

## **INTRODUCTORY ESSAY - YEAR OF ARABIAN PENINSULA**

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This introductory essay provides an historical overview of the Arabian Peninsula, an analysis of the U.S. and international relations of the region, and a description of the current context highlighting the region's strengths and challenges. It is meant to spur interest in the further examination and discussion of such topics throughout the upcoming 2014-2015 lecture series and other campus programming.

The Arabian Peninsula is situated at a complex crossroads of civilizations. Comprised of seven countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula cannot be reduced to a single cultural unit. In fact, despite some broad socio-cultural and religious commonalities, the region is very diverse, with each country possessing its own unique heritage and characteristics.

One of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world and the birthplace of Islam, Arabia has a long coastline surrounded by seas on three sides. It is along the coast where the most fertile lands can be found and where most people live, especially as mountainous terrain predominantly separates the seas from the vast inland desert. For these reasons, it has generally been easier to trade by sea than by land. Traditionally, coastal peoples of the Peninsula have engaged in maritime activities such as fishing, pearling and shipping, or in caravan trade between oasis villages linking communities across the desert (Potter, 1). Among the earliest evidence of maritime trade in the region (3400 BCE) is the transport of copper from Magan (Oman) to Dilmun (Bahrain) and to Mesopotamia, while evidence of trade with India dates back to 2300 BCE (Bhacker, 166).

### **SEAFARING ARABIA**

For thousands of years, sea routes have connected the Arabian Peninsula to the wider world. Open-water sailing and global trade can be said to have begun off the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula (Hourani, 4-5). Harnessing seasonal monsoon (in Arabic *mawsim*) winds, Arabian sailors and traders (admiral comes from the Arabic term for "Prince of the sea") established extensive patterns of migration and social relationships across the Indian Ocean. The Batinah coast of Oman, in particular, served as a crossroads of trade that distributed goods between the Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean thereby linking diverse civilizations including Egyptian, Abyssinian, Harappan, Persian, Somali, Swahili, Indian, Malay, and Chinese. The unprecedented seafaring expertise of coastal Arabian communities enabled vast networks of trade that fostered the development of intercultural relations and a mobility that generally aided in the avoidance of regional land-based conflicts. It is this rich history of continuous global trade relations that makes the Arabian Peninsula an ideal choice for KSU's year-long focused study.

### **CARAVAN ARABIA**

Located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean as well as between the ancient Egyptian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires, land routes through the Arabian Peninsula, too, have long been crucial to the region's development. In particular, Arab unity and ascendancy under Islam benefitted from

conflict between the Roman Byzantine and Sasanian Persian empires. In part, because of this conflict, land routes through Mecca and Medina became especially important with Arabs being the primary arbiters of trade (Daryaee, 62). Negotiating amidst the world's earliest and most powerful empires and civilizations, the Arabian Peninsula has long been at the center of world affairs.

## **ARABIA FELIX**

Overall, the lack of adequate staple foods in the region combined with the highly prized medicinal value of desert plants and their lightweight, transportable character have been important factors fueling trade. The Arabian Desert, covering an area of about 900,000 square miles, occupies almost the entire Peninsula. The Rub' al-Khali (or empty quarter) is larger than France. Out of necessity, the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula learned to market and trade the unique products of the desert (resins, gums, bark, herbs, flowers, seeds, salt, and date palms) and to specialize in the trade of other such lightweight valuable products such as spices and pearls. Arab Muslim traders exchanged incense, medicinal plants, pearls, camels and horses for slaves, coffee, and ivory in East Africa, rice, spices, and cotton in India, and silk, tea, and porcelain in China (Kaplan, 29). Arabia Felix, a term commonly used for the region in earlier times, captured the powerful effects of fragrant desert plants whose aromas possess "the capacity to generate a sense of happiness, healing, well-being, and harmony within the world" (Nabhan, 17). Frankincense is one of these miraculous medicinal desert plants. Famous for over four millennia as the highest-quality incense in the world, it was also "once the most economically valuable and widely disseminated plant products on the globe" (Nabhan, 21-22). Used to embalm Egyptian pharaohs, three thousand tons of frankincense was also transported annually to the Roman Empire, and hundreds of pounds were shipped to Tang Dynasty era markets in China (Kaplan 23-24).

## **THE COSMOPOLITAN GOLDEN AGE OF ISLAM**

At the time of Islam's birth in 622 C.E. the regions surrounding the Arabian Peninsula were ruled by two large and competing imperial states: the Roman Byzantine and Sasanian Persian empires. At war from about 540-629 C.E., these empires exhausted their military forces and depleted their treasuries creating a void into which would step a newly emerging Arab Islamic empire that would emphasize the importance of trade and religious tolerance (Cleveland & Bunton, 5-6). Taking their faith with them, Arab Muslim merchants helped spread Islam quickly along the vast network of trade routes connecting the Arabian Peninsula to the wider world. Muslim communities were eventually established in China, India, Malaysia, Zanzibar, Madagascar, Somalia, Egypt, Spain, Morocco, Mali, Ghana, and Nigeria.

Within 100 years of the Prophet Muhammad's death, Arab forces had reached the Indian subcontinent in the east and Spain in the west (Cleveland and Bunton, 14). The rapid conquest of the ancient world by Arab Muslims is usually attributed to a military prowess said to have developed through nomadic tribal rivalries over scarce pasturelands within the Peninsula. Once united under a common religious banner that abhorred greed and called for social justice, Arab conquerors utilized established networks and systems already in place to expand their influence and control. Moreover, these "wars of conquest were not wars of conversion, and the various people of the Empire were not forced to embrace Islam" (Lippman, 122).

