HOOVER INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

ROBERT W. STOOKEY, EDITOR

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

ZONE OF FERMENT

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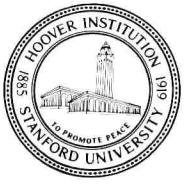
Edited by
Robert W. Stookey



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THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

HOOVER INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Peter Duignan, general editor

Publications in the Hoover International Studies series of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace are concerned with U.S. involvement in world and regional politics. These studies are intended to represent a contribution to the discussion and debate of major questions of international affairs.

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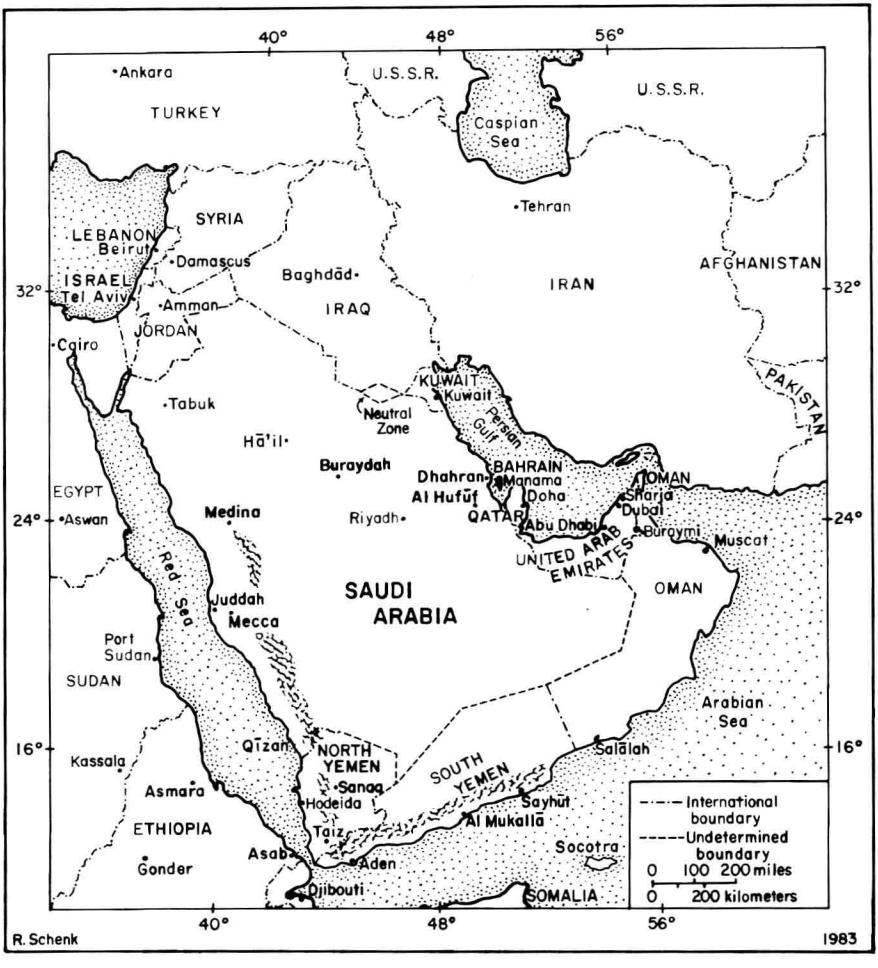
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R. Schenk
1983

Foreword

By a quirk of fate, the economic well-being of the United States and its allies has come to depend on the oil-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula, whose political future remains in doubt. We cannot quickly reduce our dependence on oil from the states in the region (even though in 1983 there was an oil glut). Unfortunately this area is inherently volatile.

On the local level, the states of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula have to contend with the imperial ambitions of Iran and Iraq, as well as the support of dissident groups in North Yemen, Oman, and Saudi Arabia by South Yemen. Most states in the area are threatened by internal subversion. Most important, the region has become an object of Soviet ambition.

The Soviet Union has been providing military support to South Yemen since 1967. In the past ten years, over $2 billion in arms have entered South Yemen. The Soviets have won major naval and air facilities in Aden and Socotra Island from which they dominate the entrances to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, the Horn of Africa, and the Persian Gulf, as well as the northwest Indian Ocean. South Yemen is thus linked to Soviet military/naval power and has further ties to radical states such as Ethiopia and Libya.

