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Population pressure and the future of Saudi state stability

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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

POPULATION PRESSURE AND THE FUTURE OF SAUDI STATE STABILITY

by

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December 2008

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Political stability in Saudi Arabia is a key strategic concern of the United States and the international community. As the largest producer of oil in the world and the country with the greatest proven reserves of oil, Saudi Arabia will be a central player in the world's economic health for decades to come. However, Saudi Arabia is also characterized by one of the fastest growing population rates in the world, and its economic and political capacity to absorb such rapid population growth is not so clear. There is a growing body of literature that systematically links demographic growth and political instability, including revolutionary instability. This thesis draws on Goldstone's model to predict whether Saudi Arabia may be vulnerable to severe instability based on rapid demographic change. The Political Stress Indicator model consists of three conditions that must exist simultaneously for large-scale internal crises to occur; namely, fiscal crisis, elite dissent, and social mobilization. Our major finding is that the Saudi regime will likely be able to maintain political stability in the foreseeable future. While we conclude that Saudi Arabia will not face revolutionary instability in the foreseeable future, we caution that these problems are serious enough to closely monitor.

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POPULATION PRESSURE AND THE FUTURE OF SAUDI STATE STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Political stability in Saudi Arabia is a key strategic concern of the United States and the international community. As the largest producer of oil in the world and the country with the greatest proven reserves of oil, Saudi Arabia will be a central player in the world's economic health for decades to come. However, Saudi Arabia is also characterized by one of the fastest growing population rates in the world, and its economic and political capacity to absorb such rapid population growth is not so clear. There is a growing body of literature that systematically links demographic growth and political instability, including revolutionary instability. This thesis draws on Goldstone's model to predict whether Saudi Arabia may be vulnerable to severe instability based on rapid demographic change. The Political Stress Indicator model consists of three conditions that must exist simultaneously for large-scale internal crises to occur; namely, fiscal crisis, elite dissent, and social mobilization. Our major finding is that the Saudi regime will likely be able to maintain political stability in the foreseeable future. While we conclude that Saudi Arabia will not face revolutionary instability in the foreseeable future, we caution that these problems are serious enough to closely monitor.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   RELEVANCY

While the current focus of global security is rightfully centered on the war-torn states of Iraq and Afghanistan, and growing concern exists in the international community regarding Iranian intentions, in the long term, no other country in the Middle East is more important to global security than Saudi Arabia. With over one quarter of the world's proven oil supply, Saudi Arabia's health and stability are crucial to the health and stability of the world's economy as well as its global political order. An unstable or revolutionary Saudi state would mean almost certain global recession and would have disastrous and unpredictable geo-political ramifications in a region already steeped in friction. The spillover effect of a Saudi revolution on the international economic and political structure is as unpredictable as it is fearful.

While the history of Saudi Arabia has always been one of struggle and strife, in comparison to other states in the region, the Kingdom has enjoyed relative internal peace and security. Nevertheless, a brief survey of the last thirty years reveals an up tick in internal dissent, manifesting itself in sporadic occurrences of terrorism at home and abroad, and periodic--if brief counter-state movements.[1] The increasing occurrence of events that arguably signify growing internal discord within the Kingdom prompts the question of Saudi stability, or lack thereof. Indeed, circumstances within the Kingdom have caused some political prognosticators to boldly predict the downfall of the royal family and a massive disruption of the Saudi status quo. Notable among them is former CIA operative Robert Baer, an open and harsh critic of the Saudi regime as well as the

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[1] Saudi Arabia has long been a hotbed of turbulence and radicalism, but never more so than it has been over this time period. The storming of the Grand mosque in 1979, the Khobar towers bombing (1996), and the extensive involvement of Saudi citizens in the 9/11 plot, are but a few occurrences that highlight the numerous terror events populating the last thirty years of Saudi history, and mark a significant increase in the radical behavior in a small but growing number of its citizens.

relationship that it maintains with the United States. Baer revealed his grim prediction of the kingdom's future in his 2003 book, *Sleeping with the Devil,* while stating the following:

> All the ingredients of upheaval are in place: open borders, the availability of arms, political alienation, the absence of a rule of law, a completely corrupt police force, a despised ruling class, plummeting per capita income (and fabulously wealthy rulers to remind the poor exactly how poor they are), environmental degradation, surly neighbors, and a growing number of young home-grown radicals who care more about righteous murder than they do about living.[2]

Criticisms like these prompt the question of whether Saudi Arabia really is on a trajectory that will result in some sort of destabilizing crisis precipitated from within. The plausibility of the question and the importance of the state to the region and the world demand that an answer be given.

B.   POPULATION GROWTH AND VIOLENCE

A study of these same last 30 years of increasing Saudi dissidence also reveals a rapidly expanding Saudi population; one that has tripled since 1980. Estimates of Saudi population by the year 2050 sit at 49 million, up 94% from its current population of 24.1 million.[3] Barring any unforeseen catastrophic event(s) that would deplete its population base, Saudi demographic momentum promises ever increasing growth. While population expansion (and contraction) is a normal facet of a nation's march through history, the extent to which Saudi Arabia's population is growing has become cause for great concern among Saudi loyalists, as the Saudi state already struggles in its capacity to properly house, employ, educate and provide basic infrastructure for its citizens. This inability to provide basic services has admittedly been mitigated by the recent upsurge in oil prices. Yet, despite the windfall profits that are now pouring in, many of the same problems that plagued the Saudi state in the past are still existent. To whit, "Nora al-Saad of the *Arab News* writes that Jeddah, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia after the capital, Riyadh,

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2 Robert Baer, Sleeping with the Devil (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), 29.

3 Population Reference Bureau, "2006 World Population Data Sheet," PRB, August 2006, 8, http://www.prb.org/pdf06/06WorldDataSheet.pdf (accessed May 11, 2008).

"still doesn't have water piped into its houses through a standard waterworks system…
People in Jeddah have been known to go for days without water." Al-Saad laments that
this failure "is a reflection of the Kingdom as a whole and how it's managed."[4] The
Arab media has reported that average Saudis are extremely angry over the increasing
price of food commodities such as milk, rice, fruits, and vegetables and almost 40 percent
of the population is severely affected by escalating food costs.[5]

These bits of anecdotal evidence are but a few examples which illustrate the fact
that despite the newfound wealth of the Desert Kingdom, the structural conditions of the
state are not improving at the rate of the Saudi government's wealth gain.[6] Additional
problems, many of which are caused largely by demographics, but are exacerbated by
poor governance include rampant commodities inflation, a shortage of housing for the
poor, and massive unemployment, which is largely the result of a drastically inadequate
state run education system. In a nation that struggles mightily against forces that should
be easily mitigated with the kind of wealth that Saudi Arabia currently enjoys, how much
more will these forces affect the now oil-rich government when it is no longer enjoying
the marvelous returns on the one finite export that it has to offer? In the mean time, what
will be the effect on Saudi state stability if the currently prosperous government, despite
its wealth, continues to struggle in its ability to meet the needs of its people? And more,
what will the affects be when the population is double its current size? No one can say
with complete fidelity, but two things are certain: barring the unforeseen, the Saudi
population will continue to grow dramatically, and some day the wells will run dry.

C.   CORRELATION OF GROWTH AND DISSENT

The notion that population pressure *alone* can act as a potentially destabilizing
source of friction between the state and its citizens is tenuous at best. No one single

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4 Jonathan Schanzer, "Saudi Squander," *National Review Online* (October 3, 2007): 1,
http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ZGVhMmViODM0OGJlYzk1NmU0ZmQ1OGVhMmEwM2M4ZTU=
(accessed May 11, 2008).

5 Ibid.

6 It must be conceded that an inherent time lag exists between a state's gain in wealth and observable
improvements in state infrastructure. However, the lack of such basic services as water in a city the size of
Jeddah reveals a misappropriation of wealth at a minimum.

variable can have the kind of destabilizing momentum that leads to something as extreme as revolution. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the burgeoning population of the desert kingdom seems to be outstripping Saudi governmental capacity and diminishing the legitimacy of the Saudi government in the eyes of its constituents. The House of Saud is simply seen as an unfair, incompetent, and squanderers of state wealth and opportunity by a great number of its citizens. According to Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Saudi Arabia ranks 80th out of a 180 ranked countries with a CPI score of 3.5 out of 10 (higher scores representing less perceived levels of corruption).[7] On the CPI scale, zero equals highly corrupt and ten equals highly clean. In comparison, the United States ranks 18th with a CPI score of 7.3 and Kuwait ranks 65th with a CPI score of 4.3.

So while population growth alone is not a sufficient source of angst among Saudi citizens, it is the *combination* of this growth along with the perceived unwillingness and governmental inability to deal with this growth that is fueling the fire of frustration among the swelling number of marginalized and disaffected Saudi citizens. Whether or not the confluence of these factors portends state crisis, break down or even revolution within the Saudi state is a question worth exploring.

D.   TESTING THE THEORY AND GOLDSTONE

In order to determine whether or not the aforementioned prognostications regarding Saudi Arabia's impending instability are accurate or not, the current Saudi situation needs to be tested against a well reasoned and empirically accurate theory and model that enjoys proven historical explanation. While numerous theories attempt to explain state break down and revolution, particularly the causal factors that lend themselves to the likely occurrence of these phenomena, Jack Goldstone posits a theory

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[7] Five surveys were utilized by Transparency International to determine Saudi Arabia's CPI score. "The Transparency International CPI measures the perceived levels of public-sector corruption in a given country and is a composite index, drawing on different expert and business surveys. The 2008 CPI scores 180 countries." Transparency International, "2008 Corruption Perceptions Index," Transparency International, News Room, In Focus section, http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2008/cpi2008/cpi_2008_table (accessed November 18, 2008).

that when superimposed over the canvas of revolutionary history has great explanatory value. Goldstone, a sociologist and political scientist, conjectures that the prime mover of revolutionary tides begins with population pressure, grows with the subsequent economic impact of imbalanced resource distribution, and becomes deterministic to the extent that the state is unable or unwilling to effectively administrate through the crisis. Goldstone further posits that the adverse economic impacts of rapid population growth must be simultaneously coupled with elite alienation, and the mobilization of the common masses motivated by a counter-state agenda.[8]

E.   FINDINGS

The question posed and answered in this thesis, in part, is whether or not in fact Saudi Arabia does fit the criteria necessary to precipitate the kind of state instability that Goldstone posits leads to upheaval of the status quo. The authors explicitly reveal in this thesis that the application of the Goldstone theory to the current Saudi state will prove *not* to portend massive state crisis as one might suspect. This will be shown by providing a careful study of Saudi Arabia within the context of Goldstone's theory of revolutions and their causes. This study will reveal an intriguing explanation of how Saudi Arabia has been able to mitigate the potential for upheaval by enacting measures that soften the applicability of requisite conditions that Goldstone posits foment instability. While Saudi Arabia does have a history of instability, its political system, as revealed in Chapter III, is designed to allay political dissent in various ways. Multiple structural emplacements exist within the Kingdom that mitigates the potential for major disruption of the status quo. The Saudi rentier system is a prime example of this. The vast resources available to Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of the current oil market, allow the government to co-opt influential leaders within Islamic circles, as well as the general populace, thus mitigating potential sources of counter-state influence. Where money does not work to subdue or suppress dissent, force does. Public dissent and demonstration is simply not

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8 Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 1-62.

tolerated within the Kingdom, and is categorically met with heavy handed suppression by the state. The rentier system and the close observation by the state of its citizens are but two examples of methods that the Saudi state uses to quell internal dissent.

A study of Goldstone's theory will reveal that three conditions must exist simultaneously for large scale internal crises to occur; namely, fiscal crisis, elite dissent, and social mobilization. While Saudi Arabia may experience each of these destabilizing factors to some extent, the government structure does not allow each to exist to the extent that upheaval of the status quo becomes imminent. As a result, major instability is highly unlikely.