The period of rule under the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad from 750 to 1258 CE became known as the Golden Age of Islam and succeeded in bringing together and advancing the knowledge of previous civilizations to the great benefit of those that followed. As Cleveland and Bunton explain:

The intellectual adventure of high Islamic society was not limited to poetry and the decorative arts. Ideas, like material goods, were transported back and forth along the caravan routes and sea-lanes, and noted scholars were recruited by caliphs and princes alike to adorn their courts. Muslim mathematicians, working within the Indian and Persian traditions, made lasting contributions to algebra (from the Arabic word al-jabr) and trigonometry. Muslim astronomers, physicians, and chemists produced works that influenced the development of the natural sciences in European as well as Muslim intellectual circles. (23)

Arabs discovered algebraic equations, invented the zero, created the decimal system, and perfected the lunar calendar (Bobrick, 235). For five hundred years or more Arabic was the language of learning, diplomacy and trade. The Bayt al-Hikma, or House of Wisdom, was established during the reign of the Abbassid Caliph Harun al-Mamun (813-833), in order to further all fields of knowledge, especially the sciences such as astronomy, botany, medicine, and mathematics. Scholars of the Bayt al-Hikma translated and built upon the rediscovered legacy of Greek learning that had been cast aside by the Emperor Justinian when he closed the Academy of Athens in 529 (Ghazanfar, 417).

The Abbasids “adopted a universalist policy accepting the equality of all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic origins. This attitude, coupled with the revitalization of urban life and the expansion of commercial activity, led to a growing cosmopolitanism within the empire” (Cleveland & Bunton, 17). Islam also adapted well to local conditions and different cultural contexts allowing for regional variations and accommodations. For many centuries Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together peacefully (see Menocal). As Cleveland and Bunton (20) have observed, “Islamic societies were dynamic and diverse, not static and monolithic; they included areas as different as India and Syria, Egypt and Spain.” For these reasons, the devastating Mongol invasion and destruction of Baghdad in 1258 did not result in an end to Islamic statehood or achievement but produced instead more regional centers, particularly in Spain (711-1492) Spain (711-1492), and the Ottoman (1299-1922), Safavid (1501-1722), and Moghul Empires (1526-1858). All of these empires maintained relationships with the Arabian Peninsula as the Muslim faithful were obligated if resources allowed to make the pilgrimage to the Holy city of Mecca.

## **RELIGION AND TRADE**

From the inception of the faith, trade has been a critical factor in the rise and spread of Islam. Indeed, Islamic law provides detailed guidance for terms of trade. As Cleveland and Bunton (12) observe, “contracting a debt agreement as the Quran required – in writing before a witness – was a religious duty, and failure to follow the prescription was a sin.” The Prophet Muhammad is known to have described himself as a merchant among merchants. The father of Muhammad’s maternal uncle was trading in Fujian China as early as 586 CE and the grandfather and great-grandfather of China’s legendary admiral, Zheng He, made the pilgrimage to Mecca. One of the earliest written records of trade with China were the diaries of Obeida bin Abdulla bin al-Qasim which predate Marco Polo’s accounts by more than 500 years (Nabhan, 98, 111, 204, 218).

Beyond its spiritual significance, the hajj pilgrimage has long functioned as a trade fair with people arriving from all over the world to participate (Kaplan, 28). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, caravans of 10,000 people or more made the journey to Mecca from Iran (Mathee, 107). Occasionally such journeys came under attack as in 1502 when Vasco da Gama burned a ship with hundreds of Muslim pilgrims from Calicut

India bound for Mecca. Today, the Muslim pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are a significant source of income and prestige for Saudi Arabia with more than two million Muslim men and women from over 100 different countries visiting annually and often staying for periods of over one month (Clingsmith, 1134).

The insistence that the Quran be recited only in Arabic helped spread the use of the language, thereby facilitating ease of trade. Arabic influence on other languages such as Swahili in East Africa and Bahasa in Southeast Asia is evidence of this impact. Today, the Arabic speaking world includes 360 million people with majorities in twenty countries. Notably, while ninety-five percent of Arabs are Muslim, only about twenty percent of the world's Muslims are Arabs (Nydell, xi).

## **EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM**

Columbus's 1492 expedition coincided with the fall of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain, subsequently resulting in the Spanish Inquisition and the displacement of large numbers of Muslims and Jews including many who went to the New World and who were quite familiar with and deeply engaged in global trade networks (Nabhan, 243-269). It was these traders who had been intensely engaged in the transfer of crops from India and China to the Mediterranean basin for centuries who helped spur what has come to be known as the Columbian exchange using the same trade networks for its rapid dispersal.

With the arrival of European imperial powers in the Indian Ocean in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, "new ideas such as the conduct of trade by warfare, the crusader mentality of the Portuguese, the implantation of flags, and the drawing of boundaries" were introduced into the Indian Ocean with profound repercussions (Bhacker, 170). The Portuguese, Dutch, and British all attempted to dominate the Arabian Peninsula region, but were generally unable to establish settlements with any substantive jurisdictional rights or authority (Floor, 601). Focused on circumventing the Arab traders of the Middle East in order to conduct trade in spices directly with India by sea, they encountered intense competition and came into frequent conflict with the Omanis, Persians, Arab Sheikdoms, and Ottomans in the region.

As Muslim rule had only recently ended in the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal took its crusade against the Islamic World to the high seas. Portugal developed a thalassocracy which attempted to rule the seas around the Arabian Peninsula for more than two centuries, setting up fortresses and stationing naval forces in Hormuz, Muscat, and Kung to protect their trading interests with India (Cunha, 208). The Portuguese seized Hormuz in 1515 and it was not until 1622 that the Safavid ruler of Iran was able to expel them from the island. Vastly outnumbered on land, the Portuguese generally took a more tolerant approach than they did with their operations at sea. For example, it was "reported in 1549 that in Hormuz, God was celebrated four times a week, the Hindus on Monday, the Moors [Muslims] on Friday, the Jews on Saturday, and the Christians on Sunday" (Cunha, 221). The Omanis regained their coastal ports by 1649 pursuing Portuguese ships throughout the Indian Ocean in open warfare (Risso, 192-93).