The authors of this volume provide clear analyses of some of the problems faced by states in the region: Saudi Arabia, the two Yemens, and Oman. They offer sound advice on how to deal with the peoples of this region. They show that the United States can do very little about the instability of the Peninsula or about Soviet interference. Washington must be careful not to jeopardize the fragile balance that exists in this region by embracing reigning governments

too closely, especially by building bases in the area. The United States should help local peoples help themselves, encourage them to cooperate for mutual defense, and offer assistance if they are attacked. These countries are making serious efforts to develop their economies and raise general standards of living and education. Six of the eight have been cooperating constructively for several years in the Persian Gulf Council in an effort to enhance their combined strength. Persistent, patient attempts by these states have succeeded at least for the time being, in persuading South Yemen to make peace with Oman and to stop fomenting rebellion in North Yemen.

Peter Duignan

Coordinator, International Studies
Hoover Institution

Preface

At the fifteenth annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, held at Seattle in November 1981, one discussion panel was devoted to consideration of five recent studies related to the Arabian Peninsula. Nearly twice as many people as there were chairs available arrived to hear the authors of the papers summarize their research and to participate in the discussion. This exemplifies the growing concern about this geographic area and the heightened awareness of its significance for American strategic and economic interests. The fact that at the end of a two-and-a-half-hour session there were still standees speaks for the quality of the material presented.

Dr. Peter J. Duignan, coordinator of international studies for the Hoover Institution, attended the meeting and considered these papers of sufficient interest to be made generally available in their entirety. He asked the chairman of the panel to assemble and edit them for publication. As the project proceeded, the initial concept was modified, since of the Arabian Peninsula's eight independent countries, only two (Saudi Arabia and Oman) were treated in detail in the conference papers. It was agreed that a comparative study of the two Yemens would be written especially for this volume, and that brief descriptions of the four small Arab states on the Persian Gulf would be included in the introduction. Dr. Duignan thus contributed to broadening the book's scope to provide a more comprehensive view of the Peninsula.

Each of the six essays addresses a specialized subject, and together they span the disciplines of history, international relations, political science, and

economics. The editor's introduction presents a concise overview of the region and relates these detailed studies to the formulation and evaluation of U.S. policy toward the Arabian Peninsula.

The map showing the internal boundaries of the United Arab Emirates is reproduced by permission of the Middle East Institute, publisher of John Duke Anthony's *Arab States of the Lower Gulf* (1975), in which it first appeared. The other maps were drawn by Roger Schenk, of the Department of Geography, the University of Texas.

In order to facilitate reading of the text by those unfamiliar with the Arabic language, the use of diacritical marks in the transliteration of Arabic names and terms has been kept to the practical minimum.

Introduction

Robert W. Stookey

Considering its economic and strategic significance for our national interests, the Arabian Peninsula is not well known to the general public. Media reporting and comment are at best sporadic, and usually intensify only at moments of international tension when American interests appear to be in jeopardy. The public tends to regard the Arabs and Islam, their predominant religion, as backward, morally deficient, and as threatening, both economically and politically, to the industrialized democracies. This perception naturally colors the popular interpretation of news and other discussions of the region.

The question is not one of deliberately distorted reporting; our journalists sent to the area are mostly competent and conscientious. However, since access to these countries is difficult, broad and sustained coverage is impractical. Editorial conceptions of what constitutes a good news story add a further element of selectivity. Understanding the societies of the Arabian Peninsula requires an intimate acquaintance that relatively few outsiders have the opportunity or the inclination to acquire.

Since the days of our founding fathers, Americans have assumed that the principles on which our nation's political institutions are based are universally and eternally applicable. We have become convinced that if our manner of conducting public affairs were faithfully copied everywhere, the common aspiration of all humanity toward peace, material progress, justice, and civil liberty would be realized throughout the world. We tend to judge another society according to its government's resemblance to our own. We overlook the fact that our nation's principles evolved within a tradition of thought

confined to Western Europe and North America and crystallized at a particular moment in their history. The quite different political experience of other peoples has given them other concepts of how to organize and rule their communities.

