

SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN SAUDI ARABIA

PART I

by

THE HONORABLE HERMANN FR. EILTS
FORMER AMBASSADOR TO SAUDI ARABIA, 1965-1970

(Editor's Note: *Beginning with this issue, Parameters is publishing a comprehensive two-part survey of the background and current conditions contributing to the social change taking place in Saudi Arabia. Part I, below, is concerned primarily with Saudi traditional values and the economic and political orientation of the country. The article is based on a talk initially delivered by the author at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.*)

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At first blush the term "social revolution," however lilting in a world of generally galloping change, hardly seems descriptive of the situation in Saudi Arabia. We tend to think of Saudi society as traditional, immutable, bred of the unblemished virtues of the desert, introspective and deeply spiritual in its impulses. Such would indeed befit the holy land of Islam, the site of Mecca, whither Muslims the world over aspire to make their at least once-in-a-lifetime obligatory pilgrimage and towards which they



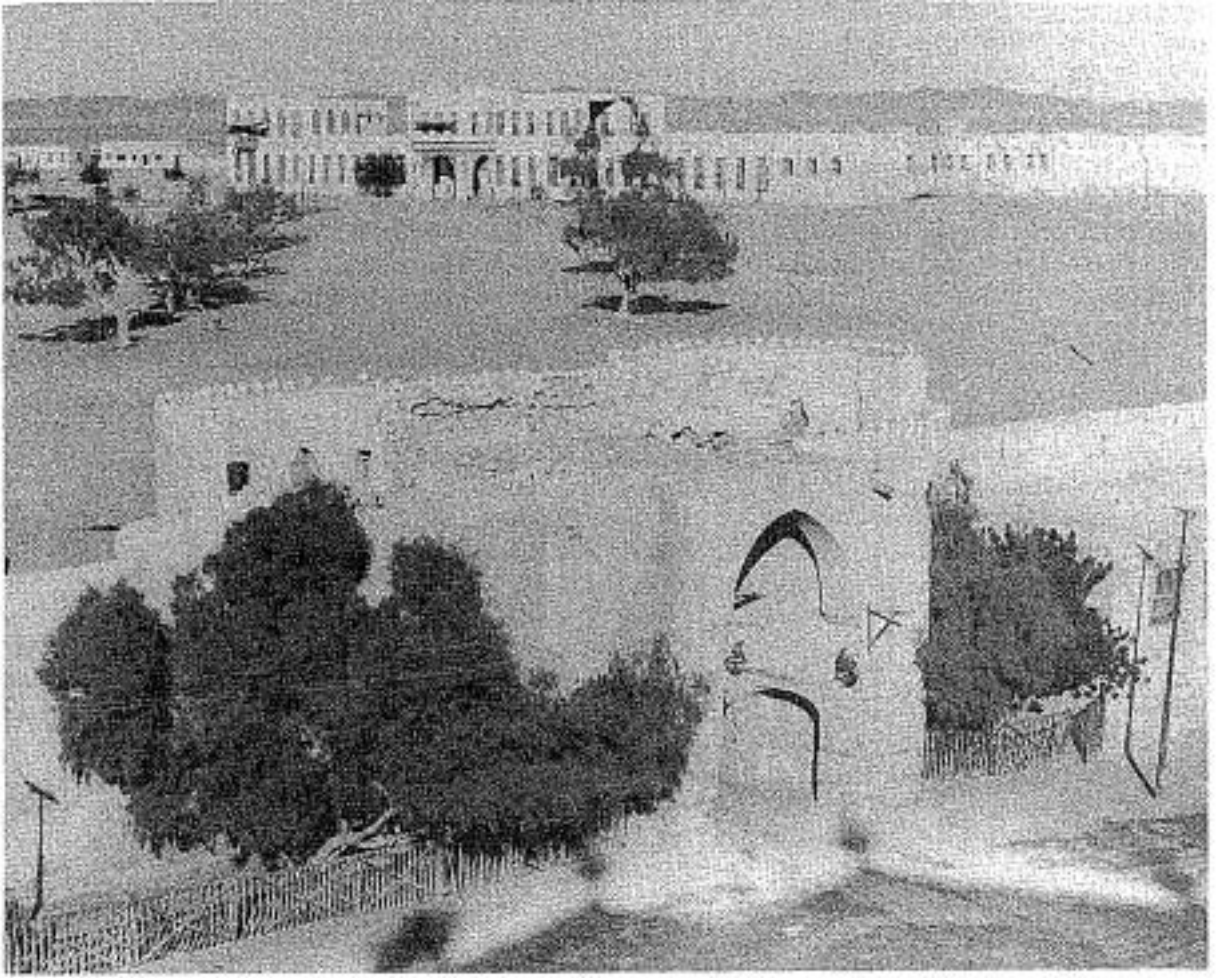
Courtesy of author

King Faysal of Saudi Arabia.

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turn five times daily in prayerful obeisance. An avowedly conservative monarchy; under the rule of an essentially patriarchal, authoritarian, withal benevolent monarch, King Faysal ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Saud;



Courtesy of author

The old Medina Gate at Jidda. The wall and gate were razed in 1947 and the city has since expanded northward (toward the photo's background).

acknowledging solely the *shari'a*, the sacred writ of Islam, as the guarantor of the rights and duties of its citizens; proscribing political parties, labor unions, elections and parliaments; prohibiting all alcoholic libations—country and concept seem utterly disparate.

Yet, any society, whatever the prescribed constraints under which it operates, strains, consciously or unconsciously, to circumvent imposed restriction and to broaden the parameters of the permissible. Saudi society is no exception.