In the eighteenth century, due to increased European presence and violence in the Persian Gulf, the Iranian government, in an effort not to lose its influence in the region, entered into agreements with Arab leaders permitting increased Arab settlement along the coastal provinces of Iran (Nadjmabadi, 135). In the Arabian Gulf ports, a unique and vibrant hybrid Arab-Persian-African culture developed known as Khaliji.

## **THE BRITISH RAJ AND THE PIRATE COAST**

By 1765 Britain had become the dominant power controlling trade with India supplanting Portuguese and Dutch rivals. With the fall of the Mughal Empire and the creation of the British Raj in 1858, the Arabian Peninsula and especially trade through the Persian Gulf region was considered as falling under British India's sphere of influence (Anderson, 161). "The major rationales for British involvement were to put an end to piracy, slavery, and the arms trade that flourished there" (Potter, 12). The abolition of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean served as an especially powerful rationale for disrupting maritime trade in the region. The British fought to protect the sea routes and ports of trade with India and therefore consistently misrepresented Arabian sailing merchants as pirates.

With a fleet of nearly 1000 ships in ports such as Ras Al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Bandar Lengeh, the Qawasim sailors of the Arabian Peninsula tried to maintain control of their long-standing trade relationships with India, East Africa and the Gulf region. In his book *The Myth of Arab Piracy*, UAE Sheikh Al-Qasimi argues that, "British policy-makers in India were determined to destroy the naval power of the Qawasim in the Gulf. Although the war was obviously a trade war, the British had managed to convince themselves that it was a war waged to rid the Gulf of piracy" (Al-Qasimi, 151).

British India signed agreements with the rulers of Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah between 1880 and 1892 to protect British shipping lanes, thereby turning these Sheikhdoms into protected emirates. What the British had called the "pirate coast" became known as the treaty or "trucial coast." Through the collaboration of the Native Agency, Britain maintained an informal empire in Arabia. The affluent merchants who served in the region as British agents did so not for the meager salaries they received but for "British protection, higher social status, increased power, and enhanced business prospects" (Onley, 220). Rather than directly confronting the Portuguese, Dutch or British, or the Persians and Ottomans for that matter, many of the sheikhdoms of the Gulf also became quite adept at non-alignment and negotiating such power rivalries.

## **WORLD WAR I & THE END OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 shortened the distance from Europe to India, undermining the importance of Muscat and other ports in the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf as Indian Ocean transit points (Kaplan, 38). It also heightened tensions in the Red Sea between Europeans and Ottomans for control of trade in the region. The British went to war with Egyptian nationalists in 1882 to establish outright control of the canal and surrounding territory (Anderson, 55). Following their victory, the British occupation of Egypt did not end until 1954.

At the other end of the Ottoman Empire, as Kemal Karpat has emphasized, "the Berlin Treaty of 1878 created a series of Christian nation states in the Balkans and forced a realignment of Muslim populations" setting off massive migration movements (Karpat, 48). Following the 1884 Berlin Conference and the "Scramble for Africa" with its intense European competition for world power, Germany increasingly saw itself vying with France, Great Britain and Russia for predominance, and therefore looked to the Ottoman Empire as an important sphere of influence and potential ally. The Young Turks reformist movement also saw in Germany a successful, rapidly industrializing country able to help protect them from Russian expansionism (Fromkin, 66). German railroads connected Berlin with Istanbul.

During World War I, the Allied powers tended to portray the Ottoman Empire as consisting of “captive peoples” in need of liberation (Anderson, xi). When the Turks sided with Germany, the British began to court Arab rulers in the hope that the Muslim population would support the Allies. Although the “Arab Revolt” they anticipated never fully materialized, Arab fighters were indispensable to British victory in the region (Fromkin, 219). Inscrutably, the British provided funding support to both rivals for control of the Arabian Peninsula, Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, King of the Hejaz and Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, ruler of Nejd (Fromkin, 424).

The war interrupted the hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca) greatly impacting the economy of the Hejaz region. It is perhaps for this reason, along with growing dissatisfaction over perceived Ottoman liberalism that Arabs of the Hejaz eventually sided with the British (Anderson, 112-113). At the same time, however, as the British signed the McMahon-Hussein Agreement promising full Arab independence after the war, they also signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement promising to divide the region up between themselves and France (Anderson, 161-163). This colonial betrayal has had long-lasting consequences that we are still living with today.

Oil was also becoming a crucial military asset. In 1912, Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, announced his plan to convert the entire Royal Navy, the world’s largest fleet, from coal to oil. Large strikes of oil had recently been discovered in the Persian Gulf region in 1908 (Anderson, 47), although most oil at the time came from the United States. British economic interests in Eastern Arabia significantly increased with the discovery of oil in Bahrain (1932), Kuwait (1938), Qatar (1940) Abu Dhabi (1958) and Oman (1964) (Onley, 34-37).

The 1919 Paris Peace Conference ignored the clear desire for self-determination of the region once under Ottoman control by partitioning it largely between the British and French (Anderson, 488-491). Arabs were not prepared for a post-Ottoman order, especially one that found them ruled by British and French occupiers (Cleveland and Bunton, xvi). Following WWI, issues such as Pan-Arab nationalism and Islamic solidarity would take on ever greater importance.