However, while Saudi Arabia is not entrenched in any sort of pre-revolutionary condition as some have said, the Saudi state does suffer numerous problems, many of which can be linked to demographic issues such as population growth (the cornerstone of Goldstone's theory), making the Goldstone model an apt lens through which to consider the Saudi problems discussed above. Thus, while application of the Goldstone model will reveal any assertion that the House of Saud is doomed to crumble under the weight of its own people to be largely premature, it will reveal that large scale restructuring of many facets of the Saudi state system are necessary if the state is to avoid the consequences of improper governance in the face of population pressure. Goldstone's theory provides the basis for this argument, and the potential pitfalls that accompany population growth will be discussed as well. Only by knowing what the potential hazards are can one hope to guard against them.

F.   METHODOLOGY

While Saudi Arabia does not suffer the likelihood of impending state crisis, but must undertake substantial efforts to address its burgeoning population, the methodology chosen here will be of the classical deductive sort, and will proceed in the following manner: a general theory, along with all its accompanying premises, will be explained (the Goldstone theory). Following this explanation, a detailed study of the subject to which the theory is to be applied will ensue (Saudi Arabia). This detailed study must of course be limited to issues that are germane to the theory's revelatory value with regard

to the subject. Logically, what follows then will be an application of the theory to the subject in order to test for fit. Fit in this case will be the extent to which the subject fits the criteria necessary for the theory to be sufficiently applicable to the subject. While application of the Goldstone theory, as revealed above, will show that state crisis is not imminent, it is of critical importance to apply this theory, as it reveals potential fissures in the Saudi state system, and guides the recommendations to KSA that may improve its ability to affectively administrate in the face of its growing population. This reasoning informs the majority of the chapter layout which will proceed as follows:

Chapter II will explain the Goldstone theory of state crises and revolutions, particularly the causes, and requisite conditions that precipitate these chaotic and often violent events.

Chapter III will offer a study of the Saudi state contextualized within the framework of Goldstone's theory. Application of this theory will reveal that Saudi Arabia contends with numerous governmental inadequacies that are aggravated by population pressures; but that the Saudi state has developed structural emplacements to mitigate factors that Goldstone believes are vital to destabilizing or revolutionary tides. Despite the fact that the House of Saud has developed these structural emplacements, a treatment of the issues that adversely affect Saudi ability to meet the needs of its constituents will be undertaken, as these issues have the potential to create demographically driven obstacles to continued stability.

Chapter IV will offer a conclusion and summary of the results found throughout the course of this study.

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II.   INTRODUCING THE GOLDSTONE MODEL

Historians have long recognized that a government, whose citizens no longer see the powers that be as the rightful custodians of their personal and national interests, is a government on the precipice, and one that given the "right" circumstances is prone to, and arguably determined toward, revolution or state crisis and breakdown. In order to determine whether Saudi Arabia is a possible, probable, or determined candidate for just such upheaval, requires a suitable theoretical framework over which the Kingdom's circumstance, structure, and stability can be superimposed; a framework that has proven to hold academic, and more importantly, pragmatic applicability. As previously mentioned, the Goldstone framework of revolutionary causes will work as the lens through which the Saudi situation is analyzed. As such, the basic tenets of his theory will be explained, so that in the subsequent chapter the Goldstone framework can be applied directly to Saudi Arabia.

A.   CAUSAL FACTORS OF REVOLUTION

The natural question that should stem from an appraisal of Saudi stability and the assessment of whether or not the House of Saud is subject to potential revolutionary forces is: "*What factors determine whether or not a state is prone to revolution or state breakdown in the first place?*"

Several theories that attempt to explain the causal factors of revolution have been expounded throughout much of the twentieth century, as scholars have turned an eye to history and attempted to find common precursory conditions and circumstances that have fomented many of history's significant state crises, to include breakdowns and revolutions.

Jack Goldstone raised the bar of scholarly inquiry significantly in his attempt to uncover universal factors that lead to state breakdown and revolution. While exploring such diverse crises as the English Civil War, the French Revolution, the fall of the Ottoman and Chinese Empires, as well as the Tokugawa Shogunate, Goldstone found that

a common thread persisted amongst these infamous state and pseudo-state breakdowns; population pressure and the state's inability to politically and economically absorb its growing citizenry.

Goldstone theory argues that long term demographic shifts, particularly population growth, can place extraordinary pressures on states that lack the capacity to mitigate the potential pitfalls of these population bulges, and that these pressures often result in state breakdown or revolution.

The basic premise of the Goldstone argument suggests that revolutionary forces are generated by the simultaneous culmination of three distinct, yet interrelated phenomena. They are: (1) a state financial crisis precipitated by a rapid population increase and a coinciding governmental inability to raise revenue; (2) severe division within elite circles as well as growing elite dissatisfaction with government as resources and positions of power become more scarce, and (3); a high potential for mobilization amongst popular groups as economic pressures foment fear, frustration, and eventual anger toward government in the face of economic distress. A more detailed explanation of each of these three factors follows, beginning with state financial crisis.

1. Population Pressure and State Fiscal Crisis

Demographics, specifically population growth, has proven to be the correlating factor that has most satisfied Goldstone's quest to unearth the underlying cause behind state instability that leads to revolution. This is not of course to say that population growth in and of itself explains political instability; that would be an absurd notion easily refutable. No one single variable can have deterministic results in such a complex problem set. Rather, the argument advanced by Goldstone is that high rate population growth has the effect of revealing inherent state weakness that may not otherwise be revealed in periods of stagnant or declining population growth. This weakness is most often revealed in the form of a fiscal crisis, in which the state, largely because of administrative ineptitude, is unable to affectively navigate through difficulties precipitated by growing population pressure. Growing populations require a growing amount of resources. State governments that are unable to adapt to the needs of a

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growing populace lack the ability to provide either the opportunity for their citizens to acquire resources, or in the case of rentier states, to provide the resources themselves, and thus face a series of dismal fiscal consequences.

Simple economics tells us that a growing population's obvious increase in resource demand will create price pressure on goods, rendering the marginal unable to secure the most basic of commodities as prices begin to rise. In this same vain, an increased supply of labor that a burgeoning population yields creates downward pressure on real wages, exacerbating the difficulties created by the skyrocketing price of goods. Increased population also means rampant unemployment, as weak governments lack the administrative knowledge and infrastructure required to spur economic growth at a rate commensurate with demographic growth, and thus simply cannot institute or execute policies that create jobs and opportunity. While these fiscal crises clearly have disastrous effects on popular and marginal groups that are often occupied with simple daily survival, the hardships created in the elite class of these societies, while of a different nature, are of equal extremity in the eyes of those whom are being affected. The result of these hardships creates what Gurr and Goldstone call a "crisis of legitimacy".[9] In the throes of economic despair, all strata of society begin to fix their gaze upon their governments and question the form, function, and eventually the authority of those around whom they either freely or mandatorily coalesce.

A general understanding of the fiscal pressures that the confluence of population pressure and inflexible governments creates forms the first leg of Goldstone's framework in that it describes one of a triad of circumstances that Goldstone conjectures must *combine* to create an environment vulnerable to revolutionary forces.

2.   Elite Alienation

No matter the form of government, and regardless of where a state's political institutions reside along the structural spectrum, the reality of elites and their relation to governmental and popular dynamics must be considered thoughtfully if one is to

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[9] Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, and Farrokh Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 331.

understand the true nature and role of elites within the context of their influence on social, political, and even economic events. Indeed, elites can play a tremendously powerful role in the shaping of the societies in which they live.

a. Elite - government Tensions

A natural tension often exists between private elites and government, as competing goals, suspicions, and occasionally unrealized expectations create friction between these parties. Private elites expect government to perform certain tasks that provide infrastructure, maintain the status quo, and yet also provide the circumstances and opportunity for elites to advance their own private ambitions.[10] States, in order to fulfill these obligations, require high revenue making ability and/or a method of extraction, usually through taxation. One would think, given these circumstances, that as long as the state has enough funds to satisfy this powerful constituency, any potential friction with them can be mitigated. Unfortunately, this seemingly straight forward problem can be complicated when, in the eyes of some elites, government is procuring *too many* resources.[11] Clearly, this worry reveals an underlying power struggle, as some elites seem to sense the resource gain that a state realizes as a zero sum game, meant to either increase the power of the state, or the influence of the elite. In their eyes, both ends are not simultaneously possible. Given this insight, the fact that tensions can arise in either periods of too little or "too much" resource gain is not surprising.

b. Elite - elite Tensions

In the face of fiscal crisis, elite-elite conflict can become a destabilizing force that can have tremendously adverse effects on the state as well. Because the state is the ultimate source of angst and blame in times of severe fiscal crisis, the notion that infighting amongst elite groups creates a larger threat to the state than a united elite counter-state effort is counterintuitive, but several factors support this non-obvious conclusion. First, is the notion that intra-elite conflicts create an environment of

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[10] Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*, 5.

[11] Ibid., 6.

confusion in which the state is unable to focus counter-revolutionary efforts against a singularly consolidated faction. Secondly, infighting amongst governmental and private elites can result in a withholding of resources by the latter group, rendering the government materially unable to compel acquiescence. Lastly, private elites who are at odds with governmental or establishment elites tend to frame the struggle in terms of a counter-state ideology, which provides a grander vision to the masses and inspires popular mobilization.[12]

Goldstone echoes, and in fact contributed to, the footnoted author's above summary of these factors, noting also that a united elite working toward common counter-state goals would be more likely to simply stage a coup d'état and rearrange policies to fit their agreed upon intentions.[13]

c. *Elite – popular Group Tensions*

While popular groups often look to elites for guidance, leadership, and patronage, and to varying degrees depend on elites for resources, employment, and representation in the higher echelons of state society, hostilities between these groups can surface in the face of burgeoning population growth and economic stagnation as competition for resources becomes more intense. While citizens of the state most often consider the national government to be the ultimate guarantor of their welfare, local elites, because of the direct access and visibility that their proximity affords, often exact a great deal of influence among popular groups, and in times of fiscal stress, bear the brunt of popular discontent that one would normally consider rightfully reserved for the state. Proximity alone does not account for the heightened tensions between these two groups in times of economic hardship. Rather, the inter-group struggle for scarce resources is what prompts conflict. Goldstone notes, citing Chinese, Latin American, and European examples, that environments of high population growth and stagnating economies often

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[12] James Defranzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements,* Second Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 12-13.

[13] Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri, *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*, 38-39.

find groups that are usually not in competition with each other struggling for control of relatively diminishing resources.[14]   These conflicts create fault lines that in times of stability don't exist.

That these conflicts create instability between elites and popular groups is of no surprise given the parochial interests of each, however the effect that these types of conflicts have on the *state* are of much greater consequence to stability than any class division that may result from inter-class struggle for resources. The extent to which state stability is affected depends largely on the elite class's ability to frame the circumstances that brings about this type of conflict in terms that either directly or indirectly hold the state responsible. If counter-state elites can sway the sentiments of popular groups in their favor under the banner of a uniting ideology, a redirection of popular anger away from elites and toward the state can have destabilizing consequences, as a united counter-state effort has the real ability to take hold.