In the Muslim countries, some of these concepts have the compelling sanction of holy writ. The strict penalties imposed in Saudi Arabia for theft or violence against the person are portrayed in our media as barbarous and primitive, with little regard for statistics demonstrating their efficacy as a deterrent to crime. Our own penal systems have failed signally in this respect even in our own society. It is no accident that in another peninsula country, North Yemen, the republican government that overthrew the Zaidi imamate in 1962 at once abolished the use of leg irons for convicts and the taking of hostages—both practices associated with the previous regime—but was shortly obliged by the imperatives of public order to reinstate these penalties.

The failure to view Middle Eastern governments and their behavior in the light of their own political cultures is not confined to the news media. In a widely discussed book, an accredited historian has given an account of the assertion of control by the petroleum-exporting countries over their oil industries and the accompanying exponential rise in crude oil prices.[1] Implicit in the author's exposition is the conviction that the appropriate international order remains the one that prevailed under the balance-of-power system of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During that period, the consensus of a few European nations established the rules of international law, such that the peoples of Asia and Africa were viewed as legitimate objects of colonization and tutelage. The historian roundly condemns the Western governments' failure to perpetuate their oil companies' control of Middle Eastern oil resources, by armed force if necessary. In attributing motives to Middle Eastern leaders, he resolutely avoids an emotion-free adjective where an insulting one will serve. The result is a lively narrative, but one that in fact erects a barrier between the unwary reader and a sound understanding of why these events occurred.

The late Secretary of State Dean Acheson once remarked that the important thing in thinking about international affairs was not to make moral judgments or apportion blame but to understand the nature of the forces at work as the foundation for thinking about what, if anything, could be done. The forces at work in the Arabian Peninsula, or elsewhere in the Middle East, cannot be identified and analyzed by deduction from broad assumptions concerning the nature of Islam, the Arab mind, or traditional societies. One might argue, for example, that the single mortal threat faced by the Muslim rulers of the oil-rich Persian Gulf states is invasion by atheist Soviet military forces. Since the Muslim rulers are weak, it is assumed that they have no reasonable choice but to grant to the United States the strategic facilities it needs to save their necks

for them. Such reasoning ignores the vivid awareness in the Arab public that since the sixteenth century the economic, military, cultural, and political pressures against Arabia and Islam have come from the West. Furthermore, it ignores the inescapable fact that the loaded weapons currently pointed at Arabs are held in the hands, not of Russians, but of Israelis, Iranians, and other Arabs. In fact, these weapons are often of American origin, provided on concessionary terms for American purposes. These considerations impose strict limits on the extent of military collaboration the United States can expect from these Arab rulers if they are to remain in power.

The point can be illustrated by historical references. Saudi Arabia allowed the United States to build an airfield at Dhahran during World War II and, after the war, permitted its use as a U.S. Air Force logistical facility, primarily for refueling Strategic Air Command aircraft. No American armed personnel were stationed at Dhahran, and no missiles or other weapons were ever stockpiled there. By the late 1950s, Egypt's President Gamal Abd al-Nasser had electrified the Arab masses by obliging Britain to evacuate its strategic base at Suez. He mounted a propaganda campaign alleging that the American "base" at Dhahran was there to coerce the Arab states and to keep King Saud in power as an American puppet.

At the time, I was serving on the State Department's Arabian Peninsula desk and recall my anguish at the statements of senior officials of the White House, the Pentagon, and even the State Department referring to "our Dhahran airbase" instead of the correct "airfield." Saud's insistence that it was not an American *base* lost all credibility before the Arab public. Eventually, pressure extending into the Saudi royal family itself obliged him to deny servicing facilities for American military aircraft.

The United Nations Charter sets forth universal principles to guide conduct among nations: peace, self-determination of peoples, human rights, and so forth. These, however, offer no sure criteria for the formulation and appraisal of policy, since these slogans have such disparate and incompatible meanings to different peoples. In discussing Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, a pundit of an earlier time stated the case as well as it could be put today:

> They were plans for the settlement of a wholly invisible environment, and because these plans inspired all groups, each with its own private hope, all hopes ran together as a public hope. . . As you ascend the hierarchy in order to include more and more factions you may for a time preserve the emotional connection though you lose the intellectual. But even the emotion becomes thinner. As you go further away from experience, you go higher into generalization or subtlety. As you go up in the balloon you throw more and more concrete objects overboard, and when you have reached the top with some phrase like the Rights of Humanity or the World Made Safe for Democracy, you see far and wide, but