## **A JEWISH STATE IN PALESTINE**

The November 2, 1917 Balfour Declaration expressed British support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The British capture of Jerusalem in December 1917, near the end of WWI, signified the removal from Ottoman rule of Palestine as an area of greater Syria. During British occupation between 1917 and 1920, a series of talks were held with British appointed King Faysal of Syria (and later King of Iraq) that allowed for Jewish immigration as long as demands for Arab independence for greater Syria were also granted. Faysal was the son of Hussein ibn Ali, Sherif of Mecca and King of the Hejaz; however, the Faysal-Weisman agreement was violated and therefore voided by the French occupation of Syria in 1920. A British White Paper in 1922 attempted to explain that the Balfour Agreement was not intended to impose Jewish nationalism over Palestine but yet would provide a permanent home for Jewish settlers. Jewish immigrant numbers expanded rapidly due largely to the rise of Nazi-Germany (more than 300,000 Jews emigrated from Europe between 1922 and 1936). The question of Jewish statehood remained unresolved until David Ben-Gurion declared independence for the state of Israel in 1948 launching a regional war and defeat of Arab forces (but none from the Arabian Peninsula) that has caused turmoil in the region ever since (Cleveland & Bunton, 239-271).

## **THE ORIGINS OF THE WAHHABI MOVEMENT & SAUDI ARABIA**

Just as there are many Christian denominations, there are many variations within the two basic sects of Islam (Shi'a and Sunni). The Arabian Peninsula is predominantly Sunni Muslim, but many Shi'as live in Bahrain, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. Other sects, such as Wahhabism unified Saudi Arabia and Ibadism unified Oman (Potter, 2).

Thomas Lippman (153) credits the rise of the Sunni Wahhabi movement as stemming from the excesses and corruption of the Ottoman court. The theological foundations of the Wahhabi movement were set by the scholar, Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) and informed the Najd chieftain Muhammed ibn Sa'ud whose followers succeeded in capturing Mecca in 1803 but were removed in 1818 by the Ottoman appointed Egyptian Governor Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) who had earlier fought with the British to expel Napoleon from Egypt in 1801 (Cleveland Bunton, 123).

The revival of the movement came through the warrior-statesman Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud (1881-1953) in 1902 when he established control of Riyadh. In 1924 his forces took control of Mecca and Medina and signed a treaty with the British establishing himself as King of Hejaz and Sultan of Nejd in 1927 which became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world today that is named after a ruling family. The association of the state with the conservative Wahhabi sect has significantly influenced the country's policies and development, although not all of its citizens are followers of the Wahhabi sect.

Oil exploration began in 1933 when his government signed a concessionary agreement with Standard Oil, which later became the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Oil was discovered in 1938, but its development was delayed until after WWII (Cleveland & Bunton, 232-233). The Saudis preferred American companies over British and other European companies, as the Americans were not viewed as having any imperial or colonial desires over the region. In 1973, Saudi Arabia acquired 25 percent of the shares of ARAMCO, a year later this climbed to 60 percent and in 1980, they acquired 100 percent ownership (Gelvin, 259).

## **THE COLD WAR AND THE UNITED STATES' TWIN PILLARS POLICY**

In many ways, the Cold War in the Middle East begins with the Suez Canal crisis. In 1955, Gamal Abdel Nasser obtained \$200 million dollars of advanced Soviet weaponry from Czechoslovakia, a move that angered the United States which then withdrew funding for the Aswan High Dam project leading to the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal, which in turn led to a British, French and Israeli attack on Egypt (Ahmed, 58). Saudi Arabia responded by instituting an oil embargo against Britain and France. Increasingly, the Arab Cold War saw Saudi Arabia, the pro-Western, oil rich, Gulf monarchy, aligned against Egypt, and the anti-colonial rhetoric of Nasser's Arab nationalism and "pan-Arabism." In 1962, Soviet supported Nasser began carrying out a proxy war in Yemen that spread into Saudi Arabia resulting in increased military support to Saudi Arabia from the United States (Bronson, 85-88).

U.S. strategic interests in the Arabian Peninsula region were to ensure access to oil and prevent any hostile power from acquiring control over this resource. During the Cold War the Soviet Union was seen as the primary threat to those interests, later it would be Iran and Iraq. (Sick, 295).

In 1968, when the British announced their intention of reducing their presence in the Middle East, the U.S. looked to partner with Iran and Saudi Arabia in order to counter the threat of Soviet expansion. This Twin Pillars Policy would also balance one Sunni majority country with one Shi'a majority country. Partnering with Iran was no simple accomplishment due to the U.S. having sided with the British in the 1953 overthrow of Muhammed Musaddiq. In the early 1970s, Iran was considered the more important partner due to its size, military capabilities, and location between the Soviet Union and the Gulf (Sick, 296). The Twin Pillars policy ignored the issue that both Iran and Saudi Arabia were unhappy with Israel's aggressive stance in the Middle East. As early as the Truman administration, the U.S. and its allies had coordinated arms sales to Israel and its Arab neighbors to ensure that neither side would have a clear advantage (Gelvin, 271). For Iran, America's support for Israel was untenable; however, "the Saudi leadership considered its geostrategic competition with the Soviets and its relationship with the United States more important than the Arab-Israeli one, and viewed the United States as its long-term central partner in that larger struggle" (Bronson, 120). Saudi Arabia and the United States were partners against "Godless" communism.

### **THE 1973 OIL EMBARGO, ENERGY CRISIS & OIL FOR DEFENSE STRATEGY**

Saudi Arabia possesses one-quarter of the world's proven oil resources and relies on oil exports for 90 to 95 percent of its total export earnings (Bronson, 21). Due to the Arab oil embargo imposed following the 1973 Yom Kippur Arab-Israeli war, "between 1972 and 1973 the U.S. bill for foreign oil jumped from 3.9 billion to 24 billion" (Bronson, 122). Rather than reduce support for Israel to recoup this trade imbalance, the United States began to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia. The value of U.S. military sales to Saudi Arabia jumped from \$305 million in 1972 to more than \$5 billion in 1975. Cleveland and Bunton (455) report that "during the 1970s, the Saudis allocated between 35-40 percent of their total annual revenues to defense and security expenditures." In addition to defense spending, "in 1974 alone Saudi Arabia invested almost \$5 billion of its \$26 billion in oil revenue in the United States. By 1976, Saudi Arabia had invested \$60 billion in the United States. By 1979, Saudi Arabia had the largest single holding of dollars and U.S. government securities" (Bronson, 126-127). Saudi Arabia had become a stakeholder in America's success.