For yet another reason, the term—if viewed in muted perspective—has more applicability than appears superficially warranted. The

transformation of Saudi Arabia from a desert kingdom into a twentieth century state, telescoped as it has been in the short span of a generation, has had its full measure of drama. An economic revolution of enormous dimension has inevitably spawned aspiration for social change. Like its neighbors in the Middle East, Arab and non-Arab, Saudi Arabia is not immune to the processes of social transformation, of modernization, of having to adjust its norms and values to the demands of our times.

It is today a traditional society, deeply religious in character, in a state of transition, opting for an evolutionary pace, but perhaps, as many believe, on the threshold of a more

rapid and significant restructuring of its values and purposes. The winds of change do not yet gust in Saudi Arabia, but waft they do. Through a happy combination of strong leadership and the basically good sense of its people, the country has to date been spared the often times destructive convulsions that have attended the trauma of modernization among some of its immediate neighbors. One hopes that this will continue. Unquestionably, however, Saudi leadership will in the years ahead increasingly have to reckon with the challenge of pacing its social and political reform to be commensurate with the enormous economic strides that the country is likely to continue to make.

The observer who saw Saudi Arabia a generation ago and again in more recent years is struck by quantitative and qualitative comparisons that memory and vision conjure.

Saudi prosperity drifts on a sea of oil. A few basic statistics illustrate the point. Twenty years ago petroleum production in quantity had just begun. In 1948 it had reached what was then a phenomenal output of 200,000 barrels per day. Today it has soared to over 3,500,000 barrels per day. Petroleum reserves in Saudi Arabia are conservatively estimated at 86 billion barrels,¹ with new reservoirs being found. It has been estimated that in the years immediately prior to World War II, the total income of the Saudi Arabian Government amounted to a meager \$24 million, derived mainly from customs and pilgrimage receipts. This small sum barely sufficed to meet the requirements of government, let alone any developmental needs of country and people. The first published budget, for the year 1947-48, estimated revenue as slightly in excess of \$103 million, with income from petroleum accounting for two-thirds.² By 1957, a decade later, public revenues approximated \$358 million, now primarily derived from petroleum revenues.³ The anticipated income for the current Saudi fiscal year is estimated at about \$1,400 million, more than a thirteen-fold increase in slightly over 20 years time. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been able to boast of an annual growth rate of between 8 and 10 per cent, a considerable achievement.

The phenomenal rise in national wealth was bound to be heady. It prompted for a time a spree of excessive spending. During the reign of the late King Saud ibn Abd al-Aziz (1953-1964), a staggering internal and external debt was incurred.

An austerity program, initiated by the present monarch when prime minister in 1959-60, enabled the debt to be paid off. The subsequent creation of a Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), designed to control Saudi currency, has given the country rare monetary soundness. In an era in which many Middle East currencies fluctuate widely, reflecting the strength or lack thereof of the national economic structure, the Saudi riyal, backed fully by specie and foreign exchange, is one of the hardest in the world. Reserves have been built up and an effort made to maintain balanced budgets, sometimes admittedly requiring dipping into such reserves.

Banking, largely limited to money lending and arbitrage a generation ago, has grown in scope. Usury is still prohibited, but various fiscal devices such as commissions, discount loans, etc., permit mercantile banking to prosper. The widespread conviction held 20 years ago by Saudis and foreigners alike that only silver and gold currencies would be acceptable, however cumbersome their carriage might be, has been proven false. Paper currency, introduced in the late 50s, was in fact accepted with scarcely a ripple. Insurance, although still legally inadmissible within Saudi Arabia, is increasingly used to protect mercantile transactions.

From the onset of an assured petroleum income, moreover, a program of economic development was undertaken, partly in the form of national infrastructure projects, designed to strengthen the state and advance the welfare of the Saudi peoples. Sparked largely by government spending, both the public and private sectors of the national economy benefited. The multiplier effect of massive capital investment and reinvestment has suffused the overall economy. Entrepreneurs, large and small, have proliferated throughout the country and seek to sell their services or wares.

Unfortunately, in the past eight years Saudi



Arabia has been faced with a disquieting security problem arising from its confrontation with various radical Arab states. In consequence, the nation's security budget has soared to a point where it now consumes almost 40 per cent of the national budget to the detriment of at least some economic growth. In a social sense, however, even such expenditures have their value. Apart from strengthening the defenses of the country, they help to develop the technically trained human infrastructure needed by the developing Saudi nation.

Qualitatively, the contrast is less susceptible to precise measurement. Here, too, however, the observer senses change.

Earlier patterns of behavior, dress, and values persist; many are being visibly assailed and, in some instances, have been assimilated into new forms.

