



Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis

John R. Bradley

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Saudi Arabia: land of oil, terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and a crucial American ally. John R. Bradley uniquely exposes the turmoil that is shaking the House of Saud to its foundations, including the problems within the new leadership. From the heart of the secretive Islamic kingdom's urban centers to its most remote mountainous terrain, he provides intimate details and reveals regional, religious, and tribal rivalries.

Bradley highlights tensions generated by social change, the increasing restlessness of Saudi youth with limited cultural and political outlets, and the predicament of Saudi women seeking opportunities but facing constraints.

What are the implications for the Saudis and the West? This book offers a startling look at the present predicament and a troubling view of the future.

Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis Details

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From Reader Review Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis for online ebook

Kamil Salamah says

It continues to be sarcastically nauseating to REALIZE THAT THIS SUBJECT HAS BECOME PRACTICALLY COMMON PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AMONGST THE GREATLY INCREASING EDUCATED MASSES(ESP IN THE WEST). Yet no serious attempts are being taken to make the slightest dent in the area that has brought much tragedy to many. If the Empire of the age truly wants to leave a remarkable footprint in the annals of human history in the arena of human rights, freedoms of all types etc, this is where it MUST make the change.

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Adam Carheden says

Fascinating content, but the writing was too dry to finish before I had to return it to the library. Very educational though. The author's way of handling the subject makes him seem very credible (though I have no other way to judging his credibility). I needed some sort of focus or direction to keep me reading though. Probably wouldn't have got as far as I had if I weren't planning a business trip to Saudi.

Shirin says

An informative narrative of the chronic feud between Saudi Wahhabis and the anti-Wahhabi sect that led to the creation of Islamic fundamentalism and Al-Qaeda into existence. This book portrays some of the controversial issues that are encrypted in the Saudi norms, such as prohibiting women of the right to vote, work, drive or even meet or talk to men in public, henceforth creating a frustrated community where sins, infidelity and double standards are commonplace.

I believe that so long as the Saud family remains in power, building strong alliances with the West to serve their political agendas and interests, it will also be in the West's interests to keep the jihadists on backstage; to ensure that political loyalties in the Arabian Peninsula remain unchanged.

Jane says

Good analysis of social and political changes.

Dave says

Great book that takes you deep inside the fascinating country that is Saudi Arabia. Each chapter deals with a certain topic relating to the society and culture. Homosexuality, women, separation of sexes etc. Very good read. I found myself asking a lot of questions to my many friends that were from Saudi Arabia when reading the book.

Roxanne says

This was a very good book about the crisis Saudi Arabia is in. In some ways the country is very archaic and the meaning of Islam is changing there, they have a new king with new ideas, women want more rights, oil prices are plunging, and a lot of problems are happening.

Sean Sullivan says

With the amount of attention the country gets in the western press, you'd think that there would be a metric ton of decent books out there on the modern history of Saudi Arabia. You'd be wrong.

This one by journalist John Bradley was recommended as a good one, since he was one of the few western journalists inside Saudi at the time of the 9/11 attacks he did have unique access. Too bad he can't write to save his life. How's this for a crap chronology:

From 1964, Saudi Arabia was ruled by King Faisal, a son of Ibn Saud, but he was assassinated by a nephew in 1975. Back in 1926, Faisal had been appointed the first governor of the Hijaz, immediately after the region was conquered by his father in battles Faisal himself had played a crucial role in leading. As king, Faisal continued to be based a great deal in Jeddah, as did much of the working government – although the capital was officially moved to Riyadh in 1961.

I mean, what? This guy has written for the Economist? Seriously? Another example that success is 90% luck.

In Bradley's defense, this book is at least somewhat balanced, and he clearly has a real affection for the culture and some of the people he met there. This isn't jingositic western propoganda (like much of what is written about Saudi) but it also isn't a very good book.

Any of you Mid East nerds out there have a decent book recommendation on Saudi Arabia?

Tariq Mahmood says

The real and proper Taliban.

Imagine the Taliban ruling Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, but this time they are sitting on top of the cheapest reserve of oil, as well as hosts of the most sacred house of Islamic God. Imagine the gravitas they will be able to generate not only with the oil starved West but also with the spiritually famished billion odd Muslims of the world! This is the impression reading this book left on me of the Saudi Arabian culture and society.