These three types of elite conflict have varying degrees of effect on the stability of the state. Clearly, in the case of elite-government conflict, the counter-state intentions that can result, while potentially threatening, are only as effective as the resources that elite groups can muster to begin genuine counter-state efforts. In this vain, it is vital for elite factions to co-opt, inspire, organize and then deploy popular groups. The ability to do so greatly expands the financial and human capital base required to effectively launch revolutionary movements. The ability to form a cohesive counter-state movement among popular groups however may be very difficult if several elite groups with conflicting ideologies or agendas are present. Presumably, disparate elite groups struggling for the affections of the masses would result in the fracture of popular groups into smaller, competing, and thus weaker factions. Squaring this supposition with the notion that disparate elite groups create the most destabilizing conditions for the state is difficult. On the one hand, elite groups are seen as more destabilizing if they are in

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[14] Jack A. Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict," *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 56, no.1 (Fall 2002): 9-10, http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/pdf/demographics_capstone.pdf (accessed November 7, 2008).

conflict with one another, yet this conflict has the potential to fracture and negate the power of popular groups. Perhaps this dynamic at least partially explains why revolutions are exceedingly rare events.

3.   Mass Mobilization Potential

The third and final phenomenon that Goldstone conjectures leads to revolutionary conditions is the previously mentioned notion of mass mobilization. While financial crises and elite alienation are necessary occurrences in Goldstone's model, they are not sufficient alone to stimulate the amount of upheaval required to weaken states to the point that they are vulnerable to existential counter-state threats. Wide and deep movements within the population are essential. To this end, a study of mass mobilization potential is essential if one is to accurately assess a state's vulnerability to anti-government forces.

When assessing mass mobilization potential Goldstone offers three factors for consideration that he argues determine the likelihood of popular involvement in counter-state efforts. These three factors are: real wages, age structure, and urbanization.[15] The strength of Goldstone's model is that if one can be supplied with historical raw data concerning these three variables, back testing can be conducted in order to determine if in fact these variables combine to show a high correlation between what Goldstone terms mass mobilization potential (MMT) and actual historical cases of revolts and/or revolutions.[16] While Goldstone constructed a mathematical model in which MMT could be quantified,[17] a detailed analysis of the mathematics is not important here. What is important is a general understanding of how each variable affects the potential for common citizens to collectively act in a fashion contrary to state interests. With that in mind, a brief discussion of each variable and its effect on mass mobilization potential is required.

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[15] Goldstone, *Revolutions and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, 134.

[16] Peter Turchin, *Historical Dynamics, Why States Rise and Fall* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 141.

[17] Ibid., 143.

a.   *Falling Wages*

It bears repeating that there is nothing deterministic about the growth of a state's citizenry other than that more people will live there. Rather, population growth only becomes a problem when the state is either unable or unwilling to expand its resource base to the extent that the growing population cannot maintain a standard of living consistent with previous and less populace generations. In short, a state must be able to increase its carrying capacity at a rate equal to or greater than the resource demand its growing population will place on it. In the modern nation-state, this is usually accomplished through such means as the purchase or development of technology, free trade and specialization, and the advancement of an open-market economy in which the forces of supply and demand can find equilibrium in the domestic and world markets. If the state is administratively unable, or ideologically unwilling to incorporate methods such as these to increase state resource capacity, the inflationary pressures that result can impel citizens to mobilize in protest. Indeed, history is littered with examples—from food riots to the forced exile of kings.[18]

b.   *Age Structure and Mobile Youth*

While no magical proportion of youths must exist in order to spawn so called "youth movements", Goldstone advances the argument that small increases in the numbers of youth in a given a society can have large effects on the potential for social mobilization.[19] In a hypothetical example, Goldstone parses percentages of a society into age categories. Noting that members of advanced age groups are less likely to join movements unless a certain proportion of society is already involved, he shows how a large cohort of mobilized youths can have a cascading effect on these older and otherwise hesitant segments of society that would in other circumstances choose to air their

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[18] Dozens of examples of mass mobilization as the result of inflationary pressures, particularly on foodstuffs are existent within history. Food riots are commonplace events in the Middle East and Asia. The "exile of kings" is an allusion to the King of England's forced exile from London in December, 1641, as because of economic depression and the subsequent question of his legitimacy, he and his family were forced to leave for safety reasons.

[19] Turchin, 137.

grievances privately or not at all.[20] Thus, it would seem that population growth, given the "right circumstances," can be destabilizing in two ways according to Goldstone. First, it places pressure on governments that cannot absorb a growing citizenry, and secondly, it floods a society with an element, that when presented with unsatisfactory conditions, has no compunction regarding the assembly of its members to either convey dissent or demand reformation.

c.   Urbanization

The third factor that Goldstone conjectures increases mass mobilization potential is urbanization. Indeed, it makes intuitive sense that the convergence of multitudes of citizens into close proximity provides an ease of communication, a common experience from which to establish similar world views, and a streamlining of logistical requirements that would otherwise not be available if these same citizens were to be spread throughout the rural countryside. These factors alone would seem to go a long way toward explaining why urbanization promotes mass mobilization; however Goldstone posits that urban settings alone do not facilitate collective action. Instead, according to Goldstone, the state's ability to either *assist* or *deter* its citizens is what determines whether or not urbanization will play a decisive role in the potential for mobilization.[21]

Assistance   to   citizens   is   accomplished   through   effective   state administrations that provide resources in the form of employment opportunity, proper sanitation, public utilities, and security. If these requisite conditions can be met by the state the growth of population centers poses no threat, and is in fact beneficial to state interests. Goldstone reinforces this claim with the following: "Indeed, if real wages are above average, then urban growth and a youthful population can be stabilizing factors, as urban growth attracts families to better circumstances and a youthful population enters the labor force under favorable conditions."[22]

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[20] Turchin, 137.

[21] Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, 139-140.

[22] Ibid., 139.

Deterrence in the context given above implies the ability to quell or disallow counter-state collective action in any form. The ability to mitigate mobilization is primarily achieved through fear, and at the root of this fear is the perception that the state is strong enough to enforce its will. If the state has the resources and the resolve to effectively promulgate this perception public dissent will be anything but commonplace. Indeed, in highly authoritarian or police states, public demonstrations are often met with such brutality that their occurrence is nothing more than a short lived anomaly. Of course the ability to deter in this context implies that the state must have strong administrative capacity. Police forces, military units, and other vehicles of censorship that authoritarian governments use require a tremendous input of resources.

While the extent to which urbanization is apparent in a society or state is an important variable to consider when attempting to ascertain the potential for mass mobilization, it is equally important to consider the political and economic strength of the state as well. States that lack the administrative and economic capacity to absorb citizens into population centers may be forced to confront a great deal of public dissent, and if these same states lack the ability to quell or silence these movements, greater troubles may lie ahead. Because urbanization is an increasingly important phenomenon given the population explosion in Saudi Arabia and the world generally, Chapter IV is devoted entirely to the further study of this subject.

B.   SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce Jack Goldstone's model of revolutionary causes in order to establish a general, historically proven framework over which Saudi Arabia's current and specific conditions can be superimposed. As such, in the following chapter Goldstone's model will be the lens through which modern day Saudi Arabia is viewed and critiqued.

While Goldstone's model specifically addresses pre-industrial states, it is the authors' belief (as well as Goldstone's) that the model can be applied to modern nation states as well, as the theory hinges around two general phenomena that have been consistent and important factors in the determination of state stability throughout the

ages; demographics and state structure. Goldstone, noting the importance of applicable analogy in the context of model building, states that initial conditions that are similar, regardless of era, can expect the actors of their respective ages to stage common responses. He states, "If the salience of those characteristics is great, then one can reasonably expect that in a wide variety of historical contexts, actors will respond somewhat similarly to them, and their likely actions can thereby be predicted or explained."[23]

With this affirmation of the model's applicability to modern states, let us consider the demographic, economic, social, and political structure of modern day Saudi Arabia, and attempt to determine the extent, if any, to which the Kingdom may be subject to revolutionary forces.

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[23] Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, 57.

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III. APPLICATION OF GOLDSTONE'S REVOLUTION MODEL TO SAUDI ARABIA

As discussed in Chapter I, a body of political pundits and international affairs analysts believe the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is potentially on a course that will lead toward increased instability, and possible revolution. While Professor Jack Goldstone has never overtly stated that just such a possibility exists, application of his framework to the modern Saudi state may provide valuable insight to those interested in Saudi stability. While Goldstone's framework has been largely applied to pre-industrial states, common variables associated with his theory have been used as explanatory markers of concern within the context of the modern Saudi state. To wit, he notes that Saudi Arabia bears watching because of its *demographic trends* and imbalances between education and economic opportunities.[24]

While Chapter I revealed that in the near term, particularly because of recent windfall oil profits, Saudi Arabia does not appear to be prone to revolutionary forces, numerous structural problems require attention and redress by the royal family if potential instability is to be averted, or at a minimum, mitigated. Acknowledgement of the many issues that potentially threaten internal accord will not be easy however, as the kingdom's leadership is collectively ensnared in a classic "kings dilemma", in which it will be forced to institute reforms that may jeopardize the legitimacy of the throne and family. The balancing act that the house of Saud must perform is as unenviable as it is necessary to long term stability within the kingdom.

The focus of this chapter is to conduct a critical analysis of the Saudi state using Goldstone's revolution theory as a conceptual framework in order to determine potential instability from within. Because Goldstone's model for state breakdown begins with population pressure, a study of Saudi demographic shifts is required. Subsequently, the

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[24] Jack A. Goldstone, "Demography, Environment, and Security," In *Environmental Conflict*, edited by Paul Francis Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch, 84-108 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000) 98, http://books.google.com/books?id=zMm9UketgwAC&pg=PA84&lpg=PA84&dq=Goldstone,+Jack+A.+%E2%80%9C Demography,+Environment,+and+Security.%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=Kx6oPa3umO&sig=g4TyK_Hvb5vSP5nG RI90qyf8_QQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result (accessed June 4, 2008).

economic impacts of population growth in Saudi Arabia, such as imbalanced resource distribution, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, will be discussed at length, as these issues highlight the Kingdom's inability and, at times, unwillingness to effectively administer. Because Goldstone's framework hinges on the simultaneous phenomena of elite alienation and the mobilization of the common masses to counter the state's agenda, an in depth study of elite Saudi groups is offered, with specific attention paid to the disincentives that mitigate the potential for both elites and popular groups to mobilize with counter-state intentions.[25]

With the above framework revealed, the chapter is laid out in the following manner: Section one will review population changes and demographic pressures. Section two will examine the destabilizing impact of economic downturns caused by population pressure. Section three will inspect the Saudi state, revealing what amounts to precipitous state ineptitude and blatant corruption. Section four will discuss Saudi elite groups and examine their ability to mobilize the masses. Lastly, section five is an assessment of the structural emplacements used by the state to mitigate internal pressures that have allowed the house of Saud to survive and maintain authoritative control of the Kingdom. We include this section because the ruling family has been able to reduce and in some cases control the pressures that Goldstone believes lead to revolution, mitigating the negative effects of population pressure and economic hardship.

A. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURES IN SAUDI ARABIA

1. Demographic Trends

While Saudi population figures were inflated in the 1970s and 1980s by the government in order to project the image of a strong economy and workforce, in the early 1990s, the opposite occurred. Saudi government sources minimized population estimates

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[25] Goldstone, *Revolutions and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, 1-62.

in order to downplay the predicted economic and political pressures that stemmed from high growth rates and overpopulation stressors.[26]

No matter what population estimates the Kingdom may provide now or in the future, the general consensus is that Saudi Arabia's population is projected to almost double from 2000 to 2015; due largely to a disproportionately high ratio of females who will soon enter their traditional childbearing years.[27] This current population growth is the result of momentum achieved through earlier growth in the previous three decades. The result is that the population has increased dramatically from 7 million in 1980 to almost 28 million today.[28] Growth rates are projected to only decrease slightly from 1.9% in 2008 to 1.3% in 2025.[29] That little is available in the way of family planning measures only contributes to the demographic momentum that the state is experiencing.[30] In 2008, the overall population was estimated at 28.1 million and is expected to increase to 35.6 million by 2025 and other estimates have a greater increase in 2025 to 48.5 million.[31] Regardless of the exact level of increase, Saudi Arabia will most likely experience a significant increase in population for the foreseeable future that will challenge Saudi government and society.