> you see very little. As the public appeal becomes more and more all things to all men, as the emotion is stirred while the meaning is dispersed, their very private meanings are given a universal application. Whatever you want badly is the Rights of Humanity.[2]

As a guide to policy, the forces at work in the Arabian Peninsula must be sought through systematic study of the aspects of its societies that influence their international behavior. Hence the importance of such essays as those presented in this volume, which contribute to the knowledge without which our policies toward the region risk being improvised reaction to imperfectly understood events. One of the papers in this volume examines the economic aid operations of the oil-producing countries. Three are devoted to Saudi Arabia, which naturally draws particular attention because of its preponderant size and its possession of one-fourth of the noncommunist world's oil reserves. One is concerned with Oman, a country with only modest petroleum resources, but whose strategic location and current willingness to cooperate with American military strategy lend it special significance. Another compares the two Yemens, which lack oil, but are important because of their demographic, geographic, and contrasting political features. Not treated in detail are the small Arab states on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Though all are members of the Arab League and of the global Islamic community, they vary markedly in demography, religious sect, economy, historical experience, and political outlook.

With less than 21 million people living in an area of about 1.15 million square miles (one-third the area of the United States), the Peninsula is sparsely populated. Much of its territory is desert, which without intensive investment of capital and technology is capable of supporting only modest numbers of nomadic herdsmen. The widely scattered oases blessed with perennial supplies of groundwater support settled communities of limited size. A prominent feature of the terrain is the L-shaped mountain system, which rises from a coastal plain of varying breadth, extends from the head of the Red Sea southward to the Bab al-Mandab, and then bends northeast along the Arabian Sea to Ras Musandam at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The highlands precipitate moisture, which is carried by the Indian Ocean monsoons as far north as the Saudi province of Asir. As a result, the southwestern regions of the Peninsula have historically been more densely settled than the more arid areas to the north and west. This distribution pattern has altered recently with the heightened economic activity stimulated by the oil revenues available to some of the desert countries.

The following table shows some recent data on area, population, per capita income, and literacy rate for the various states of the region. The population

figures must be treated with caution, as actual enumerations have been conducted in few of the countries, and other informed estimates deviate from those shown. The bare figures do not mean, furthermore, that there are 387,000 native Bahrainis, 9,828,000 Saudi Arabs, and so on, since these figures include immigrant workers who, in the case of Kuwait, far outnumber the indigenous population. Moreover, much of the migration takes place within the Peninsula, and one may well wonder whether the million or so North Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia, for example, are counted twice—once in the Kingdom and again at home.

DATA ON COUNTRIES OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

	Area (sq. mi.)	Population	Per capita income (U.S. dollars)	Literacy (percentage)
Saudi Arabia	830,000	9,828,000	7,370	15
Kuwait	6,880	1,356,000	17,270	60
Bahrain	258	387,000	5,460	40
Qatar	4,416	220,000	16,590	21
United Arab Emirates	32,278	1,040,000	15,590	25
Oman	82,030	890,000	2,970	10
South Yemen (PDRY)	128,587	1,907,000	500	27
North Yemen (YAR)	75,290	5,246,000	420	13

SOURCE: Based on *National Geographic Atlas of the World*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981).

Nor do the numbers show the ethnic diversity of the area. Among the native Arabs, the distinction between townsfolk and nomads has both social and political significance. Another dichotomy of historical importance exists between northern Arabs, who are reputed to be descendants of Adnan, and southern Arabs, said to be descended from Qahtan. In central Arabia, some tribes claim a more aristocratic status than their neighbors, and this influences relations among the ruling houses of the Persian Gulf states, some of which are of inland origin and of varying degrees of imputed nobility. Numerous non-Arab communities have been settled in the area for many generations, but still maintain distinctions from the general Arab population. These include certain tribes of North Yemen's coastal plain of remote Ethiopian ancestry, Persians in Bahrain and Kuwait, and the Baluchis and Shihuh of Oman.

Cultural characteristics vary within most of the Peninsula's countries. For example, the urbanites of Hijaz, Saudi Arabia's western province, pride

themselves on their superior knowledge and sophistication over the politically dominant Nejdis of the interior. They attribute their intellectual lead to the venerable centers of Islamic learning in the holy cities and their close contact with the outside world through the annual Muslim pilgrimage. In the 1960s, a university was founded at Jidda as a private venture by a group of wealthy Hijazi businessmen as a riposte to the government's opening of a university at Riyadh, in Nejd. (Permission to name the new university for the late King Abd al-Aziz was withheld for several years.)