John starts by presenting most of the cosmetic effects of Wahabism in the Saudi culture middle class which is very different from the working class in the West or other developing Eastern cultures for all that I know. The Saudi middle class as pointed out in this very informative book, does not know how to work, has not worked and does not want to work either. Who would, if given the opportunity not to work? After all, work is not exactly like exercise, not indulging in work is not going to kill us, is it? And I would argue that the Saudis have learnt ways to make money, from the cheap oil, their visa referral system, and limitless tourism all year long culminating in the yearly religious mega event of Hajj, pushing their Wahabi ideology on the unsuspecting new Muslims. And for Saudis everyone not a Saudi is a convert, is he not?

Wahabism is a sort of reformation within Islam challenging the all previous ideologies with a pretty simple and powerful message. This message is now being propagated across all of the Muslim and Western countries fueled by oil revenues. The propaganda is spartan, revolutionary, and extremely powerful coming from the Home of Allah itself. It resonates very very well not only outside Saudi Arabia but also inside the Kingdom as Saudis desperately want to justify their own lavish lifestyles as compared to their elder destitute generations.

The other aspect of strength for any Saudi is their culture which is synonymous with Islam. Saudis impose their 'Islamic' culture on all other converted cultures. The biggest ace in their culture is the language of the holy Quran. To date, there has never been another version of the Quran in any different language. There have been translations but the Arabic Quran commands an absolute infallible role with no other translations getting close to challenge its ascendancy.

John also highlights the tribal culture of Saudi Arabia as still pretty strong. Dealing with tribes is the age old

tradition in a royalist system. Also tribal system resonates well with the classical era of Islam in Arabia. The Prophet dealt with various tribes to spread the Islamic message, sort of similar to the Saud style of governance. Al-Qaida also developed its defiant message for the tribes of Saudi Arabia and Yemen and was later able to franchise the same to tribal cultures in Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Again one way to tackle Islamic militancy would be to take assimilate tribes into cities so that any government can comfortably deal with them. On the flip side, Al-Qaida has little hope of spreading its vile message in cities where tribal influence is non-existent.

I thoroughly enjoyed the neatly arranged chapters on Saudi youth, Shias, and especially the one one expatriate plight. This is probably the first book that mentions the third class treatment letter out to workers from Phillipines, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Why Al-Qaida saw no threat coming from the thousands of low paid workers cleaning streets in 40 degree calcius wearing orange jump suits just like in Guantanamo. Instead it choose to target the Western expats living in walled compounds blaming them for damaging the morals of a pure Saudi Islamic society. I find it ironic that similar orange jumpsuits were used by the Americans in Guantanamo holding possible Al-Qaida members. Ironic isn't it?

This book was riveting right from the beginning to the end. John in the end seemed mildly optimistic about any changes to the Wahabi control on Saudi Arabia. I tend to agree with him that change must come from the inside rather than any outside influence, somewhat similar to the Arab Spring.

Michael Griswold says

Saudi Arabia, a place of half hearted loyalties and a struggle for power John R. Bradley tells several intriguing stories of the power struggle between the Al Said royal family and the Wahabi clerics who have the willing ears of the masses. Particularly touching is the story of one of his students who on one hand befriends Bradley, than speaks of hating and wanting to kill Americans and only using Bradley to gain insights into the infidel American. This is the confusing and constrictive rope that men like Bradley walk, in one moment a friend, but in another moment an enemy crucified by a propaganda war that has consumed much of the Saudi lower class youth.

Petra CigareX says

This is a 10 star book and I want to give it a proper review. It's something I'm thinking about

Notes on reading: I'm only on the second chapter but already the author is getting on my nerves. In an effort to be fair to the extremely corrupt (his words) ruling family of Saudi Arabia and its various branches (some of them 'reforming') he details what he sees as the good as well as the appalling. Actually everything about Saudi Arabia is appalling. How can there be anything considered good in a country where women are less than people and are on a par more with objects than even slaves?

And that is where the author is wearing me down. After 9/11 the Saudis, from whom 15 of the 19 terrorists came, were mostly upset that the world would think badly of them, but not upset at what had happened (the Bin Ladens changed their name on their passports) but one of the reforming princes was genuinely upset. He launched a march from 8 schools against terrorism which the author describes how all the children wore the

same grey pants and caps. EXCUSE ME - *all* the children? Where were the girls? They aren't part of "all children" even to the author.

The second chapter is about the majlis, the public meetings held by princes and high officials which are considered better for Saudis than Western democracy which "isn't suitable for the desert environment of the Gulf". Anyone, the author says can attend the meetings which are often daily, "to petition for redress against government decisions, to claim justice, to request economic help or to discuss personal matters." The author says that in theory any citizen or foreign resident can attend "from the lowest desert-dwelling Bedouin to a member of the Bangladeshi immigrant community." "Any," says the author, but not even he includes women who must be lower than the lowest human being then.