While the Saudi growth rate can be partially attributed, as previously mentioned, to a lack of state funded birth control programs, the increase in health standards also

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[26] Saudi government sources and independent foreign census sources such as the U.S. Bureau of the Census International Database, which tracks population and demographic trends, are closer in estimates. Adam N. Goetz, "Demographics: The Downfall of Saudi Arabia" (Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2003), 13-16, http://bosun.nps.edu/uhtbin/cgisirsi.exe/Fri+May+30+12:29:20+2008+/SIRSI/0/520/03Dec_Goetz.pdf (accessed March 21, 2008).

27 Alan Richards, "Socioeconomic Roots of Radicalism?: Towards Explaining the Appeal of Islamic Radicals" *Naval War College Review* Vol. LV, No. 4 (Autumn, 2002), 26, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/00102.pdf (accessed April 8, 2008).

[28] Ian Bremmer, "The Saudi Paradox," *World Policy Journal*, Volume XXI, No. 3 (Fall 2004), 25, http://worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj04-3/Bremmer.pdf (accessed May 30, 2008).

[29] U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table A-4. Population by Region and Country 1950-2050," U.S. Census Bureau, A-7, http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/wp-02.pdf (accessed May 30, 2008).

[30] Bremmer, 26.

[31] U.S. Bureau of the Census, A-7 and U.S. Bureau of the Census, "International Database, Country Summary: Saudi Arabia," U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/country/saportal.html (accessed May 30, 2008).

explains the Saudi population surge. For instance, in 2005, the number of deaths per 1000 was recorded at six, while the birth rate per 1000 individuals, while decreasing slightly, was significantly larger, at 37.[32] This significant growth poses challenges for the government, and maintaining popular support could hinge on how it responds to the needs of the masses, as well as elites, in the coming years. Tables 1 and 2 depict estimates of Saudi Arabia population and demographic trends.

Population (1950-2050)

(Midyear population in thousands. Figures may not add to totals because of rounding)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2002	2010	2025	2050
Saudi Arabia	3,860	4,718	6,109	9,949	15,847	23,513	30,546	48,517	91,112

Table 1.   Historical and Projected Population for Saudi Arabia.

From U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table A-4. Population by Region and Country 1950-2050," U.S. Census Bureau, March 2004, A-7, http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/wp-02.pdf (accessed May 30, 2008).

Saudi Arabia Demographic Indicators

(Midyear population in thousands. Figures may not add to totals because of rounding)

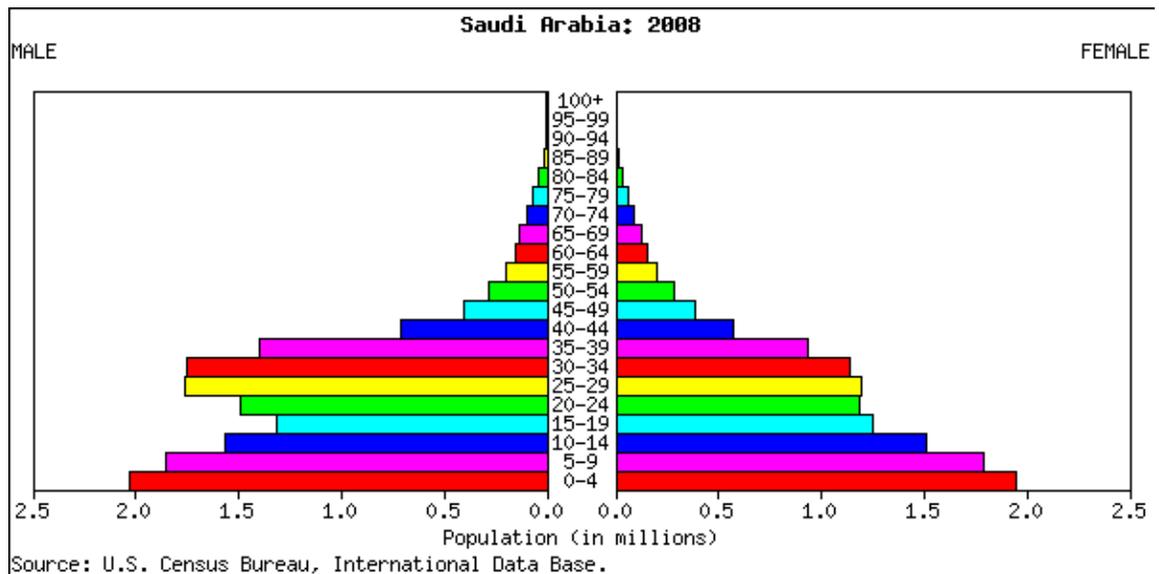|	1995	2005	2008	2015	2025
Population					
Midyear Population (in thousands)	19,967	26,418	28,161	31,560	35,669
Growth Rate (percent)	3.5	2.3	1.9	1.4	1.3
Fertility					
Total Fertility Rate (births per woman)	4.7	4.1	3.9	3.4	2.9
Crude Birth Rate (per 1,000 population)	31	30	29	26	22
Births (in thousands)	615	781	812	820	789
Mortality					
Life expectancy at birth (years)	73	75	76	77	79
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	20	13	12	10	7
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	23	15	14	11	8
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	4	3	3	2	3
Deaths (in thousands)	70	69	71	77	93

Table 2.   Demographic Indicators for Saudi Arabia.

From U.S. Bureau of the Census, "International Database, Country Summary: Saudi Arabia," U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/country/saportal.html (accessed May 30, 2008).
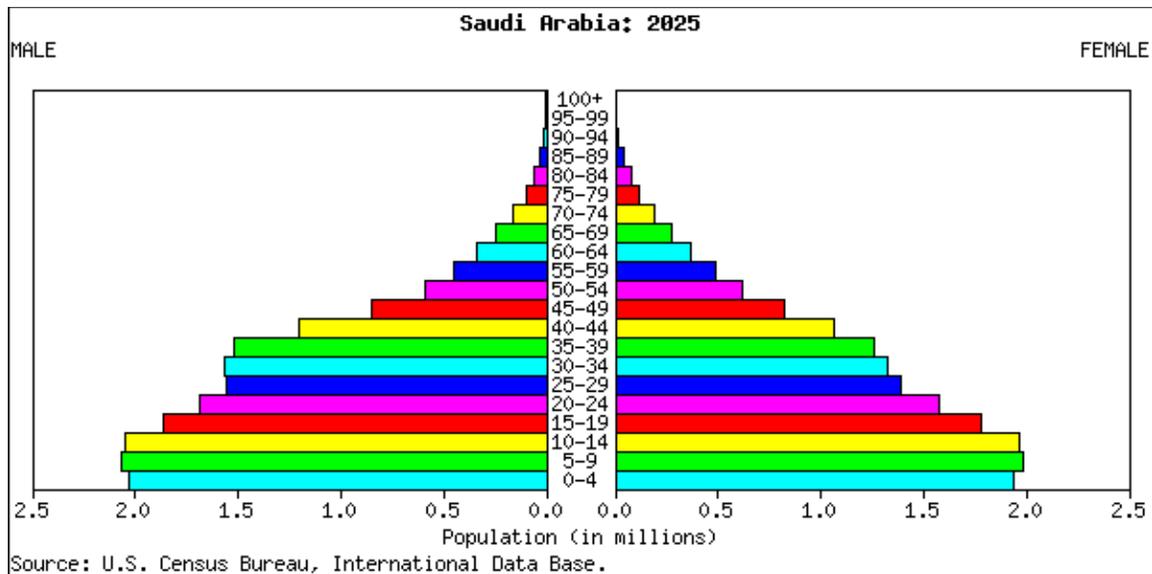
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[32] Goetz, 16.

As noted in Chapter II, specific demographic trends tend to increase the risks of political conflicts. Large shifts in age distribution, particularly a growing ratio of youths, is just such an example. According to Goldstone, youth cohorts or "youth bulges" cause cascading effects on the state that can prove to be destabilizing in states that struggle to assimilate growing populations. In short, a rapid shift in age structure causes a proportionally swift growth in the size of the labor force, stressing the national economy because of the state's inability to supply employment opportunities. The lack of employment opportunities combined with the growing population of educated youth aspiring for upward mobility and elite status creates more tension as competition stiffens among members of society.[33] As if this were not enough to stimulate potentially destabilizing conditions, urbanization--for all practical purposes a second order effect of population growth, brings the reality of these economic conditions into painfully sharp focus, making the potential for social mobilization much more likely.

Inarguably, a major youth bulge does exist in Saudi Arabia. The percentage of youth population will continue to increase. Depicted in Figure 1 are population pyramids by gender that graphically depict Saudi Arabia's present and future "youth bulge" in demographics.

Saudi Arabia: 2008

MALE   FEMALE

Population (in millions)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

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[33] Goldstone, "Demography, Environment, and Security," 87.

Saudi Arabia: 2025

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

Figure 1.   Population Pyramids for Saudi Arabia (2008 and 2025).

From U.S. Bureau of the Census, "International Database, Country Summary: Saudi Arabia," U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbpyry.pl?cty=SA&maxp=2123615&maxa=100&ymax=300&yr=2008&yr=2025&.submit=Submit+Query   (accessed May 30, 2008).

Consequently, if history is any indicator, Saudi youth are more apt to mobilize, and perhaps call for change and reform. Parenthetically, there is the contention that youth are more prone to use violence and that they utilize current information age technology such as the internet in higher numbers; which opens them up to being influenced by contrary opinions and ideas than the older generations.

B.   ECONOMIC IMPACTS

1.   Economic Conditions

Demographic and subsequent economic pressures are revealed in several areas throughout the Kingdom, including unemployment, inflation, food prices, and the economic disparity between the elites and the masses. The discontent of the youth and the population in general is increased by the fact that most people now live in cities with poor infrastructure and lack of opportunities for employment. Almost 90% of the

population is considered urban and 80% of the population lives in the kingdom's three largest cities: Riyadh, Jidda, and Dammam.[34]

Public services and utilities are being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of customers and eventually greater oil revenues will have to be utilized to stem the problems. Reporter Kim Murphy wrote from Riyadh about the urban conditions:

> The dozen years since the Persian Gulf War have seen slums grow up on the outskirts of Jidda and Riyadh, the capital. Beggars hawk bottles of water at intersections. Penniless women huddle in strips of shade outside their crumbling mud-brick houses, begging for money. Many families in the capital are so poor they can't afford electricity. Raw sewage runs through parts of Jidda.[35]

With segments of the increasing urbanized population living in adverse conditions and the prospect of self-created economic prosperity an unrealistic notion for people, fertile ground for dissent is created. How the house of Saud responds to their poor will serve to either contribute to or mitigate internal dissent and calls for reform. However, while urbanization can be a destabilizing phenomenon, the growing urban structure of Saudi Arabia may in some small way encourage state stability, as the self-identity of Saudi citizens shifts toward its new urban roots and away from traditionally tribal affiliations that have historically been reluctant to embrace the Saudi state. Successful co-optation of city dwellers may encourage urban solidarity and thus indirectly contribute to state loyalty by undermining these potentially dangerous tribal affiliations.[36]

2.   Oil Revenues and the Rentier State

The distribution of oil revenues is a contentious issue and underlies all aspects of the Saudi state, to include the economic, political, religious, and social. Petroleum revenues account for 45 percent of GDP, nearly 75 percent of the government's budget

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34 Kim Murphy, "Saudis Quicksand of Poverty," *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 2003, Section A-1 print edition, http://articles.latimes.com/2003/may/16/news/war-poverty16 (accessed October 24, 2008).