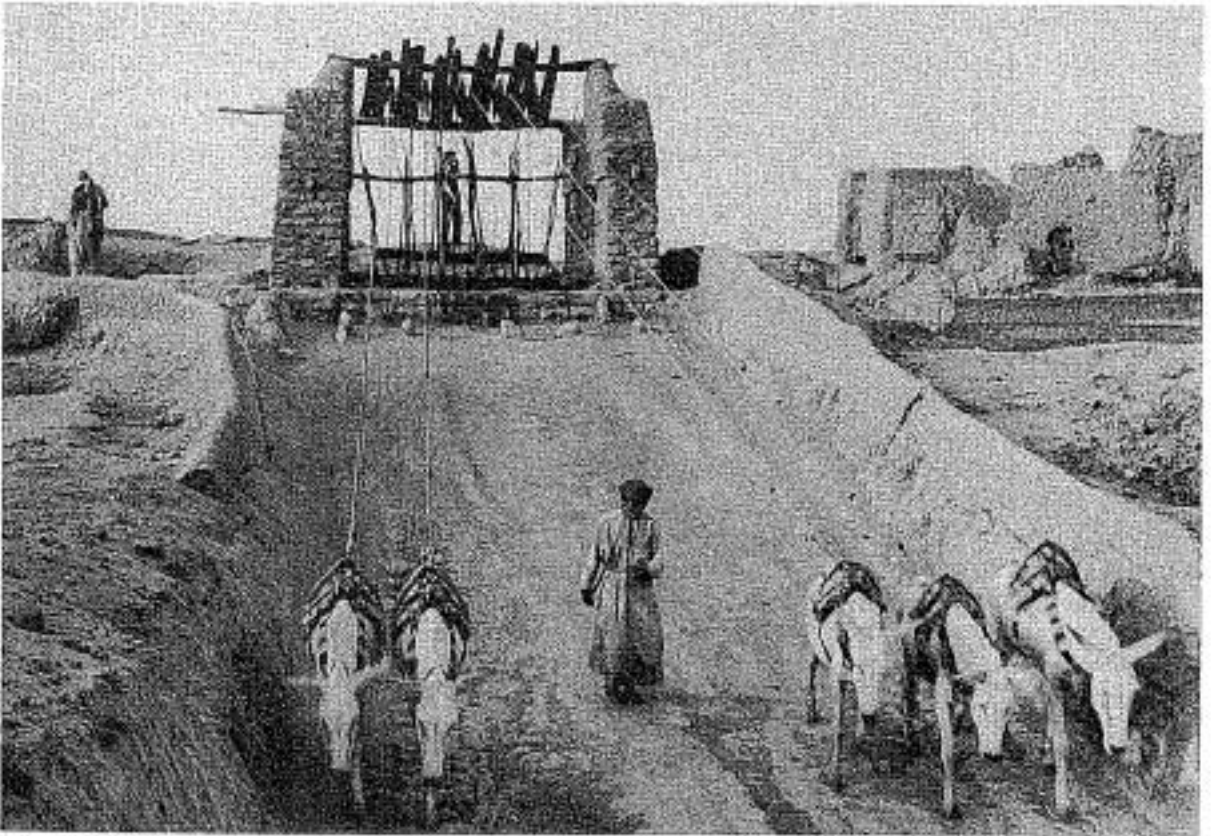
The Saudi petroleum industry has done more than introduce a technology peculiar to its own requirements. It has encouraged the introduction of technological advances in other spheres as well and enabled their financing. Rapid and mass transportation and communications are now the order of the day. An embryonic industrial base, in the form of refineries, steel and cement plants, and other factories, has been begun. The enormity of the task of planning for and implementing a nationwide development

program has, understandably, posed problems. A long dormant Central Planning Office has recently been revitalized under an exceptionally able, American trained head, Shaykh Hisham Nazir. With the help of the Stanford Research Institute, and with supplementary counsel from a group of distinguished Harvard and M.I.T. economists, a Five Year Development Program is currently being drafted. If it is ultimately accepted for implementation, it will be the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia and should prove beneficial in determining national priorities and allocating national resources.

As an inevitable concomitant of economic growth, distribution inequities have arisen which have created a growing disparity between rich and poor. In this connection, Saudi Arabia's population base remains uncertain. Notwithstanding official Saudi statistics claiming a population of at least 6.4

million people (and even higher estimates have been voiced), it is frankly doubtful that there are at present more than four million native Saudis. This is a narrow manpower base to support so vast an economic and military program. Precise statistics are lacking, but it has been suggested that the annual Saudi birth-rate is moving toward a 2.9 per cent figure.⁴ This will not appreciably affect extant manpower shortages. The situation has created a kind of laborers' market, and has contributed to current inflationary strains. It is likely to be a constant determinant in the rate of national economic and military progress and to require continued dependence on expatriate assistance.

To the catalogue of economic challenges posed for Saudi society must be added the political turbulence which has plagued the Middle East as a whole and the Arab world in particular these past several years. Although



An old water well near Jubayla in eastern Saudi Arabia.

courtesy of author

not a direct participant in the Arab-Israel war of June 1967, the conflict and its aftermath have deposited their full measure of emotional fallout on Saudis as on others. Following the burning of the al-Aqsa mosque in August 1969, a greatly aroused Saudi monarch called for a *jihad*, or holy war, to wrest the Old City of Jerusalem from its occupiers. The humiliation of the Arab defeat rankles. The country is currently subsidizing both the UAR and Jordan for losses sustained in the June 1967 conflict with Israel.

Each of the foregoing factors, economic and political, affects Saudi thinking. Each, in its own way, challenges the traditional order of things and stimulates a yearning for change.

Generally, in Saudi Arabia as elsewhere, the cleavage in social outlook is most noticeable between young and old; between those nourished in the indelible memory of an essentially impoverished society having to scrape for its wherewithal and those born to relative affluence who take the latter for granted; between those educated in traditional Islamic institutions and those exposed to foreign education, either abroad or at the hands of the large number of nonSaudi teachers engaged to staff the nation's rapidly expanded school system; between those who want as little as possible to do with government and those who, by virtue of education, believe they have a talent to participate constructively in its processes and would like a greater opportunity to do so.

The proponents of more rapid change are mainly the young men of the country. Many look to some of the younger members of the Saudi Cabinet, both princely and commoner, to pursue the cause of greater liberalization.

Arrayed against the modernizing influences are various internal forces which seek to reject or, where this proves impossible, to limit or control public acceptance of the new. Traditional Saudi society is built on the twin edifices of Allah and family. One provides the rudder, the other, the stabilizer of the social body. The regime of Islam, as interpreted by the fundamentalist, Unitarian school of dogma--Hanbalite in origin, but dubbed by its detractors as Wahhabite, after its founder, and



US Army

King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, father of the present king, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard the USS Quincy on the Great Bitter Lake after the 1945 Yalta Conference.

generally known by the latter designation—is pervasive and supreme. Revivalist rather than reformist in its thrust, it deplors what it regards as the ungodliness of modern society and demands a return to the pristine purity of early Islam in order to insure man's salvation.

