on corruption and the detention of activists further exemplified this nationalist sentiment, as the authorities categorized activists as potential threats to national security. Online nationalists on platforms like Twitter labeled them as 'embassy agents' or 'Tkhwan sympathizers' (referring to sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood) if they expressed opposition to moderate reforms. MbS emphasized the significance of

maintaining a unified voice to safeguard the stability of the state and prevent potential social chaos (Alhussein, 2019).

These actions, while aimed at consolidating power and ensuring social stability, generated both support and criticism. Supporters argued that such measures were necessary to protect the Kingdom's integrity and prevent external interference in its affairs. They believed that a unified voice and a strong stance against perceived threats were crucial for national security (ALARABIYA news, 2017). However, critics raised concerns about the potential infringement on individual freedoms and the stifling of dissenting opinions. They contended that the labeling of activists as threats and the broad application of anti-terrorism measures could lead to the suppression of legitimate voices advocating for human rights and democratic reforms (Ottaway, 2021).

The balancing act between nationalism and openness remained a central feature of MbS's approach. While emphasizing the importance of a unified voice and national stability, he also acknowledged the need for reforms and greater social and cultural openness. Initiatives such as the Vision 2030 plan, aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy and reducing its dependence on oil, demonstrated a commitment to modernization and progress. Additionally, steps were taken to promote entertainment and cultural activities, providing avenues for creative expression and fostering a more inclusive society (Vision 2030, n.d.).

In the past, the Saudi leadership placed significant importance on considering the reactions and interests of various social layers within the country. This approach aimed to maintain a delicate balance between the demands of activism and the preservation of conservative values. As a result, the pace of reforms was relatively slow as the authorities sought to avoid potential backlash (Ottaway, 2021). However, MbS adopted a different

strategy by prioritizing closer engagement with the largest faction of society—the youth. Recognizing their aspirations and influence, he presented economic upliftment as a compelling argument to safeguard the Kingdom from an impending economic crisis for the rest of social structures (Vision, 2030, n.d.).

MbS's emphasis on cultivating stronger ties with the youth was driven by the understanding that they represented a vital force for the future development and prosperity of Saudi Arabia (Alhoussein, 2019). The Crown Prince recognized that the well-being and active participation of the younger generation were crucial for the stability and success of the country. By highlighting the potential economic benefits that could be achieved through his reform initiatives, MbS aimed to garner support and enthusiasm from the youth.

Remarkably, economic elevation became a central focus of MbS's agenda, as he sought to diversify the Saudi economy and reduce its reliance on oil. With the recognition that the finite nature of fossil fuels posed a long-term challenge, he emphasized the importance of exploring alternative sectors and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. The Crown Prince's vision, encapsulated in the ambitious Vision 2030 plan, aimed to create new economic opportunities, attract foreign investment, and generate employment for the Saudi youth (Fjoertoft, 2018).

The argument of impending economic crisis played a significant role in rallying support for MbS's reform agenda. By framing his initiatives as essential for the Kingdom's economic survival, he sought to overcome resistance and skepticism from conservative elements within society. This approach appealed to the aspirations and concerns of the younger generation, who saw economic prosperity and stability as crucial for their own futures (Chara, 2018).

In summary, MbS's shift in focus towards the youth and the argument of economic elevation as a means to save the Kingdom from an impending economic crisis represented a departure from previous approaches. By recognizing the significance of the younger generation and framing reforms in economic terms, he aimed to garner support and build momentum for his ambitious agenda. However, the success of these efforts relied on striking a careful balance between addressing the economic challenges and ensuring the well-being and inclusivity of all Saudi citizens.

The rise of nationalist fervor in Saudi Arabia reached alarming levels, with influential voices within the country branding journalist Jamal Khashoggi as a traitor deserving punishment for his critical views. The Saudi authorities, driven by their primary concern of preserving national unity, viewed Khashoggi's murder as a disturbing yet normalized act, rather than an exception. This extreme nationalist sentiment also manifested in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, which adopted a 'Saudi first' approach, leading to clashes with countries like Canada and Germany and the issuance of threats against those who dared to criticize the Saudi mode of governance (Alhussein, 2019).

The Kingdom faced a series of conflicts on multiple fronts, including domestic, regional, and international challenges. In response, Saudi Arabia strategically positioned itself as the protector of its citizens, employing nationalism as a unifying force to legitimize domestic reforms and consolidate power. By appealing to patriotic sentiments and emphasizing the need for national solidarity, the Saudi leadership sought to rally support and maintain stability in the face of adversity (Alhussein, 2019).

The utilization of nationalism as a tool had various implications within Saudi society. On one hand, it served as a means to foster a sense of national identity and pride, promoting unity among citizens. It provided a platform for justifying domestic reforms,

portraying them as essential for the nation's progress and security. Nationalism also played a role in consolidating power, as it strengthened the image of the ruling establishment as the rightful guardians of the nation's interests and values (Alhussein, 2019).

In the pursuit of reforms, Mohammed bin Salman appeared to have made progress and established his regime based on his vision. However, as noted by Foucault, reformers often wished to change institutions without fundamentally altering the underlying ideological system (Rabinow, 1984). In the case of Saudi Arabia, despite undergoing transitions driven by economic motives, the core ideological system seemed to have remained largely untouched.

Although economic reforms were implemented and social changes were witnessed, the fundamental ideological principles and structures that shaped Saudi society remained largely unchanged. The ideological system, deeply rooted in conservative religious interpretations and traditional cultural values, exerted its influence and defined the boundaries of reform. This preservation of the ideological system could be attributed to various factors, including the need for stability, the delicate balancing act between tradition and modernity, and the imperative to maintain societal cohesion.

While reforms brought about visible transformations and advancements in certain areas, the underlying ideological system acted as a stabilizing force, ensuring continuity and upholding the fundamental principles that underpinned Saudi Arabia's social and political fabric. This balance between reform and the preservation of the ideological system reflected the complexities and challenges faced by the leadership in navigating societal expectations, international pressures, and the preservation of national identity.

According to Greaves (2012), the unique culture of leadership in Saudi Arabia was shaped by a combination of historical and cultural factors. This distinct culture played a

crucial role in establishing a foundation of trust between leaders and citizens, which, in turn, influenced the dynamics of national politics. The culture of leadership in Saudi Arabia was deeply ingrained and shaped the mentality of both leaders and their followers, defining their actions, reactions, ambitions, and expectations within the political landscape.

The historical context of Saudi Arabia, with its rich heritage and the legacy of tribal leadership, contributed to the development of this culture. Traditional leadership values, such as honor, loyalty, and kinship, influenced the expectations placed upon leaders and the manner in which they governed. Additionally, the Islamic heritage of the nation played a significant role in shaping the culture of leadership, as religious principles and teachings often intersected with political decision-making (Greaves, 2012).

Moreover, the culture of leadership in Saudi Arabia was connected to the broader societal norms and values as well. Family structures, societal hierarchies, and the importance placed on collective identity and stability all influenced the expectations and behaviors of leaders and their followers (Greaves, 2012). This culture fostered a sense of responsibility among leaders to act in the best interests of the nation and its citizens, while also instilling a sense of loyalty and obedience among the populace, Fairlhom (1994) further clarified:

Leadership is not so much a function of the individual leader as it is a function of culture. While leadership may be spontaneous at times, most often it is the result of specific, planned actions by individual leaders to create organizational cultures characterized by internal harmony around values and ideas the leader and follower share or come to share. (p. 13)

Meaning, leadership was not solely determined by the qualities and actions of an individual leader but was tied to the cultural context in which it operated. It was a dynamic

and interactive process that involved creating organizational cultures characterized by shared values and ideas. Effective leaders consciously shaped the culture by fostering collaboration and a sense of common purpose, inspiring their followers and creating harmony. This process involved reciprocal communication and understanding, where leaders listened to and engaged with the perspectives of their followers, promoting a sense of shared ownership and collective decision-making. By actively cultivating a culture of unity and empowerment, leaders created an environment that encouraged growth, collaboration, and success for the organization as a whole.

However, despite the apparent efforts to consolidate the regime and project a unified nationalist voice, the bending of knowledge and the rise of hyper-nationalism in Saudi Arabia reached uncontrollable headings. The nationalist approach shaped the country's foreign policy, presenting a unified front internationally. However, domestically, it led to the fragmentation of the population's stance on reforms, particularly between liberals and conservatives (Alhoussein, 2019).

The push for reforms under MbS fragmented the population further, as many liberals modified their approach to align with the government's agenda. Conservatives, on the other hand, became increasingly antagonistic towards the perceived openness in entertainment and media, viewing it as a threat to Saudi culture and identity. Interestingly, the conservative opposition did not primarily use religion to justify their argument, suggesting a nuanced relationship between religion and culture in Saudi Arabia (Alhoussein, 2019).

As the process of modernization unfolded in Saudi Arabia, it brought forth inherent challenges and conflicts that had to be addressed by the authorities. Unlike in some other cultures or nations, the Saudi approach toward reform required extensive and nuanced

conversations between the Kingdom and various activists and stakeholders. These dialogues aimed to navigate the complexities of societal transformation while taking into account the unique context of Saudi Arabia (Fandy, 1999).

The Saudi authorities recognized the importance of engaging with activists and civil society groups as they played a vital role in shaping the direction of reforms. The royal family, civil society, and the state were intertwined, with the government seeking to strike a delicate balance between maintaining stability and addressing the aspirations of the population (Fandy, 1999).

