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TOPIC: Changing Nature of Governance in Saudi Arabia: since King Faisal

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Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Arab Gulf Region has got the monarchic form of government, legitimacy of which depends on a system of governance based on a strict interpretation of Islam. Although there is a debate on lack of democracy and human rights violation in Saudi Arabia, it cannot be underestimated that Saudi is the most stable country in the Gulf region and the Saudi government has very skilfully managed to hold its power so long. Since the emergence of the third Saudi dynasty, it has been continuously engaged in various means for gaining legitimacy to rule the country. The changing strategies for gaining political legitimacy have culminated in a lot of political developments in the Kingdom. The country now relies more on strategies of opening up rather than on suppression. The ordinary Saudi citizens today even aspire to have a say in the decision making process which previously was unimaginable and confined to politically affluent classes. Therefore this study tries to highlight the process of state formation and governance in the Kingdom and analyse various means adopted by the Saudi regime in consolidating its power. This study also endeavours to explore the means that gave legitimacy to the Al- Saud regime. A detailed examination of the changes in the mode of governance due to the adoption of policies of modernization by King Faisal would also be done. The focus of the work is also to evaluate the role of traditional social and political institutions in shifting nature of governance. This work also makes an attempt to comprehend the changes in the policies of the regime. The study is also an endeavour to explore the role of both indigenous and external factors that have led to the introduction of reform measures in the Kingdom. Further, the work emphasizes on highlighting the causes for the emergence of dissenting groups in the Kingdom. It is also an effort to map various dissenting voices, with the aim to understand their impact on the governance. The study also is endeavouring to reflect upon the post-reform institutions and structures-whether they are substantial or mere cosmetic changes undertaken in order to gain legitimacy will also be attempted. And lastly, it tries to examine the post-Arab spring development that took place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Both Islam and tribal culture remain as the major sources of legitimacy for the ruling dynasty rule in the near-total absence of a well-structured political system. Whenever there is a legitimacy crisis or the

regime is in a troubled situation, the ruler reaches out to the clerics and tribal sheikhs and gets their support through the means of appeasement in order to continue in power. It was only after the discovery of oil; the regime was able to spend money in establishing formal institutions. The coming of oil revenue brought lot of transformations in the Kingdom, number of ministries was established, transportation and communication developed, education expanded, social services increased, huge palaces constructed, school, hospitals, electricity, railway lines, telegraph and radio introduced and many new government policies launched. The point, ever increasing oil revenue has significantly influenced the governance system of Saudi Arabia, is the crux of third hypothesis of the study which is validated in Chapters Two and Three of the thesis. King Faisal, redefined the means of legitimacy which were tied up with the traditional sources like religion and tribal structure. He added rentier nature of economy to the list of sources that provide legitimacy to rule in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia under the rule of King Faisal marked a transition in the mode of governance which was characterized by the traditional institutions. Faisal introduced modern secular bureaucratic and administrative apparatuses. The change in form, content and function of the state and state apparatuses, indeed, provided fundamental components for the emergence of a modern Saudi Arabia. This was the first hypothesis of the study and it has been validated in Chapter Three of the thesis by critically examining the changes that Faisal brought in. The Gulf War-induced developments in the Kingdom had direct repercussion on the governance also. It is for the first time in history that the regime had introduced some written documents for the purpose of better governance. This point validates the fourth hypothesis of this research work which has been substantiated in Chapter Four of the thesis by analyzing the measures taken by the Saudi state to overcome the legitimacy crisis that Gulf War brought in. The fifth hypothesis was about the adoption of neo-liberal policies which necessitated reform in legal administration. With the introduction of foreign business firms, the Kingdom was forced to formulate new laws and make changes in the existing legal regime so as to make the system more attractive to the external players. Recently, the Arab Spring-inspired uprising in the Kingdom compelled the regime to take steps for ensuring some substantial reforms. This was the last hypothesis of the study which has been validated in Chapters Four and Five by discussing the post-Uprising scenario in a comprehensive manner.

To sum up the research findings, the researcher wants to highlight that there are many internal and external factors that collectively contributed to the reform in Saudi Arabia. Analyzing the context of each reform, one can come to a conclusion that, whenever there is a serious legitimacy crisis, the regime comes up with a set of measures to reform the polity, economy and judicial system. But it is doubtful to say that these reform initiatives are substantial in content. It has been proven by the history that most of them were cosmetic measures devoid of genuine intension and content.