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With its crucial importance to global energy markets, its Puritanical interpretation of Islam, and its special relationship with the United States, Saudi Arabia often appears exceptional. One strength of Zakir Hussain's *Saudi Arabia in a Multi-Polar World: Changing Dynamics* is its successful diffusion of this air of exceptionalism. With his background in political economy, Hussain inundates the reader with econometric figures and details, illustrating the practical and financial considerations that currently concern the Saudi monarchy, including low oil prices, a restive and youthful population, and a shifting balance of global power. The book depicts a country facing new constraints and choices, and charts its transition towards different economic and security partners.

Hussain begins with a historical overview that is well-researched but familiar, charting the partnership between the House of Saud and the Wahhabi *ulema* of the Nejd, and later the Saudi partnership with the United States. The historical portion is most powerful in the glimpses it offers of alternative futures for the Saudi state, such as King Ibn Saud's ambitions for food security, which prompted him to seek lessons in crop cultivation in arid environments like Arizona. Hussain notes, "As late as 1970, one half of the [Saudi] population worked either as agricultural day laborers or on their own farms" (p. 51). The image of an agricultural Saudi Arabia offers the possibility that the kingdom might have avoided its unique brand of oil-fueled Islamic authoritarianism and the implications associated therewith. Saudi Arabia's rejection of its former agricultural ambitions is reinforced by the fact that the kingdom ceased wheat production in 2016 due to water constraints (p. 171).

While Hussain identifies oil and Islam as the traditional sources of the Saudi monarchy's power, he explains how both are likely to offer the country less stability in the future than they currently provide. Low oil prices threaten to bankrupt the regime as it struggles to maintain the authoritarian bargain struck with its rapidly growing population. Additionally, perceptions that Saudi Arabia funds and foments violent extremism around the world have damaged its global image, in particular its special bond with the US. Hussain identifies 9/11 as the turning point at which the kingdom began to pursue multi-alliance diplomacy in order to overcome its reliance on the American hegemon (p. 227).

One of the work's strongest features is that it moves beyond the well-known narrative of oil, Islam, and the US. In Chapters 4 and 5, Hussain explores the effects of Saudi Arabia's 2005 Look East policy, a reference to its enhanced economic and political engagement with China and India. Although it does not receive its own chapter, Hussain also illustrates examples of the increased partnership between Riyadh and Moscow, especially as Saudi Arabia looks to lessen its dependence on the US security umbrella (p. 103). In terms of enhancing security, Hussain hints that the Saudi pivot towards India is partly intended to signal displeasure with Pakistan, a long-time ally, specifically over Pakistan's inability to reign in its militant proxies (p. 211).

The author is a Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, a position that comes through especially in his chapter on India. In commenting on the harassment suffered and the bribes required of Indian workers facing Saudi government efforts to reduce the population of guest workers, Hussain observes that the mistreatment has "exposed...the mindset of the government towards the guest workers" (189) as that of a master toward a servant. Yet India may have the last laugh, as Hussain points out that

Saudi Arabia has ignored the basic principles of employment generation: it neither gave

enough weight to the marginal productivity rules nor qualification criteria, including educational background, while employing its citizens in public sector enterprises. Over a period, its education system has become irrelevant for generating employable youth. (189)

He points out that this is particularly true in the case of unemployed female graduates. The government spends significant amounts of money to educate young women but then has few employment opportunities for them as the bloated public sector becomes increasingly unsustainable.

The book is so packed with information, sources, and citations that the author's argument is sometimes hard to differentiate from those made by the scholars he cites. The effect is sometimes similar to that of a textbook, or an apparently neutral compilation of available information. However, as with any collection of facts, those that are omitted help to illustrate the view of the collector. One weakness of the book is its failure to engage meaningfully with the widespread perception that wealthy Saudis continue to finance fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, even as their government claims to encourage religious moderation. The author makes reference to unknown amounts of money sent from Saudi Arabia to madrassas in India and suggests that such finances should be more closely monitored to ensure they contribute to economic development (and not to the fundamentalist Islamic teachings perpetuated at some madrassas) (p. 229). However, he does not dwell on the possibility that Saudi money and ideology may have played a role in devastating acts of terrorism in India, such as the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. Similarly, when speaking of Sunni/Shi'a sectarianism, the author largely echoes the position of the Saudi regime, which blames Iran for the sectarian rift (p. 93), rather than considering the Saudi role in contributing to sectarianism.

In his focus on Saudi engagement with the emerging powers of a multi-polar order, Hussain provides a glimpse into a future less dominated by American power. Even the designation of the geographic region as "West Asia and North Africa," or WANA, rather than the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), speaks to the coming shift in perspective (p. 113). Hussain's lack of normative statements likely reflects his background in political economy. However, it also could signal a shift away from American hegemony and its stated commitments to norms like democracy and human rights.

At a few points, the book suffers from editorial oversights in the form of typos or grammatical mistakes. For example, the author refers to Wilson Fellow and esteemed Saudi expert Caryle Murphy as "he" (p. 32). The work would have been stronger with more careful editorial assistance. Nonetheless, the book's primary contribution is notable and lies in its attention to detail and focus on new directions and allegiances for one of the world's most significant energy producers. Students of the region and of financial and strategic alliances would benefit from the many insights Hussain has compiled.

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