This intertwining of actors allowed for a more inclusive decision-making process, where multiple perspectives could be considered and compromises could be reached. By fostering an environment of dialogue and collaboration, the Saudi authorities aimed to navigate the challenges of reform while ensuring the preservation of social cohesion and stability. As a woman from the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah demonstrated:

Change in my country does not work through protest but through dialogue with the state and the officials. We cannot force change; we can only reach change through working with the government and not against it. We have to lobby on a daily basis to achieve a change. (An unnamed Saudi woman in Fandy, 1999. Pp 35)

By emphasizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation, the Saudi citizen acknowledged the influence and power held by the state in driving meaningful transformation. Instead of resorting to confrontational methods, she advocated for a more nuanced and pragmatic approach that involved daily lobbying efforts to bring about desired changes. This approach recognized the need to align with the government's agenda and work within the existing structures to achieve progress. It underscored the belief that

constructive engagement and collaboration were key to influencing decision-making processes and shaping the direction of change in the country.

Internationally, due to the uncontrollable nature of power and the diversity of discourse, opinions regarding MbS varied significantly on the international stage. His actions and policies elicited a wide range of perspectives and judgments, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by Saudi Arabia. Some viewed his openness and cooperation with Western nations as a potential threat to Muslim values, highlighting concerns about the potential erosion of cultural and religious identities (Muslim views, 2022). These opinions reflected the divergent interpretations and understandings of Islam and its compatibility with modernity.

Conversely, from a liberal standpoint, MbS faced criticism for his involvement in the Yemeni civil war, the horrific murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and the repressive measures against activism (Ottaway, 2021). These actions were seen as a violation of human rights and sparked international outrage. The differing viewpoints and assessments underscored the diverse perspectives within the global community, with conflicting interpretations of the principles of justice, human rights, and political responsibility.

The range of opinions surrounding MbS's leadership exemplified the complexities and challenges inherent in governance and power structures. The uncontrollable nature of power dynamics and the diversity of discourse led to contrasting assessments of his actions and policies. It highlighted the importance of open dialogue, critical engagement, and a nuanced understanding of the multiple factors influencing perceptions and judgments on the global stage.

3.2. 'Bringing Islam to its Real form': The Concept of Moderation according to Mohammed bin Salman

To solve the puzzle, it was of importance to shed light on the concept of moderation according to the Crown Prince in order to understand the heading of the Kingdom. As previously argued, “There is a national identity crisis in Saudi Arabia. The absence of a collective identity has allowed individuals to define themselves along sectarian, regional, and tribal identities” (Al-Odah, 01:06:26, 2015). The absence of a collective identity in Saudi Arabia created a national identity crisis where individuals defined themselves along sectarian, regional, and tribal identities, especially after the Arab Spring (Alhussein, 2020).

This fragmented the society and hindered social integration, political stability, and nation-building efforts. The lack of a strong national identity impeded the forging of a shared vision and the mobilization of citizens. Resolving the national identity crisis required promoting inclusivity and fostering a sense of shared citizenship through education and social integration programs, meaning, to address the pillars of influence in the Kingdom and promote change starting from there. By doing so, Saudi Arabia could work towards a more unified and harmonious society.

Different sects within Islam held divergent perspectives on the interpretation of Islamic texts. The distinction between moderate Islam and radical or extremist Islam laid in the Muslims' approaches toward these texts. While all sects regarded the Quran as the ultimate source of authority, moderate Muslims believed that certain religious texts, whether from the Quran or Hadith, could become irrelevant due to historical changes. This recognition allowed for flexibility and adaptability in interpreting religious teachings, taking into account the evolving nature of societies and the need for contextual understanding (Roach, 2014).

Moderate Muslims drew inspiration from the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and viewed him as a role model for peaceful protest. They emphasized his early work in Makkah, where he exemplified qualities of compassion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. By emphasizing the Prophet's teachings of non-violence and the pursuit of justice, moderate Muslims sought to promote a more inclusive and harmonious understanding of Islam (Roach, 2014).

By embracing the principles of peaceful protest and non-violent resistance, moderate Muslims strove to foster dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect within diverse societies. They rejected the use of violence or extremism as a means to address grievances or promote their beliefs. Instead, they advocated for a more compassionate and empathetic approach that upheld the values of Islam while promoting peace, harmony, and coexistence among different communities (Roach, 2014).

On the other hand, radicals maintained a strict interpretation of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, believing that religious texts were timeless and remained relevant regardless of the changing times. They viewed the Quran as the literal and unalterable word of God, with no room for reinterpretation or adaptation. This rigid stance led to a fixed and literal understanding of religious teachings, leaving no space for contextual considerations or evolution (Roach, 2014).

Radicals placed particular emphasis on the later years of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in Medina, portraying him as a "warrior statesman." They highlighted his military campaigns and battles waged against non-Muslims in the name of Jihadism, viewing armed struggle as a central component of their religious duty. They saw these wars as necessary for defending and expanding the Islamic faith, as well as establishing an Islamic state governed by strict religious laws. Notably, the radical interpretation represented a

minority viewpoint within the broader Muslim community, with the majority of Muslims adhering to moderate interpretations that emphasized peace, coexistence, and social harmony (Roach, 2014).

In reality, the religious authority, particularly Wahhabism, faced significant pressure as part of the Crown Prince's plan to diminish gradually the ultra-conservative reputation of the kingdom. In April 2016, the government introduced new regulations to reform the functioning of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV). Under these updates, CPVPV members were prohibited from engaging in activities such as arresting, restraining, pursuing, detaining, interrogating, confirming identities, or conducting investigations. Instead, they were instructed to advise people "kindly and gently" (Sharkov, 2016).

Furthermore, during MbS's tenure, there was a rise in the prominence of refreshed religious voices that sought to replace the conservative calls of Wahhabism. The Saudi atmosphere saw the emergence of moderate religious figures who aimed to reshape the national perception of religion and improve the international reputation of the state. These religious figures supported MbS's reforms and played a crucial role in promoting a more moderate and inclusive form of Islam within the kingdom. Their presence signaled a shift away from the strict and dogmatic interpretations associated with Wahhabism and marked a deliberate effort to present a more open and tolerant image of Saudi Arabia to the world (Alhussein, 2020).

For instance, Sheikh Muhammed Alissa, the former Minister of Justice and the current head of the Muslim World League, was supportive of international interfaith conferences since the reign of King Abdullah. This commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding between different religious communities continued to the present day.

Sheikh Alissa expressed a universal vision of peace and cultural harmony, advocating for collaboration and cooperation between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. In pursuit of these goals, he called for united gatherings and initiatives involving representatives from all three religions to address important issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fight against terrorism (Levin, 2021).

One notable event where Sheikh Alissa shared his vision was a conference held in New York in October 2018, titled "Cultural Rapprochement Between the US and the Muslim World." This conference provided a platform for discussing ways to bridge cultural gaps and promote mutual understanding between the United States and the Muslim world. Sheikh Alissa's involvement in such initiatives reflected a broader shift towards interfaith dialogue and cooperation within Saudi Arabia and highlighted the country's efforts to promote peace and harmony on a global scale.

Similarly, as part of his efforts to promote peace and resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Sheikh Muhammed Alissa proposed the idea of a "peace caravan" consisting of representatives from all three religions traveling to Jerusalem (Levin, 2021). This initiative aimed to foster dialogue and understanding among the different religious communities involved in the conflict. Alongside this proposal, there were other significant indications of moderation and openness within Saudi Arabia during that period. For instance, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran's visit to King Salman in Riyadh in April 2018 demonstrated a willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation (Al Jazeera, 2018).

In May 2016, the establishment of the General Entertainment Authority (GEA) with a substantial budget of 64 billion dollars marked a significant departure from previous religious curbs. Led by Turki al-Sheikh, the GEA was tasked with organizing mass sports and entertainment events. This move was aligned with the broader goals of Vision 2030,

aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy and promoting tourism. The GEA's focus on providing modernized entertainment options resonated with the youth and garnered their support for MbS's political authority (General Entertainment Authority, n.d.).

Through these various measures, MbS sought to transform Saudi Arabia into a country of moderate Islam that embraced religious and cultural diversity. The goal was to present Saudi Arabia as an open and welcoming nation that embraced different religions, traditions, and people from around the world. These initiatives were part of a broader vision to modernize the country and create a more inclusive society, aligning with the objectives of Vision 2030.

The adoption of modernity in the context of Islam and Arab traditions was not solely influenced by Western values. Muslim scholars, including Malek Bennabi, a prominent Algerian thinker, put forth the idea of blending modernity with Islamic and Arab cultural heritage as a means of navigating the global landscape. According to Bennabi, certain religious and philosophical aspects, particularly within Salafism, carried regulations that were deemed "incompatible" with the demands of the present era. Bennabi advocated for a critical examination and reinterpretation of these outdated regulations to harmonize with the contemporary context (Bennabi, 1988).

Malek Bennabi's critique delved into the complexities of Muslim reform and the challenges faced by those who sought to modernize within an Islamic framework. He argued that the uncritical adoption of European models of reform by Muslims without first securing cultural pillars and preserving their own authenticity hindered the progress of these reforms. According to Bennabi, the transplantation of external ideas without considering their compatibility with the historical, social, and cultural context of the Muslim world limited their success. He believed that successful reform required a fusion of

modernity with Islam and Arab traditions, an integration of new ideas while safeguarding the core values and principles of Islamic civilization (Bennabi, 1988).