The nation's religious leaders, the *ulema* (sing.—*alim*), as guardians of the traditional practices of Islam, from which they insist all enduring patterns of proper conduct must flow, look askance at all but the simplest semblances of modernity. They receive full hearing. In a tradition inherited from the late King Abd al-Aziz their principals are received every Thursday in royal audience, where they may vent their concerns about the insidious influences, real or imagined, which they believe threaten to pervert the community of true believers. Nor is this their sole asset. Through the instrument known as *Khutba*, the regular Friday sermon, which is still well attended throughout the country, they rail against foreign influences. Through the *mutawai'in*, the religious police, they seek to enforce strict conformity of religious behavior and, regrettably, sometimes alienate even devout Muslims in the process.

It is tempting to criticize the *ulema* as out of touch with modern realities. Occasional utterances of various of their number are so archaic as to make even distinguished *alims* cringe. These religious savants should not, however, be dismissed because of the shortsightedness of some of their number. Many are engaging men, highly learned in the Islamic arts, eminent jurists, and possessed of a deep sense of humanity. In the final analysis, their influence is likely to erode, but for the present they undoubtedly decelerate the pace of social reform.

Between the traditionalists and the modernists, appealed to by both, stands the ruler, King Faysal. Given the high degree of centralization which exists in Saudi Arabia it

is he, and he alone, who is the ultimate arbiter of acceptable social change. An extraordinarily wise and responsible man, whose experience spectrum spans almost 50 years of active public life; bred of the country and intimately knowledgeable of its social complexities; a consummate political leader and statesman, yet cautious in accepting innovation, the King has sought to steer a middle course. His critics grumble that the promised ten-point reform program, enunciated by the ruler in 1962 when still prime minister, has been only partially fulfilled. They are concerned that he may be excessively influenced by the unreconstructed views of the *ulema*. His defenders respond that the criticism is unjustified. It overlooks,



courtesy of author

In Jidda, the author (center) presents King Faysal with a gift from President Nixon to the people of Saudi Arabia—the Saudi flag taken to the moon on Apollo XI, and some particles from the moon.

they insist, the King's deep preoccupation since 1962 with international problems arising from the Yemen Civil War and, subsequently, the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Whatever judgment one may reach on this matter, no ruler in a land where the *shari'a* reigns supreme can ignore the counsel of the religious doctors. Doing so risks domestic political instability. Instead, therefore, like his father before him, King Faysal has sought, slowly and patiently, to bring them around to an understanding of the need for specific innovation. This requires give on his part as well as take. Periodically, for example, royal rescripts appear enjoining Saudis to cease "aping" the ways of foreigners and demanding of all residents of the kingdom that they respect Saudi traditions in dress and manner. The very need for such royal edicts, of course, reflects the unceasing pressure of social change. There is no denying, however, that King Faysal, with advancing age—he is now 65—likes the known and familiar around him.

Next to religion, the family—in its extended form—looms largest in Saudi social dynamics. Primary loyalty is to the family, its status and its welfare. The head of the family, to whom all pay deference, is its eldest male member. When, for example, the King's septuagenarian uncle enters the room, the monarch will at once arise and give him pride of place. The management of the extended and often fractious family of Al Saud (estimated by one of its members as perhaps 5,000 strong), consumes much of the King's time and places a great extra-governmental strain on him. In the political sphere, the succession to the throne, as prescribed by Saudi custom, goes to the next oldest male in the family rather than to any direct heirs who may survive the monarch. This is customarily sanctioned by *fatwa*, or religious advisory opinion. Should the designee decline, the option proceeds down the line of seniority. First claim to marriage continues to be within the family, i.e., the cousin. Any general deviation from family prescripts is

disapproved not only by the aggrieved family itself, but by society as a whole.

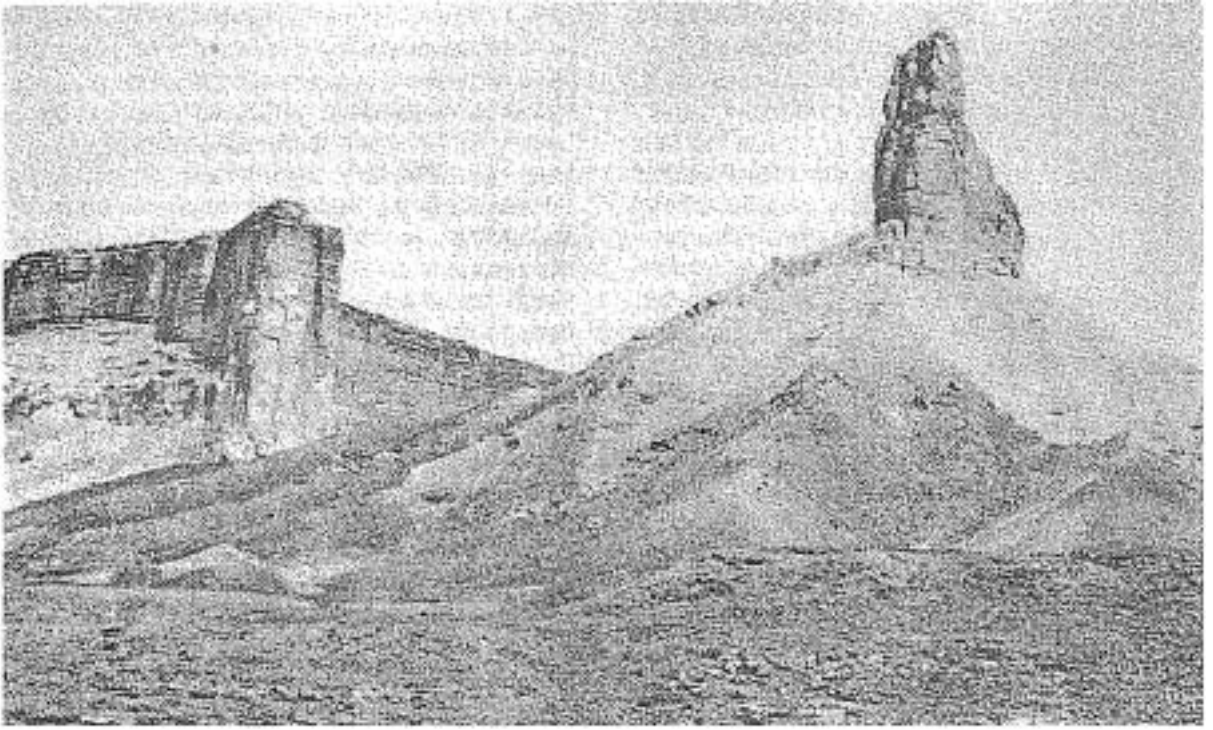
It is clear from the above that the pace of