### **WORLD EVENTS IN 1979**

The year 1979 unfolded with such complexity and alacrity, that it was impossible for the United States government to deal with them thoughtfully or thoroughly. What was clear was that these events threatened American interests and brought the U.S. and Saudi Arabia closer together.

In 1979, reports emerged "of an incipient invasion of North Yemen by its avowedly Marxist neighbor to the south... [occurring] in the wake of the Marxist coup in Afghanistan in April 1978, the conclusion of the Ethiopian-Soviet treaty in November 1978, the fall of the Shah, and the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Adolph Dubs in Kabul in February 1979" (Sick, 298). The fall of the Shah and "the Iranian revolution brought to power Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shi'a cleric who threatened to spread his version of Islam to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia" (Bronson, 10). Then "on November 4, 1979, Iranian students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took American hostages. Two weeks later religiously inspired Saudi rebels seized the Grand Mosque of Mecca [the holiest shrine in Islam] and took hostages, sparking a very public two-week domestic crisis" (Bronson, 144-145). The siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Juhayman Al-Otaybi and his followers was a direct challenge to the religious



credentials of Saudi Arabia's ruling family that only ended after commandos and paratroopers with grenades, missiles and gas attacks stormed the mosque. One hundred and twenty-seven government soldiers were killed and 461 injured, along with 117 rebels killed during the siege and another 63 captured and executed (Lacy, 25-35). Three weeks after Saudi Arabia's domestic siege ended, and as Washington was seeking a solution to the hostage crisis in Iran, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Ten months later, in September of 1980, Iraq would invade Iran sparking a ten-year war. Although the Saudi regime squelched the Grand Mosque uprising, it ended up adopting much of the religious radicals' agenda. The Iranian Revolution and the seizure of the Grand Mosque so threatened the Saudi leadership that they responded by bolstering their conservative credentials (Bronson, 148).

"When Reagan assumed office in 1981, oil prices were at an unprecedented high. Between 1972 and 1980 prices had skyrocketed from \$1.90 to \$37.96 per barrel, a nearly 2000 percent increase" (Bronson, 152). In 1981, Saudi Arabia's oil revenues reached \$102 billion (Cleveland and Bunton, 458). Sales of U.S. military equipment including F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia increased dramatically. Saudi Arabia also began to provide matching funds to fight the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. "For every dollar the United States committed, Saudi Arabia provided another one through official channels. Through unofficial channels such as highly opaque and largely unaccounted charities, Saudi Arabia contributed even more" (Bronson, 176). In the summer of 1984, Saudi Arabia began depositing money into the bank account of Nicaraguan Contra leader Adolfo Calero providing as much as \$32 million to the Contras (Bronson, 184). "In 1985-86, as part of a 'strategic opening' to Iran coupled with an abortive effort to free U.S. hostages in Lebanon, the United States and Israel undertook a series of secret contacts and substantial arms transfers to Iran...Funds from the arms sales were used to support the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries" (Sick, 299).

Notably, by this time, the U.S. had identified radical political Islam with Shi'a Muslims in Iran and not with pro-American Wahhabi Muslims in Saudi Arabia; however, the Iran Contra weapons that went to Iran also served both to stoke and prolong the Iran/Iraq war (Mamdani, 108-112). In 1986, Iran began deploying mines in the Persian Gulf to disrupt shipping and oil tanker traffic. The United States, Saudi Arabia and Iraq responded by attacking Iranian oil platforms and transfer ports. From 1984-1988, Iranians damaged more than 500 commercial vessels, almost all of which ended up going to the Jebel Ali dry docks in the U.A.E. for repairs (Krane, 92).

Saudi Arabia was the United States' most important ally during the Cold War, assisting the United States to conduct proxy wars in Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua, Yemen, and the Sudan. The U.S.-Saudi partnership helped contribute to the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan and to Soviet losses in Africa (Bronson, 203). "Through the eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency, 1981-1989, Saudi Arabia actually provided more material assistance to the world's varied assortment of anti-Communist "freedom fighters" than did the United States, thus hastening the end of the Cold War" (Lacy, 77). The Saudis bankrupted the Soviets in Afghanistan, just as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have threatened to bankrupt the United States and undermine the world economy. As Mamdani (229-260) has indicated, Reagan's counterinsurgency wars on communism laid the foundation for the future of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as Islamic terrorism was learned and enacted in America's proxy wars against the Soviets especially in Afghanistan.

## **IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT AND 9/11**

In 1990, Saudi Arabia provided more than \$60 billion to push Iraq out of Kuwait while more than half a million American men and women would arrive in the Arabian Peninsula region (Bronson, 191, 198). With the Iraqi invasion of the sovereign nation of Kuwait in 1990, the response of the international coalition headed by the U.S. included the cooperation of the Soviet Union and seemed to mark a real point of positive transition (Sick, 301). The Saudis even gave money to the Soviet Union in return for their support of the Gulf War (Bronson, 196).