Notably, Bennabi's viewpoint did not dismiss the necessity of reform, but rather underscored the importance of incorporating cultural and religious contexts into the process. He emphasized the need for Muslims to strike a balance between embracing modernity and maintaining their cultural and religious identity. The challenge of determining where to draw the line in the realm of ideas, as highlighted by Bowering (2013), reflected the ongoing struggle faced by Muslim reformers. It required thoughtful reflection and discernment to ensure that reforms aligned with Islamic values and served the best interests of the Muslim community.

Significantly, one of the major concerns was to consider the limits of openness and ideological inaccessibility toward modernity. As a result, culture played a vital role in the success or failure of reforms. Thus, the Saudi vision was correspondent with modern and contemporary headings with regard to its core values. Therefore, MBS's regime of truth shared global tools and values to connect with the outside world and national values to connect with the Saudi population. As it was demonstrated in Vision 2030:

Islam and its teachings are our way of life. They are the basis of all our laws, decisions, actions and goals... Therefore, the principles of Islam will be the driving force for us to realize our Vision. The values of moderation, tolerance, excellence, discipline, equity, and transparency will be the bedrock of our success.
(Vision 2030, 2016)

This commitment to Islam as a way of life reflected the deep-rooted influence of religion in Saudi Arabian society. By anchoring their Vision 2030 in Islamic principles, the Saudi leadership aimed to align their development plans with the religious and cultural values of

the nation. The mention of moderation, tolerance, excellence, discipline, equity, and transparency highlighted the desired qualities that would shape the country's progress. These values not only resonated with Islamic teachings but also aligned with the aspirations for a modern and inclusive society. By emphasizing these values, the text also signified a conscious effort to present a progressive and forward-looking image of Saudi Arabia, while staying true to its religious heritage. Overall, the text underscored the significance of Islam in guiding Saudi Arabia's development plans and set a framework that combined religious principles with aspirations for socio-economic advancement.

The integration of moderate Islam within the economic reforms of the Vision 2030 plan showcased Saudi Arabia's commitment to harmonizing religious values with economic development. By emphasizing the principles of moderation, tolerance, and transparency as the bedrock of success, the plan aimed to shape a modern and inclusive society rooted in Islamic principles. Ultimately, these efforts were intended to elevate the nation's standing globally, while preserving its cultural and religious identity in a rapidly changing world.

3.3.The Intentional Strategist: Mohammed bin Salman’s Governmentality

An analysis of the system of governmentality in Saudi Arabia was essential to unravel the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the reforms implemented by MbS. It became apparent that a disciplinary vision was instrumental in shaping the exercise of power at a micro level. The concept of governmentality referred to a way of thinking about a population and encompassed a multitude of specific tasks that needed to be accomplished on a continuous basis (Rabinow, 1984).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, governmentality involved a comprehensive approach to governing and controlling the population. It entailed the utilization of various

techniques, strategies, and institutions to regulate behavior, shape attitudes, and maintain social order (Rabinow, 1984). The system of governmentality in Saudi Arabia operated through a set of specific tasks and objectives that aimed to manage and influence individuals and society as a whole.

These specific tasks ranged from economic reforms and social policies to cultural initiatives and institutional transformations. The governmentality framework was useful for the interpretation of MbS's leadership. It involved the implementation of disciplinary measures, the establishment of institutions of control and surveillance, and the deployment of strategies to shape the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of the population (Rabinow, 1984).

Furthermore, the crowded agenda of tasks associated with governmentality reflected the multifaceted nature of governance in Saudi Arabia. The government had to address numerous challenges and issues simultaneously, ranging from economic diversification and social reforms to geopolitical considerations and international relations. This required a constant assessment of the population's needs, desires, and aspirations, as well as the development of policies and interventions to meet these demands. As stated in Vision 2030:

MY FIRST OBJECTIVE IS FOR
OUR COUNTRY TO BE A
PIONEERING AND SUCCESSFUL
GLOBAL MODEL OF
EXCELLENCE, ON ALL FRONTS,

AND I WILL WORK WITH YOU TO

ACHIEVE THAT. (King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Vision 2030, 2016)

The statement by King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud encapsulated his first objective, which was to establish Saudi Arabia as a pioneering and successful global model of excellence across all fronts. When examining this text in relation to Foucault's idea of governmentality, it became evident that it embodied the exercise of power and governance in shaping the trajectory of the nation.

King Salman's proclamation demonstrated his intent to govern and lead the country towards a specific vision of excellence. By positioning Saudi Arabia as a global model, it entailed the exercise of power to shape and influence various aspects, including the economy, society, and culture. It signified a desire for effective governance and the utilization of techniques aimed at achieving desired outcomes.

Moreover, the demonstration emphasized the importance of collaboration and collective effort in attaining the stated objective. This aspect aligned with Foucault's notion of governmentality, as it recognized the significance of engaging and mobilizing individuals and institutions in the pursuit of common goals. The language of collaboration implied the utilization of discourses and practices that sought to generate consent and cooperation among the population, fostering a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility.

Expanding on this, King Salman's objective of establishing Saudi Arabia as a global model of excellence signified the exercise of power and the deployment of governance strategies aimed at shaping and guiding the country's development. It reflected

the leadership's aspiration to exert control, influence behaviors, and ultimately create a society that aligned with the vision outlined in Vision 2030. By positioning Saudi Arabia as a global exemplar, the leadership aimed to leverage the power of perception and reputation to enhance the nation's standing on the international stage, attract investments, and foster economic growth.

Furthermore, the objective of becoming a global model of excellence entailed a comprehensive approach that encompassed various sectors, including education, innovation, technology, and sustainability. It necessitated the implementation of policies, reforms, and initiatives that promoted excellence, encouraged competitiveness, and fostered an environment conducive to progress and development. The exercise of power in this context involved the formulation and implementation of strategies, regulations, and incentives that shaped the behavior and aspirations of individuals, institutions, and society at large.

Indeed, MbS's system of governmentality and the utilization of technologies were evident right from the inception of his Vision 2030. The Vision itself served as a comprehensive roadmap that encompassed various aspects of human activity, reflecting a broadening of political reflection to include nearly every facet of society. This approach resonated with Foucault's concept of governmentality, which emphasized the governance of individuals and the management of resources in an economical and efficient manner.

In line with Foucault's notion of "best" as being synonymous with "most economical" (Rabinow, 1984) the Vision 2030 aimed to introduce a meticulous attention to detail, similar to that of a father towards his family, into the management of the state. The objective was to streamline and optimize various sectors, such as the economy, infrastructure, education, and healthcare, by leveraging technology and implementing

effective governance strategies. By doing so, the government sought to achieve the desired outcomes in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible.

When evaluated within the framework of Foucault's concept of disciplinary technology, Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 underwent scrutiny for its multifaceted approach to shaping Saudi Arabia's trajectory. The vision was not confined solely to economic reforms; rather, it encompassed a broader scope, incorporating behavioral, operational, and ideological aspects (Rabinow, 1984).

At its core, Vision 2030 entailed economic reforms with a primary focus on diversifying the Saudi economy. It advanced market-oriented policies and harnessed innovative technologies and business models, resulting in the redirection of economic behavior towards augmented productivity and heightened competitiveness.

Moreover, the vision extended its reach into societal and educational transformation. A key aspect involved the elevation of the education system, reorienting it to align with a knowledge-based society. In doing so, disciplinary technologies were employed to influence the mindsets, attitudes, and competencies of students, ensuring their alignment with the vision's core principles.

In addition, Vision 2030 encompassed broader social transformations. These included initiatives to empower women and broaden recreational and entertainment options. Notably, these reforms were underpinned by the strategic application of disciplinary technologies to recalibrate social norms, including reshaping gender roles and fostering specific behaviors that aligned with the vision's strategic objectives.

Also, Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 reflected aspects of docility and utility as outlined by Foucault (Rabinow, 1984). The vision sought to cultivate docile bodies and

shape individuals into productive and obedient subjects who would contribute to the nation's development.

One way this emphasis was evident in the vision was through the focus on skill development and vocational training. The vision aimed to enhance the employability and productivity of the workforce by providing training programs and skill-building opportunities. This focus aimed to produce individuals proficient in specific areas of expertise who could effectively contribute to the economy (Rabinow, 1984).

Furthermore, the vision included initiatives aimed at instilling a sense of national pride and loyalty among the population. This involved promoting a shared national identity and encouraging citizens to actively participate in the nation-building process. The goal was to create a cohesive and united society with individuals docile in their allegiance to the nation and its objectives (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Moreover, the vision's emphasis on economic diversification and the promotion of entrepreneurship can be seen as an attempt to foster individual utility and self-reliance. By encouraging individuals to pursue economic opportunities and become active contributors to the economy, the vision aimed to shape individuals into self-disciplined and productive members of society (Vision 2030, n.d.).

In addition, the concept of docility and utility aligned with the government's emphasis on economic diversification and productivity. Through the Saudi Vision 2030, the government aimed to foster a more efficient and productive workforce by promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, and skills development. Evidence supporting this could be seen in the establishment of initiatives like the National Transformation Program and the focus on attracting foreign investments to stimulate economic growth and create job

opportunities (Vision, 2030, n.d). Evidently, substantial efforts were made to establish a continuous loop of leisure and productivity.

Furthermore, within Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth, the implementation of healthcare reforms and the pursuit of specific goals outlined in Vision 2030 exemplified the application of Foucault's concept of bio-power. Bio-power referred to the exercise of power over populations by promoting and managing their well-being, health, and overall life conditions (Rabinow, 1984).