social reform in Saudi Arabia is conditioned in large measure by the weight of tradition. This situation has been accentuated in recent years by a growing political concern about hostile leftist encirclement. The UAR, Syria, Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and the Sudan are regarded by Saudi leadership as largely socialist in political orientation. Somewhat indiscriminately, Saudi leadership tends to associate any such orientation with Communist control and direction. In this situation, and with no end to the unsettling Arab-Israeli conflict in sight, Saudi leaders have come to view their land as the last bastion of religious and economic freedom. A kind of "Festung Saudiya" outlook has developed which, regrettably, has strengthened the rejective tendencies of those elements who view innovation with distrust.

These retarding factors notwithstanding, Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of King Faysal, has moved on the road of social reform. Selective, guided change has been and continues to be the keynote of Saudi leadership.

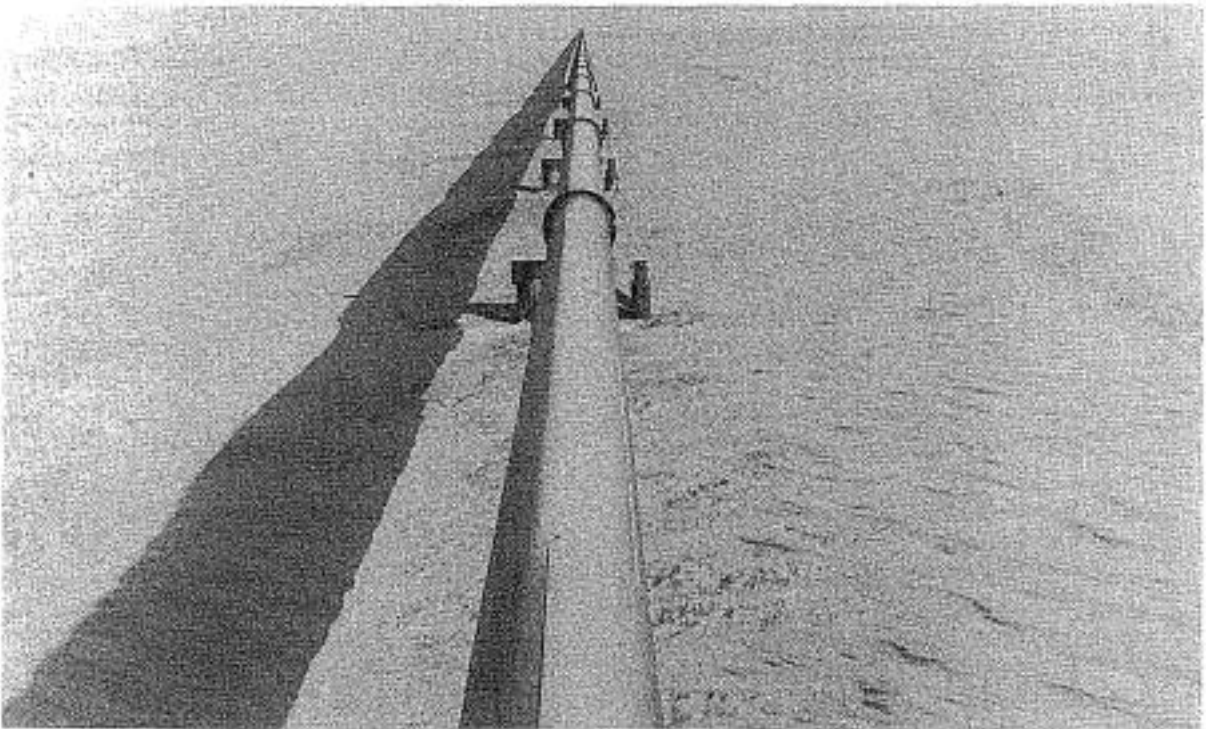


The advent of the petroleum industry, including petroleum related activities, launched Saudi Arabia on the process of social change. It exposed a heretofore languid Saudi society to a massive and powerful dosage of modern technology. It brought a wave of bustling Americans and other foreigners with strange ways and emphasizing productivity. It introduced modern housing, air conditioning, and a host of imperfectly understood but patently beneficial employee practices. It infused money into the local economy. In relatively short order, it transformed the barren landscapes of Dhahran, Abqayq, Ras Tanura, and other parts of the Eastern Province into busy oil centers. Above all, it offered Saudis regular work where there had previously been none, regular wages, medical and other benefits. Where skills were lacking, as was often the case, it offered the training required to attain them. In the early fifties, with the construction of TAPLINE (Trans-Arabian