While some believe that Saddam Hussein's attack on Kuwait was a lead up to an attack on Saudi Arabia, others interpreted the Iraq war as an American attempt to weaken and divide the Arab and Muslim World (Telhami, 18). After all, the U.S. had previously been supporting Iraq's war against Iran as well as secretly supporting Iran at the same time. After the Cold War, devoid of a semblance of balance of power, the U.S. has been accused of increasingly pursuing its own self-interests in the region (Mamdani, 207-208) with the Arab World becoming more concerned about American dominance. Without the common enemy of communism, the end of the Cold War also brought about "a slow but steady deterioration in U.S.-Saudi relations" (Bronson, 204). Nonetheless, American officials recognize that "Saudi Arabia is a long-standing friend and ally of the United States who cooperates fully on the war on terrorism" (Lacy, 289). Saudi Arabia has also proactively moved forward with peace plans for the Arab-Israeli conflict (Bronson, 238).

According to Robert Lacy (228), "Bin Laden attacked America for playing two ends against the middle. By financing Islamic extremism in Afghanistan in the 1980s and allying with the House of Saud while also supporting the Israeli cause at the expense of Arabs, Washington had sent a conflicting foreign policy message." Bin Laden was also against the Saudi government for allowing U.S. troops on Saudi land.

As Margaret Nydell has noted following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the media, impelled as always to provide instant answers, came up with a variety of theories about the hijackers' motivations. Some of which were based on popular misconceptions about Muslims, notably:

This is a religion- and culture- based clash: the "clash of civilizations" theory. The Bin Laden group and others like it are characterized as representative of the thinking of the majority of Muslims; [and] the attackers (and others who "hate America") are envious of the American way of life. They want to change American values and eliminate American freedoms. Nydell, xv)

The idea that Arabs or Muslims hate Americans because of our freedoms has never been accurate. Nor is terrorism in any way supported by the doctrines of Islam. It is critically important to distinguish between the vast majority of normal law-abiding citizens of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and small groups bent on destruction or anarchy. As Jim Krane has reported, "Al-Qaeda has said that it attacked the United States because of the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and our lopsided support for Israel" (275). While these are concerns that resonate with many people, Al-Qaeda's methods are soundly rejected. Benjamin Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld* asserts that people in the region want justice not vengeance and that their frustrations are with an aggressive neoliberal ideology prosecuted "in pursuit of a global market society more conducive to profits for some than to justice for all" (xv). He underscores the importance of democratic governance for establishing the common good in both national and

international contexts, and warns that democracy not terrorism may become the principle victim of the war on terror (Barber, xii). Dissenters should not be labeled terrorists and violence should be thoroughly eschewed as a means of bringing about social change.

Following 9/11, U.S. President George W. Bush initiated a “global war on terror.” Although the administration won widespread support for its campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, they soon began making plans to return to Iraq. The Iraq war alone has resulted in more than 4,000 American deaths and over 100,000 Iraqi deaths at a cost to the U.S. government in excess of \$3 trillion. Not to mention the untold widespread psychologically and physically wounded.

Hollywood and the United States media have long-portrayed Muslims in prejudicial and stereotypical ways. Following the 9/11 attacks, distorted negative images and racist rhetoric intensified along with other forms of vitriolic discourse further marginalizing Arab citizens and visitors. Many Muslim Americans experienced Islamophobia through racial profiling, arrests, hate speech, physical abuse, vandalism, workplace discrimination, and mass deportations. There were even several murders. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (2002) reported more than 60,000 Muslims were subjected to U.S. government actions including arrest, detention and interrogation. Indeed, over 200,000 Arab and Muslim men were interviewed (Alsutany, 4-6). Following 9/11, Islam was often equated with terrorism, violence, and extremism.

Demonization of Islam by equating it with terrorism is paralleled with the opposite view that equates modernity with Western secularism. This logic has fueled arguments that espouse either Western subjugation of the Islamic world or denies the validity of democratic politics in the Islamic world, while not questioning the rising religiosity of the United States (Mamdani, 169-70). Poignantly, Bronson has observed, “if the radicalization of Islam is an outgrowth of the Middle East’s Cold War experience, then it may be worthwhile considering how the Cold War affected the rise of religion more globally” (261). According to Muhsin al-Musawi, “the vacuum created by dictatorial systems in the Arab world and their deliberate persecution and mass killing of the secular left, along with the massive use of war machinery and force...left the door open for religious revival” (9). American support for those fighting “Godless” communism served to foster the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism (Dreyfuss). In both the U.S. and the Arabian Peninsula, moderates have largely been marginalized by partisan and sectarian politics.

In studies conducted every year since 2003, Arabs have ranked controlling oil and protecting Israel as the driving forces of U.S. policy (Telhami, 120). They fear foreign domination, are concerned about increasing American military presence, and are angry over Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Arabs see Israeli power as largely deriving from American power. Poignantly, as Telhami relates “the on-going Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the prism of pain through which Arabs view the world” (Telhami, 73).

## **THE ARAB SPRING**

People in the Middle East do not resent Americans’ prosperity, but they are angry about how the United States government has used its wealth and power in support of authoritarian rulers in the region. They want a greater say in the political, social, and economic aspects of their lives. The Arab Spring has been largely about people’s aspirations to create more representative governments. “In Bahrain, the Shia majority (70 percent) rebelled against the Sunni government headed by a hereditary Emir [King]. This

rebellion was decisively crushed when the government arrested demonstrators en masse, largely through intervention of the Saudi army” (Nydell, xiii). Notably, Amy Holmes has argued that the U.S. Navy’s maintenance of its base in Bahrain after having received eviction notices from the Bahraini government in 1973 and 1975 contributed to a de-democratization process and the dissolution of Bahrain’s parliament in 1975 (20-37).