In line with this concept, the government implemented healthcare reforms, such as the National Transformation Program for Health, which aimed to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for the Saudi population. These initiatives, including the expansion of healthcare infrastructure and investment in medical research, reflected the government's intention to exercise power over the population by actively intervening in matters of health and well-being (Vision 2030, n.d).

The bio-political approach employed by the Saudi government, as tackled by Foucault's concept, involved calculations that governed various aspects of the population's lives. The targets set in Vision 2030, such as increasing household spending on cultural and entertainment activities and promoting women's participation in the workforce, reflected a strategic manipulation of the population's behaviors, choices, and aspirations. By setting specific goals and implementing policies to achieve them, the government exerted power over the population's actions and shaped their lifestyles.

This exercise of bio-power served the purpose of enhancing the productivity and surveillance of society. By promoting healthier lifestyles, increasing workforce participation, and improving socio-economic conditions, the government aimed to create a more productive and efficient society. Additionally, the implementation of healthcare

reforms and the monitoring of population health contributed to the surveillance of individuals, allowing the government to gather data and exert control over their bodies and behaviors.

Lastly, normative rationality played a significant role in shaping the population's behavior and societal norms (Rabinow, 1984). The government set forth a vision that encompassed economic diversification, social development, and cultural revitalization. Credible evidence included the establishment of institutions like the General Authority for Culture and the National Center for Performance Measurement, which aimed to promote cultural activities and measure progress towards the vision's goals (Vision 2030, n.d).

In Vision 2030, Mohammed bin Salman's approach to governance and reform reflected elements of treating the body in masse, as discussed by Foucault. The emphasis on societal transformation and the pursuit of ambitious goals required the mobilization and regulation of the population at a large scale.

The focus on economic diversification and job creation in Vision 2030 also involved the treatment of the body in masse. The plan aimed to enhance productivity and increase the participation of Saudi citizens in the workforce. This included measures such as the introduction of vocational training programs and initiatives to empower women in the workforce. The objective was to mold and regulate the population's skills, abilities, and labor potential to align with the goals of economic transformation.

Moreover, the introduction of social reforms, such as the lifting of the ban on women driving and the relaxation of restrictions on entertainment and cultural activities, can also be seen as treating the body in masse. These reforms sought to reshape social norms and behaviors, encouraging a more open and inclusive society. They involved regulating and influencing the actions and choices of individuals on a societal level, with the aim of fostering a more progressive and modern image of Saudi Arabia.

3.3.1. What Organic Intellectual Exactly?

In relation to Foucault's concepts of the organic and specific intellectual, it seemed noteworthy that Mohammed bin Salman's regime welcomed both organic intellectuals who aligned with his regime of truth and specific intellectuals in useful fields such as technology and investment (Rabinow, 1984). The regime recognized the importance of these intellectuals in advancing its vision of modernization, economic diversification, and technological advancement.

Organic intellectuals, who emerged from within society and were connected to the interests and aspirations of the ruling elite, found acceptance within MbS's regime. These intellectuals played an essential role in promoting and advancing the regime's narrative, supporting its vision of modernization, economic diversification, and technological advancement. Their alignment with the regime's objectives allowed them to thrive and contribute to the implementation of initiatives such as Vision 2030. For example, Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the head of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), played a crucial role in driving the economic diversification agenda. As the leader of the PIF, Al-Rumayyan spearheaded initiatives to attract foreign investments, develop strategic sectors, and contribute to the growth of the non-oil economy (Public Investment Fund, n.d.).

Furthermore, the regime showed a particular interest in specific intellectuals in fields like technology and investment. Recognizing the importance of these disciplines for driving economic growth and transformation, the government sought to harness their expertise and knowledge to achieve its ambitious goals. These specific intellectuals were valued for their technical skills and their ability to contribute to the realization of the regime's vision. One such example was Dr. Fahad Almubarak, a prominent economist and former advisor to the Royal Court, who provided valuable insights and expertise in

formulating economic policies and strategies. His contributions to the design and implementation of the vision's economic initiatives, such as the National Transformation Program and the privatization agenda, demonstrated the influence of specific intellectuals in guiding the reform process (Vision 2030, n.d.).

By welcoming organic intellectuals who prospered his regime and specific intellectuals in useful fields, the Saudi government aimed to consolidate its power, promote its agenda, and secure the success of its initiatives. This approach allowed the regime to shape the intellectual landscape in its favor and utilize intellectual resources to support its objectives. However, it is crucial to note that this selective embrace of intellectuals also came at the expense of diverse perspectives and critical inquiry. The exclusion of dissenting voices and the neglect of alternative viewpoints limited the potential for comprehensive dialogue, stifled dissent, and restricted the development of a more inclusive intellectual environment.

In summary, Mohammed bin Salman's regime welcomed both organic intellectuals who aligned with his regime of truth and specific intellectuals in useful fields like technology and investment. While this approach enabled the regime to harness intellectual resources in pursuit of its vision, it also limited the diversity of ideas and perspectives, potentially hindering the emergence of a more dynamic and inclusive intellectual discourse within the country.

Albeit, since the organic intellectual represented an 'atomic' entity, Mohammed bin Salman's treatment of intellectuals who did not support his regime of truth, such as Jamal Khashoggi, became particularly significant. Jamal, as a journalist and critic of the Saudi government, could be seen as an organic intellectual who sought to provide alternative perspectives and hold those in power accountable. His writings and public statements

aimed to expose the flaws, injustices, and human rights violations committed by the Saudi regime (Khashoggi, 2018).

However, instead of engaging in dialogue or acknowledging the value of critical voices, Mohammed bin Salman's regime responded with hostility and repression. Khashoggi's murder represented the extreme manifestation of the regime's refusal to tolerate dissent and its unwillingness to accommodate intellectual voices that challenged its authority (U.S Department of State, 2018).

By silencing and eliminating intellectuals like Khashoggi, the Saudi government undermined the potential for critical discourse and intellectual engagement that was essential for societal progress. Foucault argued that organic intellectuals played a crucial role in challenging and transforming existing power structures, offering alternative narratives and perspectives that could lead to social change (Rabinow, 1984).

In the case of Vision 2030, the unwelcoming attitude towards critical intellectuals not only stifled intellectual diversity but also inhibited the potential for a comprehensive and inclusive national development strategy. By excluding dissenting voices, the regime limited the range of ideas and perspectives that could have contributed to a more robust and effective vision for the future of Saudi Arabia.

The treatment of Jamal Khashoggi and other unwelcomed organic intellectuals reflected a broader pattern of suppressing critical voices and maintaining a monolithic narrative (Reuters, 2017). It pointed the Saudi mechanisms of dialogue for reform as it should comply with the regime's nature and stability. In addition, it highlighted the tension between the regime's desire for control and its resistance to open dialogue and intellectual freedom. This approach undermined the principles of intellectual plurality and hampered

the development of a society that embraced diverse perspectives and engaged in constructive debate for the betterment of its people.

Relatedly, the inclusion of sovereignty eliminated the intervention of disciplinary power, as both coexisted in one regime the techniques would not operate simultaneously. Meaning, the processing of disciplinary power excluded the operation of bio-power and vice versa (Rabinow, 1984). The functioning of discipline, bio-power, and sovereignty in relation to Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth could be seen as operating in a complex and interconnected manner. Discipline and bio-power, as conceptualized by Foucault, involved techniques of control and regulation aimed at shaping and managing the behavior and lives of individuals and populations. These techniques focus on surveillance, normalization, and social control, with the objective of maintaining order and exerting power over the governed (Rabinow, 1984).

In contrast, sovereignty traditionally pertained to the exercise of authority and power, often through the use of violence, to establish and maintain control over a territory and its inhabitants. It implied the ultimate decision-making capacity and the ability to enforce one's will, even through coercive means if necessary (Rabinow, 1984).

Within the context of MbS's regime, there was a dynamic relationship between these elements. The regime utilized disciplinary techniques and bio-power to regulate various aspects of society, including media censorship, surveillance, and social control. These practices aimed to shape and mold the behavior, beliefs, and actions of individuals in line with the regime's objectives (Rabinow, 1984 & Ottaway, 2021).

At the same time, the regime exercised its sovereignty by centralizing power and decision-making authority. This was evident in the concentration of power within the

hands of Mohammed bin Salman and his close circle, allowing them to shape the dominant narrative, enforce policies, and initiate reforms.

However, it was essential to note that the exercise of sovereignty did not eliminate the influence of discipline and bio-power, nor did it preclude the possibility of resistance or reversal within the system. Despite the regime's efforts to control and regulate society, there were instances where other individuals or groups could exert influence and shape the discourse to some extent.

Furthermore, acts of resistance or opposition to the regime's authority, such as dissenting voices and critical journalism, could still emerge. While these acts often face severe consequences, including violence and repression, they demonstrated the potential for individuals to challenge or expose the regime's actions and disrupt its control, even if temporarily as discussed earlier with the Saudi social structures.

Remarkably, Within the context of Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth, the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi exemplified the exercise of sovereignty and the potential abuses of power within the system. Foucault's conception of sovereignty, which involved the operation of violence and the exercise of ultimate authority, could be observed in this tragic event.

Jamal Khashoggi's murder inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul was a clear demonstration of the regime's ability to exert control and dominance over individuals perceived as threats or dissenting voices (U.S Department of State, 2018). The act itself was a manifestation of the sovereign power of the Saudi government, as it involved the use of violence to eliminate a perceived enemy. This act of violence not only silenced a critical voice but also sent a chilling message to others who dared to challenge or criticize the regime (Ottaway, 2021).