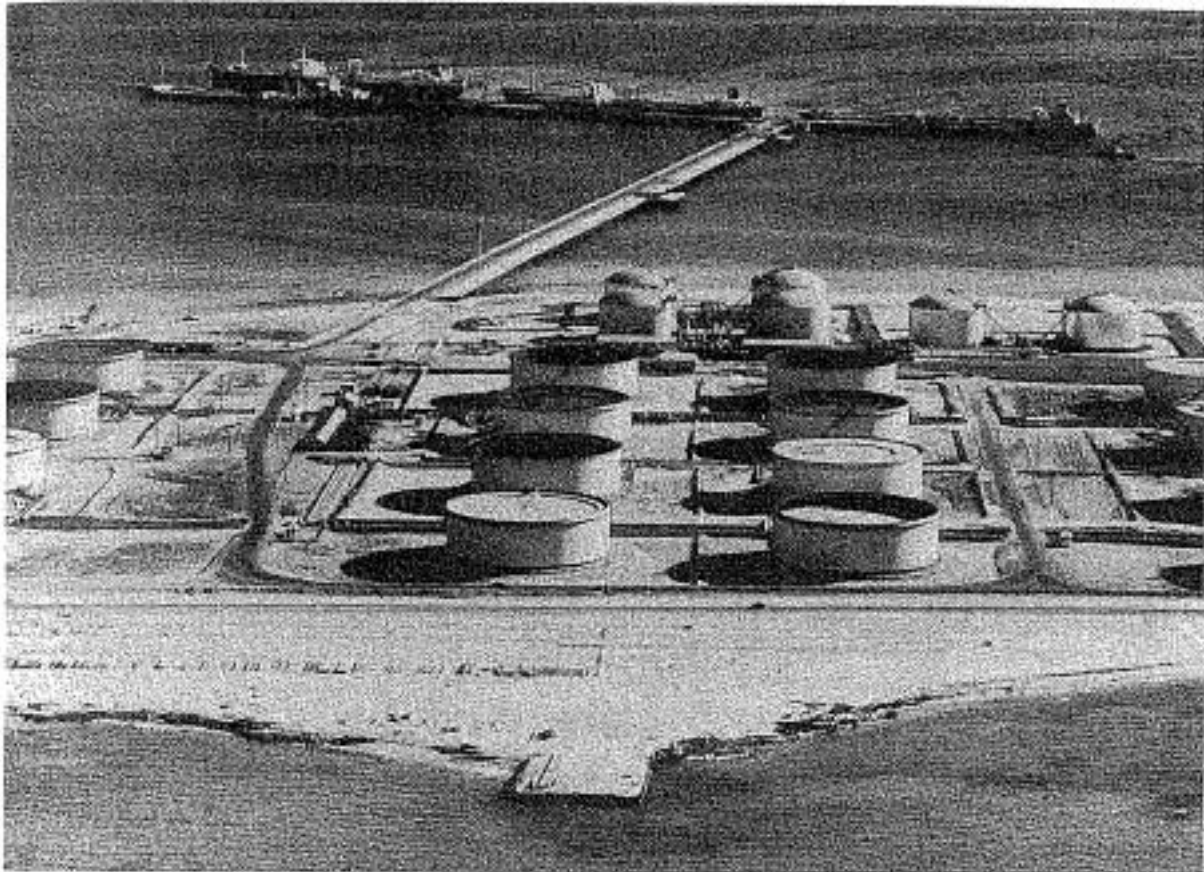
ARAMCO

The Tuwayq Escarpment on the road from Riyadh to Jidda.



ARAMCO

Nearly half of TAPLINE was constructed above ground to avoid expensive rock excavation costs.



ARAMCO

Crude oil for loading aboard tankers is stored at a tank farm at Ras Tanura.

Pipe Line), the more sparsely populated Northern Province was similarly advantaged.

Although delayed in its expansion by World War II uncertainties, the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) had by the end of 1948 brought in almost 4,200 American employees, along with various other nationalities, to inaugurate the industry. Still more important, over 12,200 Saudi Arabs had been engaged and were in training or employed as carpenters, mechanics, drivers, welders, etc. As a corollary, ARAMCO encouraged the development of indigenous Saudi contractors, who might increasingly handle the many ancillary services required by an oil industry, but not an integral part of it.⁵

Socially conscious from the outset, and deeply concerned with developing close relationships with its Saudi hosts, ARAMCO

placed great emphasis on understanding the customs, mores, and aspirations of the country where it worked. It established a well-trained and effective Government Relations Division specifically charged with maintaining contact with the Saudi authorities and sensing the pulse of public thinking. It adopted a long range policy of having Saudis take over, wherever possible, functions commensurate with their skills and experience. Its ultimate objective has been and remains to reduce expatriate staff. In 1948-49, ARAMCO reached its peak of American employment. Since that time it has steadily replaced Americans with Saudi nationals. In 1969, only about 800 American employees remained as compared with 8,500 Saudis then oil the payroll.⁶

The experiment was infectious; its ideas

and philosophy took hold; they were further refined through experience and rapidly spread throughout the country. As oil income flowed in increasing measure into the country's coffers, the Saudi Arabian Government was enabled to begin a program of development. A crescendo of construction activity marked the fifties and sixties. Although performed at the time largely by foreign firms, it was increasingly assisted by a steadily growing number of Saudi subcontractors. On the heels of American firms came British, German, Italian, Swedish, Finnish, Japanese, and others. In the commercial sphere, Saudis vied with each other in seeking to obtain foreign agency associations. The Saudi market continues to be highly attractive to foreign entrepreneurs in association with Saudi businessmen.