35 Ibid.

36 F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), ch 2, 6, http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/icas/gause/gausetoc.html accessed June 6, (accessed June 6, 2008).

revenues, and 90 percent of export earnings.[37] Saudi Arabia can be characterized as a rentier economy or state, meaning that rather than extracting revenue from its citizens, the state distributes a portion of the revenue it receives (almost exclusively on the international oil market) to its citizens. Because the government does not need to tax their citizens to fund their government, military, and social programs, existing mechanisms of accountability and connections between the state and society are highly atrophied, rendering the government autocratic and less responsive to the needs and requests of its people than extractive governments often are.[38] The result is a state that subsidizes its own incompetence and buys complacency and compliance from its citizens. In times of fiscal good fortune, the arrangement is quite efficient.

However, in times of fiscal contraction, the inherent structural problems that exist in rentier states come to the fore, highlighting the fundamental disconnect between the state and its citizens. While global demand may continue to buoy or increase the cost of crude for the foreseeable future, a decrease in demand, perhaps due to technology that creates other energy sources, could have dire consequences on state stability. Because Saudi Arabia is exposed to variations in the price of oil, it is difficult to predict with any fidelity when the Royal family may again be subject to state fiscal crisis, but the fiscal crises experienced in the 1930s and 1990s bear witness to the fact that desperate economic times in the kingdom seem to inspire desperate and destabilizing actions within small but violent portions of its citizenry.

As long as oil prices remain high and the world markets are dependent on OPEC oil to run their societies, the Saud family will have a large resource base to work with, allowing them to mitigate the issues of their rentier state. Co-optation of elites and dissenters alike will continue, and the maintenance of legitimacy will occur through scrupulous distribution of the Riyal.

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37 Central Intelligence Agency, "Saudi Arabia - Economy - Economy Overview," *The World Fact Book*, CIA, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/sa.html (accessed August 25, 2008).

38 Class notes from Professor Glenn Robinson, SO4830 Political Violence in the Middle East, Naval Postgraduate School, June 3, 2008.

3.   Unemployment

Another factor that contributes to internal dissent and state weakness is unemployment. There are varying sources on a precise unemployment rate for Saudi Arabia. The current rate is estimated at 13% among Saudi males (local bank estimate); however other sources estimate unemployment as high as 25%.[39] If there is actually a decrease this would indicate that the Saudi regime programs to curb unemployment are succeeding, or it could be more indicative that as oil revenues increase, unemployment rate decreases. However, it seems that money alone is not the only factor that explains Saudi Arabia's unemployment problems. If extremely high state revenues could solve all their problems then unemployment would be almost nonexistent. With the modernization of the country and the high availability of education, there is a large group of young people competing for public sector jobs. Can the state afford to employ all these people or will private sector growth increase substantially in order to create more economic opportunities?

Also part of the equation is the Saudi workforce's cultural attitudes and question of whether they are willing to work in many of the private sector jobs and traditional foreign worker jobs, such as those supplied by the state-run oil industry. With a high number of young, unemployed males, the country is concerned that they could drift into crime, drugs, or religious extremism.[40]

A major issue often discussed is the reliance on the foreign labor force. According to political scientist, Gwenn Okruhlik, foreign workers constitute perhaps 90 percent of private sector jobs and 70 percent of the public sector jobs.[41] For a nation with high unemployment rates, utilizing foreign workers for the majority of jobs is dangerous. An al-Saud solution to this problem, thus far slow in its implementation, is the

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39 Central Intelligence Agency, "Saudi Arabia – Economy – Unemployment rate," *The World Fact Book*, CIA, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html#Econ (accessed August 25, 2008).

40 Roger Hardy, "Unemployment, the New Saudi Challenge." *BBC News*, October 4, 2006, 1, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/5406328.stm (accessed June 4, 2008).

41 Gwenn Okruhlik, "Networks of Dissent: Islam and Reform in Saudi Arabia," Social Science Research Council, 2, http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/okruhlik.htm (accessed August 21, 2008).

"Saudization" of labor, which is a program designed to replace the country's six million foreign workers with Saudis. The Saudi Labor Department is pushing businesses to hire more Saudis and is attempting to enforce quotas. Success of this program remains to be seen. Private companies are resisting and complain that foreign workers are cheaper and work harder than Saudi citizens.[42]

The education system was developed through the state use of oil revenues but the fundamental issue is that the education system is failing to equip the young people with the right skills. The curriculums at most schools and colleges are heavily influenced by the conservative Wahhabi religious establishment and do not reflect the needs of society. It is estimated that 80% of college students graduate in history, geography, Arabic literature and Islamic studies and not enough graduate in science, engineering, and medical fields.[43] Also, the education system focuses on mostly memorization instead of critical thinking and analysis, again rendering young Saudi graduates ill-equipped to compete in the work force.

4.   Rising Inflation and Food Prices

In recent years, inflation has become a major issue in the Kingdom, and the effects of rising inflation and government mismanagement have the potential to breed dissent among an increasingly young, urbanized population. While the wealthy segments of society are able to adjust to higher living costs the poor are less able, and have experienced a declining quality of life while simultaneously witnessing the state bringing in unprecedented oil revenues.[44]

A case can be made that the poor of the country have suffered during a stagnated economy in the 1980s and 1990s. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an estimated 1.25% per year between 1981 and 2001, from $155.1 billion in 1981 to $186.5 billion in

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42 Gwenn Okruhlik, "Networks of Dissent: Islam and Reform in Saudi Arabia," Social Science Research Council, 2, http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/okruhlik.htm (accessed August 21, 2008).

43 Okruhlik, 2.

44 Yunus Abdullah Muhammad, "Revolution Past and Present? The Prospects of Radical Change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Revolution Muslim, December 20, 2007, 9, http://revolutionmuslim.com/uploads/Revolution_Past_and_Present.pdf (accessed June 4, 2008).

2001; these are hardly numbers indicative of a vibrant economy. At the individual level, the average GDP per capita shrunk roughly 2.5% per year. Defined in nominal terms GDP per capita went from $10,330 in 1989 to $7,743 in 2001.[45]

This trend of poor economic growth has changed recently with oil revenues increasing dramatically. In 2008, oil prices fluctuated up to $140 a barrel and back down to $70 a barrel. This temporarily increased gross domestic product (GDP) per capita but in recent months GDP per capita has decreased. The Saudi government has to plan to save and not overspend during the good economic times to make up for times of lower oil revenues.

When oil prices were high the Saudi government could utilize additional revenues to mitigate internal dissent among most segments of society. With oil prices decreasing again, this can have negative consequences for the Saud family. State stability issues will likely increase if any or some of the following conditions occur: 1) the price of oil continues to drop significantly, 2) other oil dependent countries develop their own oil reserves or alternative energy sources, or 3) regardless of oil revenue; segments of the population question the legitimacy of the regime because of corruption and perceived un-Islamic governing.

Inflation has increased significantly over the last few years, with the Riyal pegged to the decreasing US dollar. Real inflation rates in the Kingdom were estimated at 16% in 2005 and increased to 19.9% in 2007. Saudi society experienced minimal inflation rates of less than 1% in the 1980s and 1990s and the high inflation rates have come as a shock, particularly to lower and middle class families.[46]

Adding to the situation are rising food prices. While this phenomenon has occurred globally it has particularly affected Saudi Arabia. According to economist Brad Borland, food prices have increased dramatically in Saudi Arabia:

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45 Yunus Abdullah Muhammad, "Revolution Past and Present? The Prospects of Radical Change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Revolution Muslim, December 20, 2007, 9, http://revolutionmuslim.com/uploads/Revolution_Past_and_Present.pdf (accessed June 4, 2008).

46 Muhammad, 9.

From 1983 to 2003, food prices increased by just 8.4 percent; since the start of 2004 they have surged by 16.8 percent. Rising food prices affect all households. As consumers tend to buy similar baskets of food on a regular basis, these price changes are very noticeable. Despite government controls on the prices of certain basic foodstuffs, such as bread, milk, flour, wheat and barley, it is likely that poor households are suffering the most from the price rises, because food accounts for a larger proportion of their total spending.[47]

C.   STATE INEPTNESS AND CORRUPTION

After reviewing the economic impacts on state stability it is necessary to briefly discuss the excessive level of corruption and mismanagement that exists in the Kingdom, and its impact on both society and government. A great disparity between the well off and the poor in Saudi society exists and feeds a public perception in the world and Saudi Arabia that there is widespread corruption and mismanagement in the government. When asked by Angus Reid Global Monitor: Polls and Research if they agreed with the statement "corruption is a big problem in my country," 64% of Saudi citizens agreed.[48] A significant majority and cause for concern. Also, according to a report from the World Bank on governance indicators, Saudi Arabia has improved in controlling corruption from 1996 to 2008.   In 1996, the Kingdom was ranked around 38% in controlling corruption and improved its ranking to 60% better than countries worldwide.[49] Even though the government is reducing corruption, it still exists at high enough levels to effect public perceptions negatively and reduce effective governance. It is likely that corruption and mismanagement could further enflame pre-existing internal dissent.

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47 Brad Bourland, "Why Food Prices Have Risen in Saudi Arabia?" Saudi-US Relations Information Service, October 2007, 3, http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/ioi/071011-jadwa-inflation.html (accessed October 27, 2008).

48 Angus Reid Global Monitor: Polls and Research, "Corruption a Worry for 75% of Global Citizens," Angus Reid Global Monitor, November 14, 2006, Polling Data, http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/corruption_a_worry_for_75_of_global_citizens/ (accessed November 18, 2008).

49 "Percentile ranks indicate the percentage of countries worldwide that rate below the selected country. Higher values thus indicate better governance ratings." Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, "Country Data Report for Saudi Arabia, 1996-2007," World Bank Institute, June 24, 2008, 1,7, http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/pdf/c190.pdf (accessed November 19, 2008).

Saudi royal expenditures are often discussed by dissident networks.[50]   The extravagant spending of members of the royal family varies from million dollar parties, high priced yachts, and shopping sprees in the West. Saudi oil revenues continue to fill personal bank accounts of the house of Saud and there is no independent control or accountability. Also, mismanagement, failure of economic reforms, wasting of public money, and absence of plans for economic growth are sources of complaint from some people.[51]

Saudi oil wealth is at an all time high, generating large and unplanned for profits to the kingdom. How much of this revenue is invested into the country for the good of all and how much goes to either buying off opposition or maintaining the Saud family's extravagant lifestyle? According to a Saudi dissident living in exile in 2003, only one-third of oil revenues go towards the country and the rest is used by the Saud family to maintain its lifestyle and regime survival.[52] According to the international version of the New York Times, the International Herald Tribune, a significant portion of revenues is misused or wasted by the regime.[53]   It seems that the distribution of oil revenue is problematic for the Saud regime today and will continue to enflame dissent against the house of Saud.

D.   ELITE DISSENT AND POTENTIAL TO MOBILIZE THE MASSES

According to anthropologist, Jack David Eller, the actions of elites are consequential to the collective mobilization and defining of the masses into groups (p. 45).[54]   Because elite groups often operate as a vanguard to mobilize masses, elites

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[50] Heidi Kingstone, "Trouble in the House of Saud," *The Jerusalem Report,* January 13, 2003, 28, http://www.proquest.com/ (accessed July 30, 2008).

[51] Muhammad, 5.

[52] Kingstone, 28.

[53] Amin Saikal, "A legitimacy crisis for the Saudi leadership: The royal family must reform to survive*." International Herald Tribune*, June 28, 2004, Opinion section, Global edition. http://www.iht.com/articles/2004/06/28/edsaikal_ed3_.php (accessed July 30, 2008).

[54] Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 45.

serve as political activists that "provide the organizational principle and the militancy that move the group to specific action - or lead a cadre of other elites who act in the name or interest of the people."[55]

In this section, we will analyze five of the most relevant elite groups as they relate to the nature of the state and potential for revolution. Figure 2 depicts the elite structure and summarizes their potential to mobilize the masses.