Although the overwhelming majority of the population is Muslim, religion is not the powerful unifying force one might suppose, since the community is divided among rival sects with differing ideas regarding who should hold political power and how it should be used. Aside from the Ibadis of inner Oman, the basic division is between Sunni (orthodox) Islam and Shiism. Even among the Sunnis, there are different systems of sharia (canon law): the Hanbali rite predominates in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whereas the Sunnis of Yemen follow the Shafei school. Among the Shia, there are significant numbers of Ismailis in North Yemen and in the Saudi province of Asir. In Bahrain, Twelver Shiis compose more than half the population, presenting delicate problems to the Sunni ruling house. This Shia branch has substantial communities in other Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia's eastern province, where its adherents form a somewhat neglected and restive minority. The sect predominates in Iran, and the Islamic Republic now in power in Iran has made vigorous efforts to stir up its fellow Shiites across the Gulf against their rulers, who are all Sunnis.

The heterogeneity of these states is, of course, most striking in the area of economics. The discovery and development of petroleum resources beginning in the 1930s gave the countries adjoining the Persian Gulf wealth previously unimaginable. The Yemens, with a third of the Peninsula's population, remained as poor as ever. By the early 1980s Kuwait, not long ago a mud-brick fishing and trading village with a desert hinterland, enjoyed the world's highest per capita income. North Yemen, renowned in antiquity as "Arabia Felix" and medieval Islam as "Verdant Yemen," was now among the poorest of countries, with a per capita income less than one-fortieth that of Kuwait. Yemenis provide much of the manpower that enables the oil producers to apply their wealth to the construction of a modern infrastructure. The considerable volume of remittances these migrant workers send home is a mixed blessing. Yemen's productive capacity is expanding only slowly; marginal agricultural land is actually being taken out of production for lack of people to till it. The flow of currency has produced inflation and hardship for many Yemenis.

The governments of all these countries are committed to economic development and modernization. The oil-rich states are well aware that, however

large their reserves, the oil will eventually be exhausted. They recognize the need to provide alternate sources lest future generations fall back into poverty. (It should be noted that most of their development programs are heavily oriented toward petrochemical and other fossil-fuel-related industries. It remains a mystery how, in the absence of other natural resources, these countries will maintain prosperous, internationally competitive economies when the oil and gas run out.)

Development, whether industrial or agricultural, takes time, and the stage of modernization varies sharply among the Peninsula's countries. If we take the ratio of population to total bank deposits, both government and private, as a rough indicator of economic modernization, we arrive at some interesting results. Bahrain embarked on the path of development a half-century ago under the stimulus of oil production. Its oil reserves are nearly exhausted, but alternate sources of wealth have been created in the form of industry (aluminum smelting, oil refining, and petrochemicals), and shipping and financial services. In 1980 per capita bank deposits in Bahrain amounted to about $3,750. Oman did not begin to apply its similarly meager oil revenues to building its social and economic infrastructure until 1970, and its bank deposits were reported at $1,000 per capita a decade later.

The oil-less Yemens present a similar contrast. South Yemen inherited from the former protecting power, Britain, the modern port city of Aden, developed over a period of more than a century. At one point in the 1950s, Aden handled a volume of shipping second only to New York. Under the protectorate, some substantial land reclamation projects were completed, managed along agribusiness lines. By contrast, North Yemen took its first, halting, development steps in the early 1960s; the pace was severely hampered by protracted civil war and political instability. By 1980 the bank-deposit yardstick measured $85 for North Yemen, little more than half South Yemen's $165.[3]

It is now well understood that the process of development and modernization is not simply a matter of expanding a country's wealth while other factors remain static. It requires psychological transformations that place strain on social and political systems. In a non-Arab, but parallel, context, a visitor to Indonesia has given this impression of the resulting anomie in this Muslim, oil-producing country:

> The richer the country became, the better it was made to run, the easier it was for its creative side to be taken for granted, the easier it was for the new inequalities to show. And people could long for 1945, when everybody was equally poor and everybody had the same idea of what was right and wrong. In the town, as in the villages, every improvement made matters worse, made men more uncertain.[4]