By the mid-fifties, another operational pattern had been set. A training program, designed to permit Saudis ultimately to take over operation and maintenance functions, had become an essential component of virtually every project contract. The degree of success varied from project to project, but had the overall effect of elevating and broadening Saudi technical competence. Despite ARAMCO's continuing drawdown of

American personnel, the overall Saudi exposure to American and European firms, and to their expatriate employees, has increased.

There are at present over 7,500 Americans working in the country, as widely dispersed as Jidda, Riyadh, Kharj, Tayf, Tabuk, Khamis Mushayt, and the Eastern and Northern Provinces. Among American firms, Trans World Airlines holds a contract to manage Saudi Arabian Airlines; in the wake of a sale of HAWK missiles, Raytheon is engaged by the Saudi Ministry of Defense in training Saudi military personnel in the operation and maintenance of these missiles; Commonwealth operates the impressive Dhahran International Airport; Commonwealth-Tumpane has a contract to improve the Saudi military transport system; and various smaller American firms are similarly engaged. A British consortium, after selling Lightning aircraft, is training Saudis in the use and maintenance of these multi-role fighters. It is also constructing various radar communications connected with air defense. Italian firms are building roads. A Dutch firm is building a major desalting plant in Jidda, using the "universal design" developed by the Office of Saline Waters of the United States



US Army

The HAWK missile is included in the arms inventory of the Saudi Army.

Department of Interior. An American firm--AquaChem--has a contract for a similar plant at Khobar. The number of Europeans of various nationalities now working in Saudi Arabia probably exceeds 8,000. These expatriates have daily contact with Saudi counterparts and much, if not all, of their expertise steadily rubs off.

In addition, substantial numbers of Palestinians, Lebanese, Jordanians, Sudanese, and some Syrians and Egyptians have been engaged over the years to assist in various facets of the developmental process. The largest foreign Arab element is Yemeni and Hadhrami, perhaps a half-million in number. Arabs from the northern states tend to be engaged in white-collar jobs; those from the South and the Sudan are usually in more menial employment. All bring their own ideas, methods, and problems which they seek to introduce into the Saudi crucible. Despite Linguistic and religious affinity, such non-Saudi Arabs often tend to be regarded as outsiders and are distrusted.

Saudi armed forces--largely Army, but including smaller Air Force and Navy components--have been established. The Saudi Army is equipped with modern weaponry, including the already mentioned HAWK missile. The Royal Saudi Air Force flies Lightning, F-86, and C-130 aircraft. Its personnel are learning to operate and maintain such sophisticated equipment. A Saudi Navy is in the making. Taken as a whole, the Saudi military elite cuts a respectable figure. It was greatly heartened, incidentally, by its success at Wadi'a in February of 1970 against invading South Yemeni forces.

Industrialization and project development have brought with them governmental supervision. A spate of ordinances has appeared over the years regulating contractor activities, labor relations, social services, and the like, particularly in areas where the *shari'a* was recognized to leave interstices. Although sometimes rather casually administered, the thrust of these ordinances was generally sound. In priority of law, they rank below the *shari'a*. Yet, in the absence of canonical guidance, there is a growing willingness on the

part of magistrates (*qadhis*) to cite them in court judgments. More recently, in 1969, largely at the strong personal insistence of King Faysal, new labor and social insurance laws were promulgated. They represent the most comprehensive Saudi effort to date to improve working conditions and employee benefits for the country's growing work force.⁷ Although still in need of clarification in some areas, they open a new chapter in Saudi labor practices. A new Civil Service law is currently also under study and is expected to be issued in due course. These ordinances reflect the determination of the Saudi authorities to improve the welfare of important population sectors. The trend may be expected to continue.

Industrialization has also brought with it a growing urbanization. Jidda, Riyadh, and the greater Dammam complex were small towns twenty years ago. They have developed into sizable cities, the first two now claiming over 300,000 inhabitants each, as urban employment prospects have lured villagers previously engaged in subsistence economics. Inevitably, in this type of situation, some slum conditions have developed and remain a part of the urban scene. Other erstwhile villages, such as Burayda, Anayza, Hofuf, and Hail, have grown into towns. Throughout the Kingdom, hamlets have graduated into villages. Sunbaked mud brick remains the primary building material in rural areas, but housing in towns and cities is usually of cement block, often neo-Egyptian in architectural style and frequently brightly painted. Cement consumption, a good indicator of construction activity, has almost doubled in the past five years. It stood at 790,000 tons in 1967-68, with local production meeting about 40 per cent of the total.⁸ The Saudi Arabian Government and ARAMCO have offered their employees low cost, low interest housing as a means of improving living standards. More low income housing remains in demand.

Many of the old cities and towns are today virtually new in form. Old buildings have been razed in order to make room for new ones. Few buildings in Tayf, Khobar, Dammam, or Riyadh are today more than twenty years old.



ARAMCO

Modern apartment and office buildings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital.

In the process, regrettably, some of the finest specimens of the graceful Saudi architecture and latticework of the past have been destroyed. The tendency is to be ashamed of the old, however picturesque, and to try to conceal its remnants. Progress is conceived in terms of new, often purely functional structures.

Throughout the Kingdom electrification has made headway. As the large urban centers become increasingly hard pressed to meet growing power demands, the high cost of electricity evokes much public grumbling. Through a variety of means, plans are afoot to increase power supplies. In various villages rural electrification cooperatives have been set up. Their sometimes helter-skelter wiring systems, connected to small central generators, seem to work and have added a new dimension to village life. In Jidda, Riyadh, and elsewhere modern sewage systems are being established, and water is being piped into homes. To mention yet another area of urban improvement, no longer need the frantic Saudi telephone caller shout vainly, "Markaz! Markaz!" ("Central! Central!") into an unheeding instrument; automatic dial systems now serve the major cities.