ELITE GROUPS	DESCRIPTION	MOTIVATION FACTORS	ABILITY TO MOBILIZE MASSES
Al-Saud Royal Family Members	Estimated 7,000 males. Total family members estimated at 25,000.[56]	- Regime survival - Legitimacy - Protect personal wealth and privileges	High ability to mobilize masses in most sectors of society to execute foreign and internal defense.
Ulama (Religious Elite)	Wahabbi religious scholars, judges, lawyers, seminary teachers, and prayer leaders	- Maintain or increase influence with Al-Saud family and the masses	High ability to mobilize mass support. Not likely to challenge Al-Saud rule. Extreme elements are a danger.
Tribal Leaders	Sunni and Shi'a leaders	- Power - Influence	Decreasing ability to mobilize masses.
Shi'a Leaders	Small group of power brokers, limited power	- Representation - Increased rights	Low ability to mobilize masses to dissent.
Islamo-Liberal Reformists	Sunni and Shi'a intellectuals	- Democratic change. Reforms within Islamic framework	Low ability to mobilize masses.

Figure 2.   Elite Groups in Saudi Arabia.

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[55] Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 45.

[56] Saikal, 1 and Kingstone, 28.

1. Saudi Royal Family Members

The Saud royal family dominates the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and has maintained its autocratic hold over the state since the consolidation of power in the 1920s by Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (Ibn Saud), who formally founded the nation in 1932.[57] The royal family is the primary elite group, and the other elites in Saudi Arabia have been sufficiently co-opted, bought-off, or sanctioned to date in order to maintain Saud dominance. According to Saikal:

> Power entirely rests with a small oligarchy of elderly brothers, which presides over a royal family of some 7,000 members. The oligarchy, which has a determining share in every aspect of Saudi life and society, has treated the Saudi oil wealth as its private property and spent it in the way that it has seen most fit.[58]

In the early twenty-first century, the royal family still relies heavily on material wealth, access to oil revenues, personal networks, and its size and degree of internal cohesion to maintain power. With the increases in oil revenues beginning in the 1950s the Saud family gained the material means to establish a rentier state, which effectively obligated the people to the state for their livelihood. Additionally, many royals are in charge of the most influential government ministries, ministers of less important ministries, deputy or assistant ministers, governors, and members of the Royal family Council.[59] The personal networks of the royal family members consist of formal and informal connections with the other elites throughout the various provinces of the country. The sheer size of the royal family gives it the ability to influence several areas of the country with blood ties, furthering the Saud strategy of inter marriage to consolidate power. Of course, this family growth has the potential to cause increasing

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[57] Abd al Aziz is a member of the Al Saud family and a descendant of Muhammad ibn Saud who first conquered parts of the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century. Over time he conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula and asserted his role over Saudi Arabia's tribes. Bradley J. Waltermire, "*Prince, Priests, and People: Is Saudi Arabia the Next Iraq"* (Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School September 2005), 71, http://bosun.nps.edu/uhtbin/cgisirsi.exe/Mon+Jun+16+10:02:52+2008+/SIRSI/0/520/05Sep_Waltermire.pdf (accessed April 8, 2008).

[58] Saikal, 1.

[59] Volker Perthes, *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 142.

internal competition among the ruling elite.[60] This competition could be positive and negative. Positive because with competition it seems likely that the more capable members will rise to positions of greatest power, and negative because the infighting could increase in severity creating internal instability.

The possibility of internal instability among royal elites remains a great cause for concern for some of the above reasons. Is their a potential for major dissent or rifts in the Al-Saud family? The last succession of power took place on August 1, 2005 with Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz taking over after King Fahd's death. King Abdullah rules the country today and next in line is Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. According to a BBC News report, there is tension between King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan, but it does not appear to be anything serious enough to fracture the government. Both are members of the same generation as King Fahd and the kingdom will have to prepare for another succession of leadership sooner rather than later.[61] It does not appear likely that the Al-Saud family will turn against one another to the extent that a revolution or civil conflict would develop. Of course competition and jockeying for power and influence will continue among the Al-Saud elites, and how this plays out will affect the type and pace of reforms that take place in Saudi Arabia.

2.   Ulama (Sunni, Religious Elite)

The Ulama are the second most influential and powerful elite group in the Kingdom.   The most influential Ulama are recruited from the same families for generations. They possess a high level of traditional legitimacy and the ability to support or undermine the policy decisions of the regime. According to Volker Perthes, "their main capital was their capacity to shape public opinion and to mobilize public support"[62] The Al-Saud family relies on their state controlled Ulama to back their decisions with fatwas (religious opinions that carry great weight and influence in the highly religious

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[60] Volker Perthes, *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004) 148.

[61] John Leyne. "Tensions Remain Among Saudi Royals," *BBC News*, August 1, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4735505.stm (accessed August 1, 2008).

[62] Perthes, 142.

society) in difficult situations, such as the 1991 Gulf War when U.S. troops were stationed in the Kingdom, and in the crackdown of jihad extremists after September 11, 2001.[63]

The religious clergy have been bureaucratized into a functional cog of the Saudi state machine; a majority of these religious leaders have been co-opted to the extent that their primary purpose is to support the regime, and as a result their subservience to the ruling family is far outweighed by any autonomy they might otherwise enjoy.[64] In 1971, King Faysal established the Council of Senior Ulama, which was comprised of twenty leading Wahhabi scholars, mainly from the Najd region where Wahabbism originated. This council is chaired by the grand mufti and is considered the highest religious authority with its fatwas having a nearly legislative effect.[65]

While political dissention will not likely come from state sponsored Ulama, it could originate from the younger, less co-opted clergy. Some of these elites are discussed in the Islamo-liberal reformists section. Another source of dissent from within may come from extreme Islamic elements. The elites of this group have little political power but continue to challenge state stability through the distribution of anti-regime information and physical attacks on royal family members and sites in the Kingdom. Some examples are Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia attacks since September 11, 2001. Some religious reform is under way by the ruling family in order to "define Islam and delegitimize its more extreme elements."[66] It appears this has been successful, and jihadist groups such as AQ have de-legitimized themselves by killing innocent Saudi citizens during terrorist attacks.

The traditional Ulama are a loyal instrument of the state and will remain so as long as the regime continues co-opting, providing support for traditional Wahhabism, and does not attempt to modernize and grant reforms too quickly that are perceived as un-

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[63] Perthes, 142.

[64] Okruhlik, 2.

[65] Perthes, 142.

[66] Edward S. Walker, "The Quiet Revolution – Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Institute (MEI)*, (January 14, 2004), 1, http://www.mideasti.org/scholars/editorial/quiet-revolution-saudi-arabia (accessed August 26, 2008).

Islamic by the Ulama and conservative segments of society. Also, Wahhabi Islam remains a "double-edged sword for the family." Islam is their source of legitimacy; however, it restricts what the Saud family members can do.[67] Their excesses and instances of un-Islamic practices weaken their own legitimacy in the eyes of many conservative Islamists.

3. Tribal Leaders

Tribal elites can be considered the losers in the political struggle of the country. Inter and intra tribal social statuses have not changed, and these groups generally have little influence in public debate and state politics. The Saud strategy, executed effectively in the twentieth century and continuing today, was to replace tribal identity with the religious ideology of Wahhabism and to settle nomadic tribes (urbanization).[68] Also, the nature of the rentier state allows the regime to co-opt tribal elites. However, tribal leaders maintain some influence with people affiliated with their tribes and are able to influence political opinions. Tribal elites' political capital has diminished significantly, and according to Perthes, tribal elites risk losing their people to the growing number of Saud princes, who are linked by maternal descent and have established their own patronage system.[69]

In the midst of weakened tribal ties, the tribal elites' ability to mobilize masses is significantly weakened, and it appears unlikely that this elite group can or would benefit by challenging the Al-Saud royal family.

4. Shi'a Leaders

In present day Saudi Arabia, the Shi'a elite are a small group of notables who are permitted some stake in the political process because of their power ties, but in return are

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[67] Okruhlik, 2.

[68] Perthes, 143.

[69] Ibid.

expected to control their communities.[70] With the minority status of Shi'a and their political, economic, and social suppression over time, the threat of serious dissention from the Shi'a population of Saudi Arabia, which is estimated at about 10-15 percent of the country's total population, does not seem likely in the near future. However, in the past, there have been instances of Shi'a uprisings. In these circumstances, the ruling Saud family turned to state force to suppress Shi'a riots in 1979 and 1980, and "after massive internal disputes" that resulted from various socioeconomic crises. These Shi'a riots were inspired by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and encouraged the Shi'a to take to the streets in the eastern province, where the vast majority of their population inhabits. The most radical elements of this movement formed a group called "Organization of the Islamic Revolution" and their objective was to resist against the ruling Saud regime. Even in this volatile situation, the majority of Shi'a were not calling for the overthrow of government but were protesting for "equality and recognition."[71]

Also in the 1980s, a campaign that escalated terrorist activities and propaganda against the regime began that demanded equal rights and respectful treatment for Saudi Shi'a. This group known as the "Saudi Shi'a Underground Movement for the Liberation of the Arabian Peninsula" enjoyed popular support in the eastern oil province, where Shi'a comprise about 50 percent of the population. This group ceased all activities in 1993 after signing an agreement with King Fahd in 1993. The king agreed to improve the treatment of Shi'a, provide development funds to their areas, and halt Wahhabi clergy anti-Shi'a messages.[72] Shi'a opposition can be divided into groups; those that remained since the 1980s, and those who returned with amnesty.[73]

The royal elite realized in the 1990s that "accommodating the Shi'a opposition could easily temper a serious conflict," which resulted in the state engaging the Shi'a in a

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[70] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2006), 84.

[71] Maximilian Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?" *Middle East Policy*, 14, no. 2 (July 1, 2007), 71, http://www.proquest.com/ (accessed August 8, 2008).

[72] Mordechai Abir, "Saudi Arabia in the 1990s: Stability and Foreign Policy," *The Jerusalem Letter*, No. 365, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, September 1, 1997, 2, http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp365.htm (accessed August 8, 2008).

[73] Okruhlik, 5.

number of methods to include incorporation, adaptation, and cooptation. Of course state force is still used when necessary to quell outright dissention. Also, any Saudi policy that includes representation from Shi'a leadership is met with religious opposition from the Sunni ulama, who refer to the Shi'a religious elites as rafida (rejectionists) and have even issued a number of fatwas calling the Shi'a apostates.[74]

The government has accepted the Shi'a as an actor in Saudi society and politics, even inviting their leadership to the "National Dialogue" conferences, which is an opportunity for the various elite groups to discuss issues at a national level.[75] In turn, the select elite leadership from the Shi'a minority has worked within the framework of the state in seeking greater autonomy and political power within their communities.[76] They see themselves and frame their views as citizens of Saudi Arabia and openly express their "allegiance to the regime." According to Maximilian Terhalle, it remains to be seen whether the current paradigm of "reconciliation" will continue.[77] A small group of Shi'a elite have been given a stake in Saudi politics, although not much of one; however, they will most likely continue to work within the current status quo of Saud rule because of the benefits of economic incentives, limited political influence, and the willingness and likelihood of state use force to eradicate dissention.

5. Islamo-Liberal Reformists

This elite and political group has only come onto the scene in the last few years in Saudi society. Their calls for reforms have even gained support from some among the Royal family, to include King Abdullah, who initially supported some of their suggested reforms while Crown Prince. The constituency is made up of former Islamists and liberals; Sunnis and Shi'a, whose primary objective is to achieve democratic reforms within an Islamic framework while changing some Wahhabi doctrine that they deem to be exclusionary and undemocratic.[78]

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[74] Nasr, 236 and Terhalle, 71.