According to Shibley Telhami, “Arabs have never fully divorced the authoritarianism of their rulers from the Western-dominated international order that they see as having cultivated and entrenched these rulers in power from the inception of the modern political system in the Arab World at the end of World War I” (19). The U.S. has been seen as predominantly self-interested, supporting authoritarian regimes, and abandoning groups such as the Palestinians and Lebanese (Gelvin, 277). Telhami believes that “the Arab uprisings have been above all about freeing the Arab people from the domination of their rulers and of the outside world, the big powers” (93). The Arab Spring was not only about deep-seated resentment of Arab dictatorships, but also reflected anger and frustration over issues such as unemployment, rising prices, and corruption. These grievances were mostly domestic. For the first time since WWII, anti-American, anti-Western or anti-Israel slogans/chants were absent from the Arab Spring uprisings. The grassroots mobilization of dissatisfied, Arab youth largely through communication technologies that allowed for instant sharing of information and which Arab women as well as men could actively participate as on-line activists and citizen journalists was unprecedented. The Pan-Arab media revolution started by Qatar-based Al-Jazeera Satellite Television in 1996 had grown exponentially as young people adapted the latest internet technologies. Arab regimes no longer controlled the flow of information (Arafa, 97-126). In order to respond appropriately, it is critically important for the United States to understand the depth of desire for change within the Arab world, and especially the desire for dignity, respect, and the right to self-determination.

## **WOMEN & FAMILY**

Arabs generally believe that life is guided by God, that everyone loves family, that wisdom increases with age, and that the inherent personalities of men and women are vastly different (Nydell, 1). Good manners and personal contacts are extremely important, where dignity, honor, reputation, and loyalty to one’s family matter most. Among conservative Arab Muslims as well as many other non-Islamic societies, the public display of intimacy between men and women is prohibited and many activities are segregated into all-male or all-female groups (Nydel, 3, 33-35). Generally, such social customs and restrictions are not viewed as repressive, rather they are largely understood as liberating and respective of different spheres of influence, reducing the “stress, competition, temptations, and possible indignities” found outside the home in the wider society (Nydell, 45). Religious Muslims in the Arab World tend to view women in the West as subject to degrading and offensive conditions due to the emphasis on appearance and physical attributes. They view such conditions as demeaning and as reducing women to objects of male desire.

Arab Muslim cultures may tend to view gender roles in terms of complementarity rather than equality, but Islam should not be interpreted as sanctioning patriarchy and sexism (Ahmed, 282). Gender segregation and gender hierarchy are cultural not religious issues. When it comes to the status of women in the Arabian Peninsula, Western society tends to view Islam as a barrier to empowerment and part of the problem; however, this is an oversimplification of a very complex issue. Muslim women expect full rights of citizenship and see their religion as essential to this process (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). There

is a pervasive misconception in the United States that Arab Muslim women are oppressed and voiceless. Some feminists have tried to equate Islam with the oppression of women. The Quran when interpreted sensibly and in context carries a strong message of social justice and women's rights (Nydell, 36). Nonetheless, women in the region are generally underrepresented in positions of authority. The primary concerns of women in the region pertain to the gender gap in terms of employment opportunities and advancement, as well as the ability to exercise political rights (UNESCO, 163). As women in the region have gained access to education and are exposed to different norms abroad, they have increased their demands for equal opportunities in these areas. Tawakkol Karman of Yemen became the first Arab woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her activist role in the Arab Spring. In 2012, two Saudi women athletes participated in the Olympics for the first time.

Arab society is built on the extended family system in which individuals feel strong affiliation with all of their relatives. "Status in a family increases as a person grows older, and most families have patriarchs or matriarchs whose opinions are given considerable weight in family matters" (Nydell, 65). Given the importance of the extended family in communal life, many Arab parents still help suggest potential marriage partners for their children. Because marriage is such a major life decision with social and economic implications, it is considered wise to rely on the families in the selection process rather than to choose someone solely on the basis of emotion or ideas of romance (Nydell, 67). Increasingly, these traditions are weakening.

## **GLOBAL DUBAI: CITY OF MERCHANTS**

Since the early 1970's when most of the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries of the Arabian Peninsula (the GCC does not include Yemen) were granted independence from British rule and began harnessing their largess of oil revenues, the region has undergone massive socioeconomic transformations, significantly expanding infrastructure, education, healthcare, and housing. The case of the UAE is described below as perhaps the most successful and dramatic example.

As Jim Krane has explained - what was once one of the world's most desolate backwaters is now one of the most globalized cities in the world. Dubai began providing its residents electricity in 1961, the same year it first completed dredging its port to allow in cargo ships (Krane, 70). Since that time, it has grown rapidly establishing itself as a transportation hub and business center. In 1960, the city had a population of 60,000. Today it is over 2 million, 92% of whom are foreigners (Krane, 253).

Oil was discovered in 1966 in Dubai and by 1975 represented two-thirds of the city's gross domestic product; however, rather than relying solely on oil, Dubai's rulers invested in large infrastructure projects enabling the city to diversify its economy; by 1985 it had fallen to 50% and would continue to diminish (Krane 50-51). For example, the Jebel Ali port, completed in 1981, is the world's largest man-made harbor. To spur investment, it was declared a free trade zone establishing a model that other places, looking to attract business, have emulated. It is the 9<sup>th</sup> busiest port in the world with its parent company, Dubai World, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest port manager by tonnage with 43 container terminals in 22 countries (Krane, 125, 141). Air Emirates began operations in 1985 and has been expanding rapidly. Today, they fly over 30 million passengers annually, travel to 140 cities in 62 countries, and have annual sales of over \$1.45 billion. The world's tallest building, the Burj Al-Khalifa, and one of its most luxurious hotels, the Burj Al-Arab, are both located in Dubai. The city has become a Mecca for foreign tourists with the world's

highest concentration of luxury hotels with tourism earnings in excess of \$8 billion annually (Krane, 117-118).

The UAE, like the other Gulf monarchies, can be described as operating under a system of state capitalism where the state plays a lead economic role investing in projects that attract capital and create wealth for its citizens in return for political support (Mathews, 339). Dubai levies no income, property, or corporate taxes. The UAE is the most competitive economy in the Arab World and is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the world in terms of economic freedom, 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 189 countries for ease of doing business, and 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 131 countries in terms of security of property rights (Gwartney et al, 2013). Abu Dhabi is home to the world's biggest sovereign wealth fund.