The murder of Jamal Khashoggi also served as a stark reminder of the imbalances in power and the lack of mechanisms for dissent and accountability within the regime. It illustrated how sovereignty could be wielded to suppress opposition and maintain control over the narrative. The brutal act and its aftermath shed light on the dark side of sovereignty and the potential for its abuse, as it allowed the regime to act with impunity and undermine fundamental principles of justice and human rights.

Concretely, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi exemplified the presence of sovereignty within Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth. The act of violence and the subsequent efforts to conceal the crime demonstrated the exercise of ultimate authority and the ability of the regime to assert control over individuals and shape the narrative. This tragic event served as a sobering reminder of the potential abuses of power that could occur within systems where sovereignty interfered in its most primitive forms (Rabinow, 1984).

3.3.2. Constant Surveillance: The Inescapable Panopticon

In the context of Mohammed bin Salman's regime of truth, the concept of the panopticon could be further explored to highlight that the panoptic gaze extended not only to the governed but also to the ruler himself. The panopticon, with its central observation tower, implied that every member of the institution was subject to constant surveillance, including the one in power (Rabinow, 1984).

The idea that Saudi Arabia would enhance its governmental system to meet the needs of the regime aligned with the panoptic logic. In the panopticon, the aim was to monitor, control, improve and regulate behavior. By continuously observing and surveilling both the governed and the ruler, the system could identify areas of improvement

and implement changes to ensure the smooth functioning and stability of the regime (Rabinow, 1984).

In return for the panoptic surveillance and control, Saudi Arabia sought to enhance its governmental system by implementing reforms such as Vision 2030. This ambitious plan aimed to diversify the economy, promote social and cultural changes, and enhance the country's global standing. By aligning the governmental system with the needs and goals of the regime, Saudi Arabia aimed to consolidate its power and maintain stability while pursuing its vision of progress and development.

Therefore, within the regime of truth established by Mohammed bin Salman, the panoptic dynamics extended beyond the governed to include the ruler himself, emphasizing the notion that in the panopticon, all members, including the ruler, were subject to constant observation and scrutiny. This reciprocal relationship between surveillance and governmental enhancement reflected the underlying power dynamics and aspirations of the regime (Rabinow, 1984).

3.4. Mohammed bin Salman's Grip on Power Between Construction and Destruction

According to Pratto et al's (2011) differentiation between constructive and destructive power, it could be argued that Mohammed bin Salman's regime exhibited elements of constructiveness rather than destructiveness. While it was important to acknowledge and critically examine various aspects of his regime, including the limitations on freedom of speech and human rights concerns, it was also necessary to consider the broader context and the objectives pursued by the regime.

Firstly, the regime placed a strong emphasis on protecting the well-being and safety of Saudi citizens. Initiatives such as the Citizen's Account Program, which provided

financial assistance to low-income families, and the expansion of social welfare programs demonstrated the government's commitment to addressing socioeconomic disparities and improving the standard of living for its people (Vision 2030, n.d.). These measures contributed to the overall welfare and security of Saudi citizens, ensuring that their basic needs were met and fostering a sense of social cohesion.

Furthermore, the regime's efforts extended beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia, with a vision to elevate the situation of the Arab world as a whole. The Saudi government took steps to support neighboring countries, providing financial aid, humanitarian assistance, and development projects that contributed to their socioeconomic progress. Through these actions, the regime demonstrated a constructive approach to regional engagement and a commitment to fostering positive change in the Arab world (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Additionally, the Saudi government's investments in infrastructure development and diversification of the economy had the potential to uplift the Arab world's situation. Projects like NEOM and the Red Sea Development were not only aimed at advancing Saudi Arabia's economic growth but also had the capacity to create opportunities for collaboration, trade, and investment within the region (Vision 2030, n.d.). By establishing strong economic ties and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, the regime envisioned a future where the Arab world could become a more prosperous and influential player on the global stage.

Moreover, the regime's focus on counterterrorism efforts and combating extremist ideologies contributed to the overall stability and security of the region. Through initiatives like the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition and efforts to counter radicalization, the Saudi government sought to mitigate the threat posed by terrorist organizations and

promote a more peaceful and tolerant environment (Islamic Military Counterterrorism Coalition, n.d.). By addressing the root causes of extremism and fostering dialogue and cooperation, the regime aimed to create a safer and more harmonious Arab world.

Even globally, Mohammed bin Salman's constructive regime contributed to the global welfare. The regime's initiatives and policies had a positive impact on various global issues, making it a constructive force on the international stage. One area where the regime made notable contributions was in energy and environmental sustainability. Saudi Arabia, as a major oil-producing nation, took significant steps towards reducing its carbon footprint and transitioning to renewable energy sources. The Saudi Vision 2030 included ambitious goals for renewable energy production and energy efficiency, demonstrating the regime's commitment to combating climate change and promoting sustainable development. By investing in renewable energy projects and championing international collaborations on climate action, the Saudi government contributed to the global effort to mitigate the impacts of climate change and build a more sustainable future.

Furthermore, the regime's focus on economic diversification and investment created opportunities for global partnerships and economic growth. Through initiatives like the Future Investment Initiative and the establishment of Special Economic Zones, Saudi Arabia aimed to attract foreign investment, promote innovation, and foster economic cooperation. By engaging in global trade and investment, the regime contributed to the prosperity of not only Saudi Arabia but also the global economy, creating jobs and facilitating technological advancements (Vision 2030, n.d.).

Additionally, the Saudi government played an important role in promoting cultural exchange and understanding through initiatives like the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and the hosting of international events and

conferences. These efforts contributed to the enrichment of global knowledge, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the promotion of dialogue and tolerance among different nations and civilizations. By engaging in cultural diplomacy and supporting initiatives that promoted global welfare, the regime enhanced global cooperation and understanding (Arab News, 2022).

In conclusion, Mohammed bin Salman's regime seemed constructive not only for its contributions to Saudi Arabia and the Arab world but also for its positive impact on global welfare. Through its commitment to sustainable development, economic diversification, cultural exchange, and international collaboration, the regime contributed to global efforts in addressing climate change, fostering economic growth, and promoting cultural understanding. Through the active participation in global initiatives and championing positive change, the regime demonstrated its constructive role in the global community. Indeed, it managed to connect the Kingdom's goals with its people's aspirations.

4. Is the US-Saudi Relation Losing the Spark?

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States was shaped by a complex interplay of economic interests, human rights concerns, and geopolitical dynamics. Economic considerations played a significant role during the Trump administration, with a focus on expanding trade and investment opportunities aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan. However, this emphasis on economic gains raised questions about the balance between financial interests and human rights. The Biden administration brought significant changes, prioritizing human rights and democratic values, while still recognizing the importance of shared interests and stability. The pressure

on human rights within the context of Vision 2030 reflected the recognition of intertwined economic survival needs between the two countries.

Challenges emerged due to perceived economic subordination and the delicate balance of economic stability. Looking ahead, the future of Saudi-US relations would be shaped by geopolitical considerations, shared interests, and the need for constructive engagement based on understanding and mutual respect. By navigating these factors effectively, both nations could forge a path that promoted regional stability, economic growth, and the pursuit of common goals.

4.1. Trump's Administration: Economy First

During the Trump administration, economic interests played a significant role in shaping the Saudi-US relations. The Trump administration's emphasis on economic growth and job creation led to a focused effort on expanding trade and investment opportunities with Saudi Arabia. The administration sought to bolster American businesses and promote the export of goods and services to Saudi Arabia, which aligned with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 plan aimed at diversifying its economy and attracting foreign investment.

One notable example of the economic dimension of the relationship was the signing of economic deals worth billions of dollars during Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the United States in 2018 (Starr & Diamond, 2018). These deals spanned various sectors, including energy, defense, infrastructure, and technology. The agreements aimed to create economic opportunities for both countries, foster job growth, and enhance bilateral trade relations. The economic deals served as tangible manifestations of the shared economic interests and the desire to forge closer economic ties. As former president Donald Trump demonstrated:

Saudi Arabia, very rich country, we defend them. We subsidize Saudi Arabia. They have nothing but cash, right? We subsidize and they buy a lot from us. \$450 billion they bought. You know, you had people wanted to cut off Saudi Arabia. They bought \$450 billion. I don't want to lose them. (MEMonitor, 2019, 00:01-00:29)

President Trump's statement reflected his perspective on the economic significance of Saudi Arabia as a trading partner for the United States. By mentioning that the United States subsidized Saudi Arabia, he implied that the United States provided support or assistance to the Kingdom, possibly referring to military aid or security cooperation. The statement suggested that the substantial amount of money spent by Saudi Arabia on American goods and services created a positive trade balance and contributed to the U.S. economy. President Trump's concern about not wanting to "lose them" indicated his desire to maintain and strengthen the economic relationship with Saudi Arabia, potentially due to the economic benefits derived from this partnership, such as job creation and revenue generation for American companies. The quote highlighted the interdependence and economic interlocking between the two countries, underlining the strategic importance of the Saudi-US economic ties.

Furthermore, the Trump administration's favorable stance toward the fossil fuel industry and its push for energy dominance aligned with Saudi Arabia's role as one of the world's leading oil producers. The United States became a major importer of Saudi oil, and this economic interdependence further strengthened the Saudi-US relations. The administration's focus on energy security and reducing reliance on oil imports from unstable regions created a mutually beneficial partnership with Saudi Arabia, which provided a stable and reliable oil supply.