[75] Terhalle, 71.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Stephane Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New Islamo-Liberal Reformists," The Middle East Journal, vol. 58, no. 3, Summer 2004, 345, 363, http://www.mideasti.org/files/doc237.pdf (accessed August 26, 2008).

According to Lacroix, The emergence of an "Islamo-liberal" trend began as early as 1998:

> ..with activists and reformists reformulating their calls for political reform in an Islamo-democratic fashion while expressing unprecedented criticism of the Wahhabi religious orthodoxy, thus insisting on the necessity to combine political reform with religious reform.[79]

Key to their survival and limited success is the framing of their objectives in Islamic terms and serving as a counter-balance to Islamic extremism in the Kingdom. Saudi society is generally conservative and any reforms that challenge Wahhabism will have to be incremental and carefully framed.

The catalyst for Islamo-liberal reformism was the events of September 11, 2001. Prior to September 11, the elite intellectuals had to express their views informally in private businesses, internet forums, and articles in the press. After the attacks they were able to take advantage of a more pervasive political climate, which resulted in the creation of political manifestos and petitions.[80] In January 2003, a group of Islamo-liberal reformists carefully drafted a petition that stated the internal problems the country was facing and requested the implementation of political, economic, and social reforms. Political demands included:

> ..the separation of powers; the implementation of rule of law; equal rights for all citizens regardless of their regional, tribal, and confessional background; national and regional parliaments; and complete freedom of speech, assembly, and organization.

Other major economic demands were: a fairer distribution of wealth, measures against corruption and waste, and diversification of oil revenues. Last was the demand for a national dialogue conference for all regions and social groups.[81] The reactions of Saudi elite were positive, including then Crown Prince Abdullah who approved the national dialogue conference. He acknowledged the need for reforms but stated the

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[79] Lacroix, 346.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Lacroix, 360-361.

process would take time.[82] King Abdullah seems to be reform minded but also understands that he cannot move to quickly at the risk of alienating other members of the Royal Family and the religious elite of the Ulama.

The Ulama will compete with the reformers to maintain the status quo that supports their power and influence and promotes conservative Wahhabism inside and outside the kingdom. The ultimate goal for these intellectual elites is for the nation's foundational myth to be reframed along the lines of inclusive principles of a greater Saudi Arabia. This would ultimately result in the reduction of the exclusive influence of Wahhabism.[83] However, the intelligentsia have little political power and ability to influence and mobilize the masses. As a result, their strategy is to work within the current autocratic system and petition for reforms respectfully over time. The Al-Saud family has to take great care in its reactions to these Islamo-liberals, because if democratic-type reforms are fully implemented this will reduce the religious elite's influence and power, which will most likely jeopardize their tribal-Wahhabi legitimacy that has kept them in power.[84]

E. STRUCTURAL EMPLACEMENTS TO MITIGATE PRESSURES

The Saudi regime has developed a number of structural emplacements to maintain its control, and without these structural emplacements the house of Saud would have long ago been forcibly challenged by an internal revolution, and in all probability deposed. Significant to the continued existence of the state is that it does not allow individuals or groups to publicly demonstrate or develop political organizations for mobilization. Individuals can say and do many things in private, but public or group dissent is not tolerated. The state has to stop any dissenting social movements in advance to prevent loss of influence and power in the long term. In this section, we will discuss the

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[82] Lacroix, 363.

[83] Ibid., 364.

[84] Lacroix, 364-365.

following key mitigations to internal dissent: 1) State leveraging of tribalism and Islam, 2) military structure for internal security, and 3) government control of media to influence both domestically and regionally.

1.   Islam and Tribalism

Saudi Arabia expert and writer F. Gregory Gause III, writes that Islam and tribalism were both mechanisms used to form the state, and that they remain instrumental in the politics of the country, facilitating regime control. He posits that the rentier nature of the state greatly mitigates the autonomic spirit required of a state's citizens if they are to successfully mobilize with counter-state intentions:

> The state now provides directly to the individual many of the benefits that, in the past, came from the tribe. The balance of power between the central authorities and the tribes is now squarely on the side of the former. Likewise the institutions of Islam are now much more dependent upon the state and much more a subordinate part of the state apparatus …[85]

Gause goes on to discuss "the taming of Islam and tribalism" as a deliberate process that is essential to the regime's control.[86] The house of Saud uses Islamic rhetoric and symbols to legitimize its control, framing its existence as the rightful protectorate of Islam as well as its constituent faithful. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is sometimes called "The Land of The Two Holy Mosques", which is a direct reference to its role as guardian and administrator of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina. Also, it declares the Qur'an as its constitution, clings to religious justification for its rule, and frames virtually all statements within the context of Islam. The claim of religious justification dates back to 1745, when Muhammad ibn Saud formed an alliance with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a religious scholar who preached a strict, fundamental interpretation of Islam. The alliance was based upon Al-Saud following the 'Wahhabi' interpretation of power consolidation, which settles for nothing less than utter domination of competing ideologies and peoples.[87]

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[85] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies,* ch 2, 1.

[86] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies,* ch2, 2.

[87] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies*, ch2, 2 and Okruhlik, 2.

The key element that has remained since the formation of the nation is the Saud regime's reliance on the Ulama. Acting largely as instruments of the state, the Ulama are often used to justify state policies (religious sanction), and provide political legitimacy. The resultant mutual dependence between the state and the Ulama greatly reduces the likelihood that the Ulama would ever form an opposition movement broad enough to be an existential threat to the House. The vast majority of the Ulama are employees of the state and hold positions as judges, teachers, scholars, and preachers in local mosques. There exists an extensive bureaucracy of religious institutions that helps the regime maintain control of the country. These institutions exist to manage the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, the religious courts, and Mutawaa-in (religious police) who enforce the strict interpretation of Islamic social norms.[88] Likewise, the regime supports and finances the Ulama and its bureaucracy. This loyalty has paid off in times of state crises; particularly in regard to the suppression of extremist opposition groups in the Kingdom.

According to Gause, the relationship between the regime and the religious institution has evolved to the point that the Ulama are completely subordinate to the state.[89] It seems that the Ulama is significantly compensated, and will continue to support the regime as long as the regime does not attempt to institute too much modernization reform that could be perceived as un-Islamic.

The second key area that the regime is able to control and utilize to its advantage is tribalism. While tribal support was essential for the Saud family to establish the state and its rule, the administrative expansion and resultant military growth experienced by the state over the last 80 years has rendered tribes and their leaders largely ineffectual and without influence. Any vestigial influence that tribes may enjoy has been mitigated with oil money. Like the Ulama, this class of Saudi elites has succumbed to the need to remain relevant, and has thus become a willing victim of the state's intentions. As long as the Saud coffers remain full, the regime will continue to buy off and co-opt tribal leaders.[90]

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[88] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies*, ch2, 2-4 and Okruhlik, 2.

[89] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies*, ch2, 5.

[90] Ibid., ch 2, 5-8.

Concerning the state's ability to mitigate tribal loyalties that might be destabilizing, strategies have been adopted by the regime to dampen the potentially adverse influence that tribal affections may foment. Because tribal sheiks and leaders can be very influential amongst their people, it is vital that the state co-opt them; the failure to do so invites disaster. A rentier state is easily able to do this through the simple use of state funds. While the notion that tribal loyalty can be bought is laughably unrealistic, the tribe can in effect be "rented", and it is through tribal leadership that this transaction occurs. By engaging leadership and allowing them to be the conduits through which state funds reach tribal affiliates, state regimes are able to provide resources to their citizens, and more importantly, to allow tribal leadership to maintain an air of importance amongst their own people. This is vital, as placation of tribal elite through artificial elevation of importance provides security to both parties, because it engenders a sense of loyalty to the regime.

2.   Internal Security Structure

A major concern for the Saudis is a military coup or revolution backed by the military, given the history of coups in the Arab world. The regime relies upon the Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG or White Army) for protection for royal family members, protection against internal threats, protection of key infrastructure and resources, and protecting the holy places of Mecca and Medina. The SANG is the King's private army consisting of soldiers from religious supporters and tribes that are loyal to the king and royal family. It's commanded by a high ranking member of the royal family and typically stationed near cities to deter internal dissention.[91] According to foreign policy analyst Anthony H. Cordesman, the Saudi National Guard has performed well and has been a major asset in its internal security roles.[92]

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[91] Muhammad, 7 and Wikipedia contributors, "Saudi Arabian National Guard," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saudi_Arabian_National_Guard&oldid=213943958 (accessed June 6, 2008).

[92] Mohammed Badrul Alam "Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Military and International Security Dimensions." Review of. *Journal of Third World Studies* 23, no. 2 (October 1, 2006): 246-248. http://www.proquest.com/ (accessed June 9, 2008).

Internal security forces are critical in any authoritarian regime, including Saudi Arabia. A recent event illustrating the seriousness and competence of Saudi internals security occurred in June 2008. According to the Saudi Interior Ministry, authorities arrested "520 Al-Qaeda operatives who had planned to strike oil facilities and economic centers in eastern Saudi Arabia."[93] The continued success of internal security elements is necessary to prevent a terrorist attack on key oil infrastructure, which would reduce national confidence in the regime and temporarily reduce oil revenue needed to maintain the state patronage networks. According to Gause, internal security forces "have been able to contain the challenge to regime security presented by local affiliates of al-Qaeda" and AQ remains a risk but will not topple the regime.[94]

3.   Government Control of Information and the Media

In the information age, with Saudi Arabia's increasing population boom and large "youth bulge," Saudi's information strategy is critical to survival of the Saudi regime and suppression of internal dissent. Like many things in the kingdom, the regime is able to use a portion of the extensive oil revenues to control and influence media in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

The state completely controls Saudi broadcast media; however, newspapers are mostly privately owned, with the government controlling the hiring and firing of newspaper editors. The Ministry of the Interior exerts considerable control over what is written and who works where. A few Saudi newspapers have demonstrated boldness in publishing articles critical of low level mismanagement. Further, calls for reform have occasionally been voiced. However, for the most part, any media coverage that is

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[93] "According to the report, the leader of the cell, who bore a message from Al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, was among those arrested, as were some 50 webmasters of websites that spread extremist ideas and encourage terrorism MEMRI, "Saudi Anti-Terror Cartoons," Special Dispatch Series - No. 2031, *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, August 21, 2008, http://www.memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD203108 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[94] F. Gregory Gause III, "Statement of Mr. F. Gregory Gause III in U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia: Oil, Anxiety, and Ambivalence," Serial No. 110-133, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 110th Congress, 1st Session, September 18, 2007, http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/37908.pdf (accessed August 15, 2008).

negative or critical of the royal family or Islam is off-limits and not tolerated.[95] According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),

If a journalist steps out of line, he is fired and unable to find work. Dozens of editors, writers, academics, and other media critics have been suspended, dismissed from their jobs, or banned from appearing in the Saudi press when they offended the government or important religious constituencies.[96]

Since the 1990s, Saudi Arabia has extended its influence over pan-Arab media to counter political movements that challenge the Saudi regime by using its oil wealth to buy-off media or develop alternative media. Its information strategy is to utilize influenced media to filter out criticism of Saudi foreign and domestic policy and provide a more moderate analysis of issues and events.[97] Part of the regimes media strategy is to control internal dissent by also focusing efforts on shaping public opinion in the Arab Middle East because of the regional and global spread of information. Saudi Arabia has acquired whole networks and has influence with advertising. It is estimated that 40-70% of the region's advertising is spent in Saudi Arabia. Arab networks, television channels, and publications are not going to risk jeopardizing their cash flow by upsetting the authoritarian government of one of the largest Middle East economies and thus, in recent years there has been a tampering down of Saudi criticism.[98]

Internet and satellite television are extremely popular and widespread in the kingdom. The government filters thousands of pornographic, political, and news sites. However, many families access the web uncensored by dialing out of country providers or through satellite feeds. According to CPJ more than 90 percent of homes have access to satellite dishes.[99]

95 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2004: Saudi Arabia," CPJ, March 14, 2005, 1, http://www.cpj.org/attacks04/mideast04/saudi.html (accessed June 6, 2008).