The author is doing his best to criticise Saudi Arabia from an objectively-observed point of view but being a male he is not seeing that the greatest crime of all is the worse-than-slavery position of women. Everything is seen from a male perspective. Is this what they did in times of slavery in the US and Caribbean, see and discuss everything from the point of view of Whites, and if everything was all right with their world then great and if it wasn't then it should be put right but slaves were never considered except in terms of repression to keep them from asserting themselves and in how they could benefit their owners? That's how the author is reporting from Saudi Arabia.

A few weeks ago I was reading that a cleric in Saudi Arabia was saying that slavery being illegal was anti-Islamic and led to Western promiscuity. It is in the Quran that Muhammed owned slaves that he acquired in battle and that he was entitled to sex with the female slaves and as Muhammed's life is an example to be emulated by Muslims making slavery illegal was unIslamic. The cleric said that was better than the Western way of a man having sex with any woman he came across. I suppose that is how Boko Haram in Nigeria and ISIS with the Yezidis justify sex slavery. In any case slavery in Saudi Arabia has only been illegal since 1962 and there are no laws against trafficking.

There is a book I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced where a Yemenite girl was sold off in marriage and bravely obtained a divorce and the law was changed to a marriage age of 17. This was repealed by the clerics who said that Muhammed married a 9 year old girl so it was unIslamic to impose on the parents an age before which they in their wisdom could not marry off their daughters.

This diversion into slavery is because I find the position of women there to be iniquitous and the author's ignoring of that and putting everything else before it to be disingenuous and patriarchal in the extreme, it's as if female emancipation and feminism are really not that important and countries can do very well without it.

(I am aware that a great deal of modern slavery is not just in the Arab and African Muslim countries but also in the UK and the US and that Eastern Europeans are both slavers and enslaved. In the Far East under Buddhism, Communism and Confucianism is also endemic, and that there are half a million slaves in Haiti, some of which get purchased by the Dominican Republic, but right now I'm discussing a book on Saudi Arabia).

Hatred Central (view spoiler)

Michael X says

3.5 stars

Bob Duke says

A book aimed at the general reader. I like most people, have never been to Saudi Arabia and have been reliant reading and conversations with people who have in order to get an impression of the Kingdom. Only on very rare occasions have I met a person from the Kingdom. The people who I have visited have a negative view of the place and I have sensed that its citizens have been very defensive about their home land. This book has helped me get a better understanding of the place and it is an easy read. It is not a definitive text about the Kingdom nor does it claim to be. The author has lived and worked in the Kingdom and being able to speak Arabic has had the opportunity get some insight into the workings of Saudi society and its prospects for the future. I recommend this book for persons such as myself who want to get some insight into the Saudi nation.

Arvind says

The author actually lived - actually means not in the walled compounds set aside for Westerners and travelled in Saudi Arabia. So, this could be the first first-hand experience book of Saudi Arabia by a Westerner set in the 21st century and with loads of new insights and information.

The book is divided into 2 parts - the first part has a chapter each, on each of the 4 provinces. As with many medium-sized countries (say Pakistan), they may appear to be homogeneous to outsiders, but heterogeneous internally. While there were no linguistic divisions, according to the author, there is a prominent sense of regional, sectarian and tribal identity among most ppl in the 3 provinces other than the dominant Riyadh. But, I think the author may have made too much of their resentment towards the royal family.

He is however able to define the different poles - terrorists, Wahhabi fundamentalists, Royal Family, West and the (relatively) liberals quite well. The greatest mistake even analysts make is assume that some1 opposing extremism is a liberal. No, he may just like extremism of a different flavour !

The second part deals with life in the kingdom - expats, religion, freedom of expression (whats that? :P), crime, youth, women, press censorship etc. More or less your earlier perceptions are reinforced. Still, it is shocking to read the plight of women, the silent and ignored prevalence of homosexuality according to the author, and ofcourse the Press - which only prints "positive" news and has such low circulations.

It is d greatest curse perhaps, to be born and live in that country.

Muhammad Arqum says

Nothing particularly new for someone living in the Kingdom. Deliberate Emphasis on selective points, biased and venomous on others . The author's narrative of Wahabis hatred towards all non-Wahabis is pretty similar to the author's hatred towards Wahabis, which is ironic. The book is a bit outdated as well, a lot has changed ever since this book was launched, a few things have gotten better, however the general trademark arrogance of the Saudis is pretty constant.