Moreover, the economic interests were evident in the Trump administration's response to the Khashoggi case. Despite international outcry and calls for stronger actions against Saudi Arabia, President Trump expressed reluctance to jeopardize economic ties and arms deals with the Kingdom. The administration weighed the economic benefits of maintaining a close relationship with Saudi Arabia against the moral and ethical considerations surrounding the Khashoggi murder. The prioritization of economic interests in this context underscored the significance placed on preserving and expanding economic cooperation between the two countries:

...Saudi Arabia has nothing to do with me. What does have to do with me is putting America first ...they're buying hundreds of billions of dollars worth of things from this country. If I say 'we don't want to take your business.' If I say 'we're going to cut it off' they will get the equipment, military equipment and other things from Russia and China. Russia and China would be very very happy, because right now we are doing very well against China, we're doing very well against everybody including Russia. And I'm going to keep it that way, and I'm not going to tell a country that's spending hundreds of billions of dollars and has helped me do one thing very importantly; keep oil prices down... I'm not going to destroy the world's economy and I'm not going to destroy the economy for our country by being foolish with Saudi Arabia. (C-SPAN, 2018, 00:51-01:49)

President Trump's statement reflected his pragmatic approach to Saudi Arabia, primarily driven by economic considerations and the desire to protect the interests of the United States. He acknowledged that while Saudi Arabia might not have a personal connection to him, the economic relationship between the two countries held great importance. President Trump emphasized that Saudi Arabia's substantial purchases of American goods and services contributed to the U.S. economy and job market significantly.

By stating that he did not want to "take their business" or "cut it off," he highlighted the potential consequences of severing economic ties with Saudi Arabia. He argued that if the United States were to halt its trade with Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom would seek alternative partners such as Russia and China, potentially bolstering their economies and weakening America's position in global competition. President Trump further asserted that maintaining a strong economic relationship with Saudi Arabia helped the United States maintain its leverage against China and Russia, as he believed the country was performing well in its dealings with these nations. Additionally, he acknowledged Saudi Arabia's role in helping to keep oil prices down, which he saw as beneficial for both the global and U.S. economies. In summary, President Trump's perspective centered on the economic advantages and strategic considerations associated with maintaining a positive relationship with Saudi Arabia, positioning it as a crucial player in preserving America's economic strength and global competitiveness.

Furthermore, the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal had economic implications. The re-imposition of sanctions on Iran created opportunities for Saudi Arabia to increase its oil exports and market share, thereby benefiting its economy. The United States supported Saudi Arabia's efforts to curb Iran's regional influence and viewed Saudi Arabia as a key ally in countering Iran's activities. This alignment of economic interests in countering Iran's influence in the region further solidified the Saudi-US relationship.

However, it was important to note that the emphasis on economic interests also raised questions about the prioritization of financial gains over human rights and democratic values. The close economic ties between the two countries sometimes overshadowed concerns about Saudi Arabia's human rights record and its restrictions on civil liberties. The administration faced criticism for downplaying human rights issues and

failing to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its actions. This tension between economic interests and the promotion of human rights and democratic values remained a contentious aspect of the Saudi-US relations during the Trump administration (Wajahat, 2019).

In conclusion, the Saudi-US relations during the Trump administration were influenced by economic interests. The emphasis on expanding trade, investment, and energy cooperation created opportunities for both countries and strengthened their economic interdependence. The economic dimension of the relationship was evident in the signing of major economic deals and the alignment of energy policies. However, the emphasis on economic gains sometimes raised concerns about the promotion of human rights and democratic values. The economic interests played a pivotal role in shaping the overall dynamics of the Saudi-US relations during this period, while also highlighting the complexities and challenges associated with balancing economic priorities and other considerations.

4.2. Biden's Administration: Human Rights First

During the Biden administration, the United States-Saudi Arabia relationship underwent significant shifts compared to the previous administration, reflecting a more critical approach towards Saudi Arabia and a stronger emphasis on human rights concerns and democratic values in U.S. foreign policy.

One pivotal event that greatly influenced the dynamics of the relationship was the release of the U.S. intelligence report in February 2021 (The New York Times, 2021). The report implicated Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi directly, heightening tensions and triggering calls for accountability and a reassessment of the bilateral relationship. The findings of the report

placed a strain on U.S.-Saudi relations and contributed to a more challenging environment for cooperation between the two countries.

Under President Biden, promoting human rights and democratic values became one of the key priorities in U.S. foreign policy, and this shift had implications for the U.S.-Saudi relationship. The administration emphasized the importance of addressing human rights concerns in Saudi Arabia, including issues related to freedom of speech, women's rights, and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. President Biden's commitment to upholding human rights principles led to a recalibration of the bilateral relationship, with a focus on encouraging Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record and implement reforms to protect civil liberties and promote inclusive governance: “We were not going to in fact sell more weapons to them, we were going to in fact make them pay the price and make them in fact the pariah that they are.” (CHARPMedia, 2022, 00:01-00:09). Apparently, the statement implied that the Biden administration intended to take a different approach to the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia compared to the previous administration. It suggested that the administration aimed to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its actions and policies, particularly in relation to human rights concerns. The administration sought to distance itself from Saudi Arabia's controversial reputation and position the country as an outcast on the global stage.

The Yemen conflict was another crucial aspect that influenced U.S.-Saudi relations during the Biden administration. President Biden announced a change in policy by ending U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen and suspending arms sales to Saudi Arabia. This decision signaled a significant departure from the previous administration's approach, reflecting a more restrained stance on the Kingdom's military actions (BBC News, 2021). The Biden administration sought to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and promote

a diplomatic solution, emphasizing the importance of a negotiated settlement to the conflict and increased humanitarian assistance.

Also, energy policy played a role in shaping the U.S.-Saudi relationship during the Biden administration. The administration's commitment to combating climate change and promoting clean energy had implications for the partnership given Saudi Arabia's significant role as a major oil producer. President Biden's focus on transitioning to renewable energy sources and reducing dependence on fossil fuels raised questions about the future of the energy partnership between the two countries. This shift in energy priorities introduced an additional dimension to the relationship and required both parties to navigate the changing global energy landscape.

Despite the recalibration of the relationship, the Biden administration recognized the importance of maintaining stability and security in the Middle East and engaging with Saudi Arabia on areas of mutual interest. The administration acknowledged that while human rights concerns and regional conflicts required attention, cooperation on issues such as regional security, counterterrorism, and economic cooperation remained essential. The administration sought to strike a balance by expressing concerns over human rights issues and advocating for reforms while recognizing the broader strategic interests shared with Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, the U.S.-Saudi relationship during the Biden administration underwent significant shifts characterized by a more critical stance, greater emphasis on human rights, and recalibration of priorities. The administration's focus on addressing human rights concerns, reevaluating support for military actions in Yemen, and transitioning to clean energy reflected a departure from previous approaches. However, the administration also recognized the importance of engaging with Saudi Arabia on shared

interests to maintain stability in the region. The complex dynamics of the relationship demonstrated the challenges of balancing human rights considerations with broader strategic and regional interests.

4.3.Survival Needs: The Link Between Saudi Arabia's Economic Multi-Partnerships and the U.S. Pressure on Human Rights

One of the key factors that shaped the U.S. pressure on human rights in Saudi Arabia within the context of Vision 2030 was the involvement of other nations in supporting and contributing to the Vision. Vision 2030 represented an ambitious plan aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy, reducing its dependence on oil, and implementing social and economic reforms. Actively, Saudi Arabia sought international cooperation and investment to achieve the goals of Vision 2030.

However, the U.S. anticipated being the sole promoter and concretizer of Vision 2030, viewing it as an opportunity to exert influence and shape the direction of Saudi Arabia's reforms. This anticipation was driven by the recognition that the economic prosperity and survival needs of both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were intertwined.

Saudi Arabia's control over oil resources was a critical factor in global energy markets, including the U.S. economy's stability and energy security. The U.S. relied heavily on Saudi oil imports to meet its domestic energy needs, and any disruptions in oil supply or price fluctuations could have significant repercussions on the U.S. economy. Therefore, the U.S. had a vested interest in ensuring the stability and viability of Saudi Arabia's oil sector, which was vital for the survival of both nations.

By positioning itself as the primary promoter and concretizer of Vision 2030, the U.S. sought to safeguard its economic survival needs. The reforms outlined in Vision 2030,

such as economic diversification, privatization, and foreign investment, aimed to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil and create a more sustainable and resilient economy. This transition was not only essential for Saudi Arabia's long-term survival, but it also aligned with the U.S.'s interests in maintaining a stable and reliable partner in the region.

Moreover, the U.S. recognized that addressing human rights concerns was crucial for the long-term stability and survival of both nations. In an increasingly interconnected world, human rights issues could impact a country's international reputation, relationships, and even economic partnerships. The U.S., as a champion of democratic values and human rights, understood the importance of promoting human rights as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development and global cooperation.

Therefore, the U.S. pressure on human rights in Saudi Arabia within the context of Vision 2030 was not solely driven by economic profit but also by the recognition that addressing human rights concerns was vital for the survival and well-being of both nations. The U.S. government aimed to ensure that the reforms under Vision 2030 aligned with international human rights standards, as it understands that a stable, prosperous, and inclusive Saudi Arabia was beneficial not only for Saudi citizens but also for regional stability and the U.S.'s own survival needs.