96 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2006: Saudi Arabia," CPJ, February 5, 2007, 2, http://www.cpj.org/attacks06/mideast06/sau06.html (accessed June 6, 2008).

97 Andrew Hammond, "Interview – Saudi Media Empire Tries to Counter Opposition," *Reuters*, August 9, 2007, 1, http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL09856399 (accessed June 6, 2008).

98 Paul Cochrane, "Saudi Arabia's Media Influence,"*Arab Media & Society*, October 2, 2007, http://www.arabmediasociety.com/countries/index.php?c_article=122 (accessed May 28, 2008).

99 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2004: Saudi Arabia," 2.

Censorship or filtering the global market of ideas is a necessity for authoritative regimes, including Saudi Arabia. The regime allowed public access to the internet in 1999, only after years of careful consideration and developing control mechanisms to censor internet content.[100] KSA filtering focuses on political, social, and security/conflict and the state blocks a large amount of content on the internet.[101] Figure 3 depicts internet content filtering choices instituted by the Saudi government.
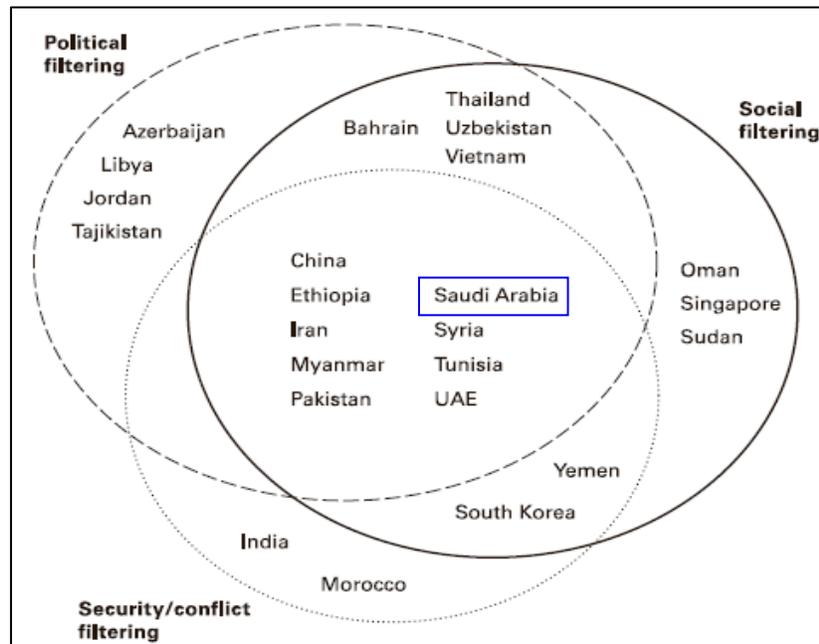
Figure 3.   Internet Content Filtering Choices

After Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas. *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 115.

The purpose for social filtering is to deny citizens access to opposing ideas or material that is considered immoral by conservative Wahabbi standards. The intent is to block pornography, gambling, and other immoral topics and material. The purpose of

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100 Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas. *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 114.

101 Robert Faris and Nart Villeneuve, "Measuring Global Internet Filtering," In *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering*, edited by R.J. Deibert, J.G. Palfrey, R Rohozinski, and J. Zittrain, 5-28. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 6, 9, 24-26, http://opennet.net/sites/opennet.net/files/Deibert_02_Ch01_005-028.pdf (accessed October 24, 2008).

political and security/conflict filtering is to minimize political dissent and to deny opposition groups and terrorists such as AQ in Saudi Arabia the use of the internet to share information, recruit, and mobilize.

Saudi Arabia utilizes "SmartFilter as a filtering proxy" and they also block access to specific URLs. The government does allow citizens to write to the government to request access to a website because it was blocked erroneously or to request that sites be blocked.[102] Allowing citizens some say in "internet censoring" is a state attempt to reduce the public frustration with not having full freedom to surf cyberspace. Not surprising, Saudia Arabia's internet censorship measures are not entirely successful. The use of overseas proxy servers is common, with many individuals circumventing state blocking and censoring mechanisms. Kalathil and Boas reference a Saudi official who admitted that "many Saudis with internet access are visiting sites that detail corruption in the royal family or that belong to overseas opposition groups."[103]

Research from Kalathil and Boas in "Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule" supports Farris and Villenueve's findings and the results of their study showed that few civil society organizations use the internet and that the state filters social and political information it deems inappropriate such as pornography, criticism of the royal family, and material offensive to Islam. Also, the state's primary use of internet is for putting religious material online and developing e-commerce and foreign business investment.[104]

The internet poses some challenges to Saudi legitimacy and authoritative rule, however, its use by civil society organizations and dissent groups is very limited. Foreign-based anti-Saud groups utilize the internet to maintain web pages that challenge Saud policies and excesses.[105] As discussed earlier, only individuals with access to overseas proxy servers would be able to view those sites and probably do so at risk to

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102 Faris and Villenueve, 15-16 and Kalathil and Boas, 115.

103 Kalathil and Boas, 115.

104 Ibid., 116-117.

105 Ibid., 116.

their livelihood and personal freedom. Overall, the Saud regime will continue to censor the internet and benefit from its technology to promote and export Wahhabist Islam and develop e-commerce.[106]

In the area of satellite television, two of the more popular media outlets are Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. Al-Jazeera has been criticized by the Saudi regime and has been a platform for Saudi dissent in the past but it appears to be toning down its anti-Saudi rhetoric. One example is the regime accusing Al-Jazeera of "inciting terror" by showing a tape of suicide bombers before they carried out an attack on a residential compound in Riyadh.[107] Al-Jazeera remains one of the biggest media challenges to the Saudi government.

Al-Arabiya is the state sponsored alternative to Al-Jazeera that began in 2003. It came on air after the September 11, 2001 attacks and just in time for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Saudi leaders were correct in foreseeing another round of anti-Saudi criticism similar to the rhetoric after the 1991 Gulf War.[108] The station's goal is to balance coverage and still maintain a large viewership in the Arab world. Generally, with the spread of media in the Arab world, the potential for spreading dissenting ideas and accessing anti-Saudi information is greater for the Saudi people and cannot be fully censored. Perhaps over time the free flow of ideas and information will have the effect of weakening state stability and bring about major reforms. The regime's information strategy is critical to mitigating internal dissent.

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106 Kalathil and Boas, 120.

107 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2004: Saudi Arabia," 3.

108 Andrew Hammond, "Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: Keeping the Masses at Home," *Arab Media & Society*, October 2007, http://www.arabmediasociety.com/countries/index.php?c_article=122 (accessed June 6, 2008).

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Whether or not Saudi Arabia is on the precipice of a destabilizing crisis has been the question that this thesis has attempted to answer. Saudi Arabia, as has been shown, is rife with endemic obstacles to internal security. Population growth continues to increase, and while showing signs of slowing still threatens the state's ability to adequately accommodate its burgeoning population. State infrastructure is being stressed beyond its ability to support its own people, as evidenced by its crumbling urban centers and massively over-populated educational apparatus; merely two examples of the many detailed in the preceding chapter. This population growth has also shown a corresponding increase in unemployment, a continually nagging problem within the Kingdom. Given the seeming increase in internal violence and dissent that has accompanied the structural problems created by the growth in population over the last 30 years, the natural question that arises is whether or not this relationship portends even greater instability in the future.

The problems facing the Saudi state at the outset of this thesis seemed to mirror greatly those conditions that Jack Goldstone posited must be present for state crises to precipitate. Primarily, the inability of the Saudi state, despite its vast wealth, to accommodate its growing citizenry seemed to echo Goldstone's assertion that population driven financial crises almost categorically result in political instability. While Saudi Arabia does enjoy great wealth due to its oil revenue, its inability to affectively administrate to the extent that this wealth reaches its citizens would seem to create the potential for social and political upheaval. For this reason, Goldstone's model was applied to Saudi Arabia with every expectation that massive upheaval would be predicted in the future. This was not the case.

After applying Goldstone's model, a revolution in Saudi Arabia does not appear likely in the near term. The basic premise of the Goldstone argument as explained in Chapter II is that the following three conditions must exist simultaneously: (1) a state financial crisis precipitated by a rapid population; (2) severe division within elite circles as well as growing elite dissatisfaction with government as resources and positions of

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power become more scarce, and: (3) a high potential for mobilization amongst popular groups as economic pressures foment fear, frustration, and eventual anger toward government in the face of economic distress.

The financial crisis element of condition (1) does not exist in Saudi Arabia at *this* time because oil revenues are at an all time high, but if oil revenues decrease dramatically and Saud corruption and mismanagement continue than a state financial crisis could develop. The other element of condition (1), population increase and demographic pressures does exist, and is a major challenge. A growing, young, and large population will demand more from the state and will most likely push societal norms within the heavily Wahabbi influenced country. Economic impacts will have to be mitigated and planned for to relieve population pressures. The state will have to improve efficiency, provide greater economic growth and jobs, and improve education to better serve the population and the overall society.

Conditions (2) and (3) do not exist at a significant enough level to contribute to a high potential for revolution. It can be argued that Saudi Arabia is a strong state or at least not as weak as many Middle East analysts believe because they have developed a rentier state that is able to mitigate the traditional elements of Middle East state power, namely Islam and tribalism,[109] which could otherwise act as potential sources of dissent and rebellion. The vast resources available to the regime, particularly in light of the current oil market, allow the Saud government to co-opt influential leaders within Islamic circles, thus mitigating potential sources of counter-state influence. There subsists some dissention from various elite groups, but none have both a high level of disenchantment and the ability to mobilize the masses to overthrow the regime. Instead, most elite groups have some stake in the political process to influence the Saudi royal family and society. Over the long term, these groups will continue to compete and seek a larger political stake in affairs, eliminating any desire to form counter-state factions, as it would contrary to their own interests.

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109 Gause III, *Oil Monarchies*.

Another factor that mitigates the potential for increasingly unstable conditions is the Saudi regime's ability to leverage the structural emplacements it has created; from the maintenance of legitimacy through Islamic and tribal mechanisms through clever contextual framing, to co-opting and buying elites and key groups like the Ulama and tribal leadership through state sanctioned rentier policies and under the table corruptive pay-offs. Where money and coercive influence leave off the Saudi state's ability to manipulate its own media apparatus begin. The regime utilizes a proactive and carefully cultivated information strategy to buy and influence media both domestically and regionally. The state's ability to censor any material that it deems as contrary to Saudi interests is vital to its ability to control information and drastically reduces the potential for a massive counter-state consciousness or voice to form.

In conclusion, within the context of Goldstone's framework, the only condition that seems to be cause for concern for the Saudi regime is the economic impact that its growing population will have on the state. As discussed throughout, massive structural economic problems still exist within the Kingdom despite the massive wealth that the Saudi regime enjoys. These problems however are far from insurmountable. It is not the amount of resources that confines the Saudi government's ability to provide for its citizens, but rather it is lack of ability to effectively administrate and subsequently appropriate funds to the benefit of the state and its citizens.

Even if, however, no attempts to change the economic status quo of the Kingdom were made, according to Goldstone's framework state crisis would still be far from imminent, as conditions (2) and (3) would have to occur simultaneously. As shown, Saudi Arabia has effectively mitigated the potential for this to occur. As a result, according to Goldstone' revolutionary framework, no great threat of Saudi instability would appear to exist within the near term.

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