## **CONSUMPTION & WASTE**

Rates of consumption and waste in the Arabian Peninsula are among the highest in the world. Domestic consumption in Saudi Arabia has risen from 3% of production in the 1970's to about 25% today. People in the region waste fuel, electricity, and water largely due to subsidies that make these resources available at little to no cost to consumers. The UAE provides \$55,000 a year in subsidies to the average male Emirati, while neighboring Saudi Arabia, with more oil but also more citizens, averages \$23,000 (Krane, 60). These subsidies also help maintain popular political support for the region's ruling royal families.

According to Jim Krane (224), "residents of the UAE and Dubai consume more water and electricity and produce more waste per capita than anyone else on the planet." The UAE's consumption of water at 145 gallons per person per day is the highest in the world with 80% of Dubai's water coming from desalination plants that contribute to increased salinity of the Arabian Gulf. Dubai's consumption is so high that it is dangerously short of electricity and the city produces more sewage than it can process (Krane, 165, 201). Generally speaking, the region's biggest problems are an over-reliance on oil revenue, the wasteful consumption of energy and natural resources, environmental degradation, and migrant labor rights.

## **RELIANCE ON FOREIGN LABOR**

Across the entire GCC region, 67 percent of the labor force is comprised of foreign guest workers. Most of the foreign workers in the Arabian Peninsula (over 14 million) come from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka to fill low-skilled manual labor jobs. While most of the guest workers have been male, the number of female domestic foreign workers has been steadily increasing, reaching as high as 1.5 million in Saudi Arabia (Shah, 44). The income derived from these jobs as remittances is very important to the sending countries; however, labor migration has caused divisiveness as native-born citizens are entitled to generous government benefits that non-citizen immigrants are not (Gelvin, 264). Eighty-eight percent of the UAE's population is comprised of guest workers, with guest workers comprising 87% of the population in Qatar, and 68% in Kuwait. These numbers increase when you look at percentages of the workforce as compared to the overall population. Although percentage-wise the smallest, in terms of raw numbers, Saudi Arabia by far hosts the most foreign workers.

## **THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE UAE**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) located along the Gulf and between the powerful neighbors of Iran and Saudi Arabia occupies a unique position. Migration across the Gulf between Persia and the Arabian Peninsula has flowed constantly throughout history with long standing cultural ties based on intermarriage, shared cuisine, trade, and religion. Evidence of such ties, for example, can be seen in the Arabic spoken in Dubai which has a Persian inflection. Following the Iranian Revolution, Iranians have especially been attracted to the UAE. Today, there are more than 300,000 Iranians living in the UAE. In Dubai, Iranians outnumber Emiratis three to one. Dubai is Iran's largest trading partner with Iran spending more than \$15 billion in 2007 alone (Krane, 24).

The UAE is known for religious tolerance; there are thirty-one churches in the country, as well as both Hindu and Sikh temples. The constitution guarantees equal rights, and many Hindus and Sikhs have moved there to escape persecution elsewhere. There are 1.9 million Indians living in the UAE. The country is 80 percent Sunni Muslim, 16 percent Shia, and 4 percent Christian and Hindu (Nydell, 207). There are more than 200 different ethnic groups living in Dubai. Within the Arabian Peninsula region, the UAE is perhaps the most liberal, allowing for example the sale of alcohol, while Saudi Arabia is the most conservative, not allowing women to vote or to drive.

Women make up slightly less than one quarter of the UAE's population and 14% of the workforce, but they make up 70% of university graduates (Krane, 254, 269). The UAE, like all of the GCC countries, has made significant investments in education. Literacy in the Arabian Peninsula region has risen from about 10 percent in the 1970s to above 90 percent today.

## **YEAR OF ARABIAN PENINSULA (YoAP)**

As Margaret Nydell (xvi) has noted, Americans are notoriously ill-informed about the Arab World and the average Arab also knows very little about American society. Both sides have enormous misconceptions about the other. Moreover, she asserts that "The Arab peoples see themselves as having been victimized and exploited by the West...they believe that Arabs are misunderstood and wrongly characterized by most Westerners, and that many people in the West are anti-Arab and anti-Muslim" (4). The Year of the Arabian Peninsula aims to develop a deeper appreciation for the issues and challenges that Arabs and Americans face together by bringing about greater intercultural understanding between these societies.

Among the many exciting programs planned for the up-coming year is a joint conference on "Women of Oman: Changing Roles & Transnational Influence" co-sponsored by the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center. While social and legal challenges exist for Omani women, as they do for women across the globe, an estimated one-third of all civil servants in Oman are women, and more Omani women than men pursue university education. In March 2004, Oman's first woman minister was appointed to head the ministry of higher education. Today, women in Oman are free to drive, work, own land, vote, and hold office. Increasingly, Oman is calling upon women to shape its future and the future of the region.

Generally speaking, there are many more similarities than differences when looking at the United States and the Arabian Peninsula such as the wasteful consumption of resources, the importance placed on the role of religion in society, rapidly changing demographics due to immigration, and increased

urbanization. The study of other countries and cultures provides a mirror of reflection for our own. It is a goal of the YoAP that a critical understanding of world history and American involvement in the Arab World will develop a more nuanced approach to solving complex global issues and challenges and will improve our ability to interact with the region constructively, responsibly and appropriately. The YoAP weekly series of lectures and events offer participants a wide range of perspectives on different aspects of the artistic, economic, social and cultural life of the region as well as opportunities to engage with people from the region in meaningful dialogue. We hope that you will join us for the many interesting, informative, and engaging programs being offered throughout the year.

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