Indeed, the U.S.'s anticipation of being the sole promoter and concretizer of Vision 2030 stemmed from the recognition that the economic survival needs of both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were interconnected. The U.S. sought to safeguard its energy security and economic stability by supporting Saudi Arabia's efforts to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on oil. Additionally, the U.S. recognized that addressing human rights concerns is crucial for long-term stability and survival, as it contributed to the reputation and international relationships of both nations. Understanding the intertwined nature of

economic and survival needs helps elucidate the U.S.'s pressure on human rights in Saudi Arabia within the context of Vision 2030.

4.4.Paradoxical Headings: ‘Saudi First’ Foreign Policy

Historically, the U.S. maintained close alliances with Saudi Arabia, particularly in the energy sector. However, it seemed that Saudi Arabia's economic policies and actions resulted in the degradation of U.S.-Saudi economic relations, leading to a perceived sense of economic subordination for the U.S. The control Saudi Arabia held over oil resources, combined with its strategic position as a major oil exporter, granted it significant economic leverage in global energy markets.

Apparently, Saudi Arabia's actions, such as fluctuations in oil prices, changes in production levels, and shifts in market strategies, had affected the U.S. economy adversely. The U.S. relied heavily on stable and affordable oil supply from Saudi Arabia to meet its energy demands. Disruptions in oil supply or sudden price fluctuations could severe repercussions for various sectors of the U.S. economy, including transportation, manufacturing, and overall consumer costs. This perceived economic subordination, driven by Saudi Arabia's control over oil resources, influenced the U.S. government's stance on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia.

As a reaction to the Riyadh-led Opec+ alliance for the cut of oil production (Al Jazeera, 2022), President Joe Biden expressed his disappointment toward the Saudi decision to decrease oil production levels, and maintained that such decision will result in further consequences for the Kingdom. He demonstrated, “We’re going to react to Saudi Arabia. And they’re doing a consultation when they come back. And we will take action” (The National News, 00:15, 2022). President Biden's expression of disappointment towards Saudi Arabia's decision to decrease oil production levels underscored the significance of

this action in the eyes of the United States. The consequences he mentioned could potentially range from diplomatic repercussions to economic implications. By stating that the United States would react and take action, President Biden demonstrated a firm resolve to address the situation and assert the interests of the United States. Overall, the statement reflected the Biden administration's proactive approach to foreign policy, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a close eye on Saudi Arabia's actions and taking measures that align with the strategic objectives and priorities of the United States.

In response, the Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir demonstrated that "... when it comes to the relationship between the two countries its fundamental and very strong ... because the interests of the two countries require that they work very closely together in order to overcome many challenges that they face." (CNN, 2022, 07:48)

Al-Jubeir's statement suggested that the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States was rooted in shared interests and the recognition that close collaboration was necessary to confront the challenges they face. By asserting that the relationship was fundamental and strong, he highlighted the depth and significance of the partnership. The Minister's mention of working closely together implied a sense of interdependence and the understanding that cooperation was essential for both countries' success. The statement reflected Saudi Arabia's commitment to maintaining a robust alliance with the United States, emphasizing the importance of overcoming obstacles together for the benefit of both nations despite occasional misunderstanding. It conveyed a message of continuity and stability in the bilateral relationship, emphasizing the ongoing cooperation and shared objectives that underpin Saudi-U.S. ties.

In contrast, there was another Saudi voice, the Prince Saud al-Shaalan, responded differently to the U.S. threats, “Anybody that challenges the existence of this country and this kingdom. All of us, we are projects of Jihad and martyrdom. That’s my message to anybody that thinks that he can threaten us” (Middle East Eye, 2022, 00:06-00:27). By making this statement, Prince Saud al-Shaalan aimed to convey a strong and resolute stance against any perceived threats or attempts to undermine Saudi Arabia. The use of the term "projects of Jihad and martyrdom" suggested a willingness to defend the kingdom through various means, including potentially sacrificing their lives for its protection. The statement reflected a defiant and uncompromising attitude towards perceived adversaries, asserting the resolve of Saudi Arabia to safeguard its sovereignty and existence.

Next, the fear of economic repercussions, such as disruptions in oil supply or price fluctuations, might deter the U.S. from taking strong actions against Saudi Arabia on human rights issues. The economic interdependence between the two countries created a delicate balance where the U.S. considered the potential impact on its own economic stability before exerting significant pressure on Saudi Arabia. Unlike Biden’s administration, Donald Trump prioritized maintaining economic stability and its relationship with Saudi Arabia over taking stronger actions on human rights concerns.

The perceived economic subordination of the U.S. to Saudi Arabia, resulting from the control Saudi Arabia held over oil resources and Vision 2030, influenced the U.S. government's stance on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia. The fear of economic repercussions and the delicate balance of maintaining economic stability were significant factors shaping the U.S.'s approach towards Saudi Arabia's human rights violations. The U.S. government's concerns about the potential negative economic impact of taking strong actions against Saudi Arabia influenced its pressure on human rights issues, reflecting the

intricate dynamics between economic considerations and human rights concerns in the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

In this regard, the U.S. government recognized that economic partnerships and alliances played a vital role in ensuring its economic stability and prosperity. Saudi Arabia's engagement with other nations to support Vision 2030 presented an opportunity for those nations to strengthen their economic ties with Saudi Arabia and gain a competitive advantage in the region. This economic cooperation, if not carefully managed, could potentially diminish the U.S.'s economic position and influence in the region, thus affecting its economic survival needs.

The U.S. pressure on human rights in Saudi Arabia within the context of Vision 2030 was influenced by the involvement of other nations in supporting and contributing to the realization of the vision. The U.S. had expected to be the sole promoter and concretizer of Vision 2030, and the involvement of other nations challenged its anticipated role and influence. The U.S.'s historical alliances, economic interests, and commitment to promoting human rights contributed to the intensified focus on human rights in Saudi Arabia. By exerting pressure, the U.S. government aimed to ensure that human rights principles were not compromised in the pursuit of economic and social reforms. Understanding the complex dynamics surrounding the U.S. pressure on human rights in Saudi Arabia within the framework of Vision 2030 was crucial for comprehending the multifaceted nature of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and its implications for human rights considerations.

4.5.A 'Catholic Marriage,' the Future of the US-Saudi Relations

The future of US-Saudi relations was shaped by a combination of geopolitical considerations, shared interests, and the evolving global landscape. As the United States

sought allies and partners in an increasingly multi-polar world, maintaining a cooperative relationship with Saudi Arabia became strategically significant. Both nations demonstrated instances of effective collaboration on issues like counterterrorism, regional stability, and energy security. Moreover, addressing global challenges such as climate change and the fourth industrial revolution necessitated collective action, offering a compelling rationale for continued cooperation and partnership. While concerns regarding human rights and governance existed, constructive engagement based on understanding and mutual respect could foster a more productive and collaborative relationship. Realism and pragmatism played a crucial role in shaping the relationship, as both countries navigated their options and potential partnerships in a complex regional and global context. Ultimately, a strong US-Saudi partnership could contribute to regional stability, security, and the pursuit of shared interests (Rob Sobhani, 2023).

In his address, Al-Ansari (2023) emphasized the nature of the American political system as the primary problem in US-Saudi relations. He argued that the ongoing issues within the United States, particularly the dynamics between the two major political parties, hindered the productivity of the relationship and its impact on the global scene. To analyze this perspective, one could delve into several key aspects. Firstly, the political landscape in the United States became increasingly polarized in recent years. The deep divisions between the Republican and Democratic parties resulted in significant challenges in achieving bipartisan consensus on key foreign policy issues, including those related to Saudi Arabia. The lack of a cohesive and united approach within the US political system led to inconsistency and unpredictability in its engagement with Saudi Arabia, impacting the stability and effectiveness of their relationship.

Moreover, the domestic priorities and agendas of each political party often shaped their stance towards foreign policy matters, including relations with Saudi Arabia. These

partisan interests influenced decision-making processes and resulted in shifts in policy directions, complicating long-term planning and cooperation. As a result, the productivity of the US-Saudi relationship was hindered, as the focus on domestic concerns took precedence over broader global interests.

In addition, one other crucial aspect to consider was the recognition that the United States, as a global power, needed allies and partners in an increasingly multi-polar world. The rise of China, Russia, and Iran as assertive actors on the global stage presented new challenges and opportunities (Rob Sobhani, 2023). In this context, maintaining a cooperative relationship with Saudi Arabia was not only advantageous but also strategically significant. Past experiences demonstrated instances of shared goals, such as counterterrorism efforts, regional stability, and energy security, where both countries found common ground and collaborated effectively.

Another pressing issue that demanded collaboration between the United States and Saudi Arabia was the need to address global challenges (Sobhani, 2023). Climate change and the rapid advancement of the fourth industrial revolution, particularly artificial intelligence, required collective action and cooperation among nations. Recognizing the interdependence of these challenges, the United States and Saudi Arabia engaged previously in joint initiatives and agreements aimed at finding sustainable solutions, promoting innovation, and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. These shared interests offer a compelling rationale for continued cooperation and partnership.

Respecting the values, vision, and direction of Saudi Arabia was another crucial aspect that influenced the future of US-Saudi relations (Al-Ansari, 2023). While concerns related to human rights and governance was raised, it was equally important to acknowledge the unique historical, cultural, and regional context that shaped Saudi

Arabia's perspectives and priorities. Constructive engagement, based on understanding and mutual respect, had the potential to foster a more productive and collaborative relationship. By recognizing Saudi Arabia's vision and aspirations, the United States could build trust and facilitate dialogue in areas of shared interest, contributing to the overall stability and prosperity of the region.