Partly in response to the large number of

foreigners working in the Kingdom and partly due to developing local tastes, new marketing techniques have been introduced in many sectors. Saudi Arabia must still import most of its food and household requirements, but the shops of Jidda, Riyadh, Khobar, Dammam, and elsewhere are becoming increasingly well stocked. Modern shop windows, often neon-lighted, display lingerie, women's clothing, appliances, furniture, and a wide assortment of luxury products. In the past two years, food supermarkets have made their appearance. Even the traditional bazaars (*souq*) are modernizing in stock and facades. Fixed pricing is coming in, but bargaining remains an appreciated and mutually exhilarating test of wits. The accelerated pace of Saudi business notwithstanding, the time-honored offer of the thimble-size cup of cardamom-flavored coffee still marks its etiquette.

Transportation has improved enormously. In 1950 there were only two stretches of paved road in the Kingdom, one between Jidda and Mecca, the other between Dhahran and Abqayq. The roads covered a total of about 150 kilometers. In the intervening years a national road construction program has proceeded apace, and in 1966 the first trans-Peninsular highway connection was completed. The national road grid has increased to over 11,000 kilometers and more road construction is underway. Some Saudi roads, for example the steep escarpment portion of that connecting Mecca and Tayf, are conspicuous for their fine engineering. An increasing number of lorries and cars ply these roads and provide rapid trucking service to the interior. The Mercedes five-ton truck virtually dominates the highways. Saudi Arabian Airlines, which boasts the largest commercial air fleet in the Middle East, ranging from DC-3s to Boeing 707s, connects all major points in the country and offers direct flights to Europe, other parts of the Middle East and Pakistan. Saudi and American crews share the cockpits and have established a good record of reliability.

The Saudi Arabian Railroad, which connects Dammam with Riyadh and points in between, while hardly economic, still runs but



ARAMCO

The highway between Mecca and Tayf curves 174 times in 54 miles.

its roadbed is in need of repair. For many years now work has been underway, in conjunction with the governments of Jordan and Syria, to restore the Hejaz railway, a line of dubious economic value but of great religious importance. No longer is it an expedition to visit one Saudi city from another. Commuting between Jidda and Riyadh for a day of business has become standard fare for Saudi merchants and officials. Many Saudi employees of ARAMCO

commute each weekend from their places of work to Hofuf, where their families reside.

This newfound ease of travel has markedly increased social mobility. In turn, this should have a coalescing effect. Provincialism in Saudi Arabia, although it should not be overrated, has been an obstacle to national cohesion. Hejazis, commercially oriented and relatively cosmopolitan as long **time** hosts of the annual Muslim pilgrimage, tend to regard Najdis as unsophisticated; Najdis, traditionally

more puritanical and xenophobic, view Hejazis as effete and grasping; Hasawis tend to be Gulf-oriented and sometimes allege official neglect. A governmental effort some years ago to try to overcome such sectionalism through nomenclatural fiat, i.e., by redesignating the provinces as Western, Central, and Eastern, has only partially altered provincial attitudes. Increased exposure of geographically minded Saudis to each other should help to strengthen national identification.

Agricultural development is high on the national priority roster. Under the direction of a capable Minister of Agriculture and utilizing FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and private contractor help, a program is underway to probe available water resources as a prerequisite to expansion of cultivable areas.

The annual pilgrimage, to which the Saudi authorities attach high importance for its spiritual significance and as a means of projecting the nation's image abroad, receives much attention. The management of over a million annual visitors of divergent nationalities, languages and ages, increasingly concentrated in recent years into a four to six week period, poses major logistic, health, and security problems. These have been handled with commendable foresight and have elicited favorable comment from many such pilgrims. The task is likely to become still more formidable if, as is expected, the annual inflow of foreign pilgrims continues to increase.

Much attention has been given to the establishment of hospitals, health centers, and dispensaries throughout the country. The number of health centers increased during the decade 1957-67 from 38 to 271; of dispensaries from 45 to 180; and of hospitals from 29 to 49. More of each have been sanctioned.⁹ Some Saudi doctors have already been trained and are on duty. Other aspiring medical practitioners are currently in training. For the moment, however, there is a

considerable reliance upon Pakistani doctors and nurses. At least 1,000 such doctors and nurses have been engaged by the Saudi Arabian Government to staff these health centers, especially those in the outlying areas.

In yet another sphere, although distinctly subordinate to the King, cabinet government has expanded in scope and responsibility. Commoners share with royal princes the management of government departments. A large (some believe swollen) bureaucracy has been built up. The Ford Foundation has for some years, by Saudi Arabian Government invitation, been studying the organization of various ministries with a view to making recommendations to sharpen their effectiveness.

(Part II will follow in the fall issue of Parameters.)

FOOTNOTES

1. Arabian American Oil Company, *Facts and Figures*, 1969, Dhahran, p. 7.

2. H. St. John Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, London, 1955, p. 333.

3. Edmond Y. Asfour, *Saudi Arabia, Long Term Projections of Supply of and Demand for Agricultural Products*, Beirut, 1966, p. 121. Saudi riyal figures cited therein have been converted at 4.5 riyals = \$1.00.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

5. *Report of Operations to the Saudi Arabian Government by the Arabian American Oil Company for the Year 1948*, April 15, 1949, p. 10.

6. Arabian American Oil Company, *ARAMCO*, 1969, Dammam, p. 14.

7. English Texts in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Labor and Workmen Law*, Mecca, 1970; and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Social Insurance Law*, Mecca, 1970.

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