Indeed, both the United States and Saudi Arabia were keenly aware of their options and potential partnerships. Realism and pragmatism played a crucial role in shaping their relationship, considering the complex regional dynamics and the evolving global landscape. As the United States navigated its role in the world, it ought to recognize the strategic significance of its ties with Saudi Arabia and the mutual benefits that could be derived from a strong partnership. Past experiences showed the importance of strategic alliances, economic cooperation, and diplomatic engagements that advanced shared interests and contributed to regional stability and global security.

In conclusion, the future of US-Saudi relations ought to recognize the need for allies, cooperation on global challenges, respect for Saudi Arabia's values and aspirations, and a pragmatic understanding of their relations. By navigating these factors effectively, the United States and Saudi Arabia could forge a path of collaboration that not only addressed shared concerns but also contributed to regional stability, economic growth, and the pursuit of common goals for world peace and prosperity.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation presented an analysis of the interrelated and continuous nature of reforms in Saudi Arabia, the distinctive style of the Saudi leadership, and the complex dynamics influencing the Saudi-US relations, using Michel Foucault's theory on power and Pratto's conceptualization on survival needs. The findings elucidated key dimensions that contributed to a profound understanding of these subjects within the realm of academic scholarship.

The research illuminated the intricate interconnections that existed among the various waves of reforms implemented in Saudi Arabia. These reforms, intricately woven into a comprehensive and forward-looking trajectory, were influenced by historical events, societal trends, and the imperative of survival needs. By delving into the historical context, it became evident that each phase of reform built upon the accomplishments and challenges of its predecessors, reflecting a cohesive and progressive approach to transformative change. This interdependence underscored the holistic and long-term vision that shaped the reform efforts and underscored the Kingdom's commitment to sustained development.

Moreover, the study underscored the unique nature of the Saudi mentality of leadership, which manifested in a distinctive governance approach. The Saudi leadership exhibited a delicate balancing act between preserving stability and satisfying the imperatives of survival within the social contract. This intricate equilibrium ensured the continuity of the regime while providing a framework for informed decision-making. The ability of the Saudi leadership to navigate the complexities of societal expectations, cultural values, and geopolitical exigencies while upholding stability showcased their adaptability and pragmatic leadership style.

At the forefront of these transformative endeavors, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman emerged as a pivotal figure, guiding the reform agenda and recalibrating the social contract to meet the evolving needs of Saudi society. His initiatives were underpinned by principles of nationalism, moderate Islam, and meritocracy, all aimed at modernizing the Kingdom while preserving its distinct cultural and religious identity. The research posited that the Crown Prince's regime could be characterized as a constructive rather than destructive leader, as it propelled the nation towards multifaceted progress encompassing economic diversification, societal reforms, and enhanced geopolitical positioning. His ambitious Vision 2030, which garnered global attention, attested to his unwavering commitment to forging a prosperous and sustainable future for Saudi Arabia.

In the realm of Saudi-US relations, the study underscored the dominant role played by survival needs and shared interests. Over the course of history, Saudi Arabia and the United States recognized the strategic significance of their alliance in confronting global challenges, safeguarding regional stability, and upholding their respective national security interests. However, recent developments, largely influenced by the US political system, strained this relationship. Notwithstanding these challenges, it was crucial to acknowledge that the findings underscored the imperative for continued cooperation and collaboration between both nations. Given the intricately intertwined nature of contemporary global challenges, Saudi Arabia and the United States ought to seek common ground and work together to address shared concerns such as counterterrorism, regional stability, energy security, and economic prosperity.

In summary, this research contributed significantly to the academic discourse surrounding the reform trajectory in Saudi Arabia, the distinctive Saudi leadership mentality, and the multifaceted dynamics shaping the Saudi-US relations. The findings shed light on the interconnectedness and continuity that underscored the reform process,

the adaptive and pragmatic nature of Saudi leadership, and the indispensability of cooperative engagement between Saudi Arabia and the United States. These scholarly insights provided invaluable guidance to policymakers, academics, and stakeholders seeking to navigate the intricacies of Saudi Arabia's path and foster mutually beneficial relations amidst the ever-evolving global landscape.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, the reliance on theoretical frameworks, namely Michel Foucault's theory on power and power relations, and Pratto's conceptualization on survival needs, provided valuable analytical lenses. However, it was crucial to acknowledge that these frameworks might have limitations in fully capturing the complexity and nuances of the studied phenomena. Alternative theoretical perspectives or a combination of theories could offer additional insights and enhance the overall analysis.

Furthermore, the methodology employed in this dissertation primarily relied on qualitative research methods, such as document analysis and historical contextualization. While these methods provided rich and contextualized findings, they inherently entailed limitations in terms of generalizability and quantifiability. Future research could incorporate quantitative approaches, surveys, or interviews to complement the qualitative analysis and provide a more comprehensive view.

Additionally, the research was limited by the availability and accessibility of data and sources. Given the nature of the subject matter, there were limitations in accessing certain documents and obtaining comprehensive data on specific aspects. Researchers should be cautious of potential biases and limitations in the data used, and efforts should be made to address these limitations through rigorous triangulation and verification of information.

Moreover, it was important to acknowledge that this study represented a snapshot in time, with the findings reflecting the situation up to the time of its completion. As the political, economic, and social landscape evolved, the dynamics of Saudi reforms and the Saudi-US relations might undergo further transformations. Future research should consider the longitudinal aspect to capture the evolving nature of these phenomena.

Furthermore, the study predominantly focused on the macro-level dynamics of reforms in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-US relations. While this provided valuable insights into overarching trends and patterns, it might overlook the nuances and variations that exist at the micro-level. Future research could delve deeper into specific sectors, regions, or societal groups to capture the diverse experiences and perspectives within Saudi society.

Moreover, the study relied heavily on secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, reports, and historical documents. While these sources provided valuable information, they were subject to potential limitations, such as biases, incomplete data, or differing interpretations. Researchers should exercise caution and consider the reliability and validity of the sources used, and future studies could benefit from incorporating primary data collection methods to supplement the existing literature.

Due to the ever-evolving nature of the subject matter, there might be limitations in capturing the full impact and outcomes of the reforms initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Some reforms might still be in progress, and their long-term effects might not be fully evident at the time of this study. Consequently, the findings provided a snapshot of a particular moment in the reform process, and future research should monitor and assess the outcomes and implications of these reforms over time.

Further research could investigate the situation of Saudi women between the past and the present, examining the changing roles and status of women in Saudi society. This

would provide insights into the progress made, challenges faced, and the overall impact of social reforms on gender dynamics in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, studying the reactions of Saudi women towards the initiated reforms would offer valuable perspectives on whether these reforms aligned with the traditional identity of Saudi women and their level of acceptance.

Furthermore, exploring the influence of the rise of Saudi Arabia on the Arab world and the potential for a clash of civilizations, as theorized by Samuel Huntington, would provide insights into the regional dynamics and the potential implications for the wider Middle East. Examining the reactions of conservative Muslims, both within and outside Saudi Arabia, to the Saudi reforms and the threats they might pose to the Crown Prince would contribute to understanding the complexities of religious and social reforms in Saudi Arabia as well.

In addition to these areas, it would be crucial to investigate the future of activism and free speech in Saudi Arabia, analyzing the impact of recent reforms on the space for dissent and the exercise of civil liberties. This research would provide insights into the evolving political and social landscape in the country.

Lastly, as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman consolidated his power and Saudi Arabia strengthened its international position, further research should explore the Saudi reaction to international tensions and conflicts. Understanding how Saudi Arabia navigated these challenges and the implications for its foreign policy and regional stability would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Saudi Arabia's role in the global arena.

By recognizing these limitations, this dissertation laid the foundation for further scholarly inquiry and encouraged future researchers to address these gaps to enhance our understanding of the subject matter.

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ملخص

في وسط مناظر عالمية متغيرة باستمرار، تستمر الإصلاحات في المملكة العربية السعودية والعلاقة السعودية الأمريكية المتطورة في إثارة الاضطراب العلمي وتحفيز النقاشات المتضاربة. تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى التحقيق في الطبيعة المترابطة والمستمرة للإصلاحات في المملكة العربية السعودية، ونمط القيادة المميز الملاحظ في البلاد، والديناميكيات التي تؤثر على العلاقات السعودية الأمريكية. من خلال فحص الأحداث التاريخية والاتجاهات الاجتماعية وضرورة البقاء، تكشف هذه الدراسة أن الإصلاحات المنفذة في المملكة العربية السعودية كانت جزءاً من عملية مستمرة ومترابطة. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، يحلل البحث سعي محمد بن سلمان للسلطة والعلاقات السعودية الأمريكية في سياق الإصلاحات السابقة في المملكة العربية السعودية والمسار التاريخي للعلاقة الأمريكية السعودية. يشمل الإطار النظري المستخدم نظرية ميشيل فوكو وتصور براتو لاحتياجات البقاء. تؤكد النتائج أن النظام بقيادة الأمير محمد بن سلمان قد تميز برؤية بناءة لدفع المملكة قدماً فيما يتعلق بالهوية السعودية. وعلاوة على ذلك، تبرز الدراسة أن العلاقات السعودية الأمريكية قد تم تحريكها بواسطة احتياجات البقاء وشكلتها الخصائص الجوهرية للنظام السياسي الأمريكي. في الختام، يؤكد هذا البحث أهمية التاريخ والثقافة والاتجاهات العالمية واحتياجات البقاء في تشكيل أنماط القيادة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: القيادة، الثقافة، هياكل القوة، الإصلاح، القوة البناءة، احتياجات البقاء.