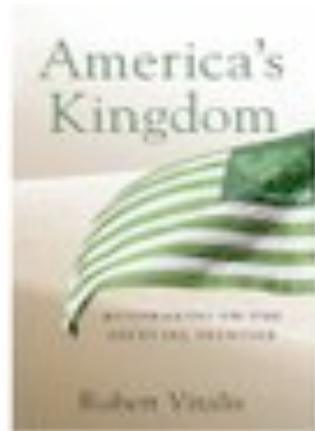


America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier
by Robert Vitalis (Stanford University Press).



A Qahwa Sada book forum.
December 2006
Edited by Marc Lynch

Made available under a Creative Commons license. All rights reserved by the original authors.

Table of Contents

- 3 Marc Lynch, Editor's Introduction
- 4 Robert Vitalis, *Writing America's Kingdom*
- 10 Toby Jones, *Reading America's Kingdom*
- 13 F. Gregroy Gause III, *Reading America's Kingdom*
- 16 Discussion

Editor's Introduction
Marc Lynch

Blogging has the potential to revolutionize scholarship and its relationship to the wider public sphere. Nowhere is that more true than in the genre known as the 'book review.' Traditionally, academic journals send books off to experts qualified to evaluate new publications in their fields, and the experts duly summarize, critique, praise, or challenge them. And then it ends. Authors may appreciate the praise, fume at the criticism, or rage over perceived misinterpretations – but, beyond the occasional (and ill-advised) aggrieved letter to the editor, have little recourse. The blog format offers another, more dialogic model for responding to important new academic books, one which allows authors and critics to interact, argue, and learn from one another in a public forum and leaving a public record. In December 2006, the Middle East Studies group blog Qahwa Sada (<http://www.qahwasada.com/>) hosted its first book forum discussion, focusing on America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier (Stanford University Press, 2006), by Robert Vitalis of the University of Pennsylvania. Discussants were Toby Jones, visiting professor at Swarthmore College and former Gulf analyst for the International Crisis Group, and F. Gregory Gause III of the University of Vermont. While a few outside commenters also participated, I have retained only one of those interventions in this roundup. In the future such public participation may emerge as another contribution to this new format for discussing scholarly books. For now, I am delighted to present this experiment in a blog-based book forum.

Writing America's Kingdom

Robert Vitalis

I want to thank Greg Gause, Toby Jones, and especially Marc Lynch for the chance to discuss my new book with three very sharp thinkers. What I will do to kick off the discussion is rehearse the book's main arguments, briefly, and the objectives in writing it. I also want to consider in a way that I wasn't able to in the book itself some steps in the crafting of it. For a website devoted to Middle East scholarship, the latter points might prove interesting and, ideally, useful. However, I also assume some, maybe most readers on this site want to know why a book about the 1940s and 1950s matters today and not just to professors and graduate students, how it helps us in understanding America in the Persian Gulf and in the world now. I'll tell you what I think, and then let's see what my colleagues say.

America's Kingdom is most basically about the organization of the labor process in the oil industry in Eastern Saudi Arabia during the time when the private U.S.-owned company known as ARAMCO was in charge of exploration and production, starting in the 1930s. My book identifies the racist order built by ARAMCO in Dhahran and the other company campsites for what it is, a Jim Crow system, meaning that its white American executives pursued a purposeful, planned project of discrimination and forced segregation. I show that firms generally in the U.S. mining industry organized the labor process in this way in, among other places, what was then Indian territory, Arizona, "New" Mexico, and so on, beginning in the 1860s and 1870s in the copper industry, and, a decade or two later in the newly emerging oil industry, and when American oil firms move beyond the Caribbean Basin (Mexico, Trinidad, Colombia, Venezuela) and start to explore for oil in the Gulf and its surroundings.

At stake was what I call the "racial wage." All firms paid miners, drillers, and other skilled and unskilled labor different wages according to race. And ending the racial wage became the issue that pitted the subordinate races against not only the white owners and managers but also the privileged caste of workers in strike after strike across the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The full panoply of Jim Crow institutions—segregated housing, differential access to services, let alone the degradation and humiliation of white supremacist thought—worked to buttress the labor control regime. The system was exported everywhere U.S. firms went, although it has not been noticed anywhere by anyone writing about oil in the past few decades, with one important exception. The historian Miguel Tinker Salas has been working on a similar project

in the case of the Creole (Exxon's subsidiary) camps in Maracaibo, Venezuela, when oil exploration began there in the 1920s.

I also explain the causes for, in this case, the halting and partial steps to dismantle the Jim Crow order inside the kingdom, which happens during the brief moment of a Saudi labor movement in the 1950s and what I call an incipient challenge to the hierarchy of the camps, the world oil market, and American hegemony launched for different reasons by a set of progressives in government and their allies in the royal family. It is a remarkable, wholly forgotten moment in modern Saudi Arabian history. In the last chapter of my book I tell the sad story of the end of this moment—a Saudi “revolution” is how more than one observer at the time referred to it—and the creation of what I call America's Kingdom—consolidation of the power of the coalition known as the House of Fahd, which still rules today.

What most analysts, journalists, and oil, business, and diplomatic historians have done until now is reproduce the company's propaganda unreflectively, when, for example, ARAMCO officials then and retirees now insist that the company led all others anywhere in its dedication to developing the kingdom, uplifting Arab workers, training them to take over the running of the oil industry, and the like. The reality is quite different. The firm's own records and the testimony of its top officials reveal that its competitors in Iraq and Iran (joint moved faster and further on all the dimensions that Saudi workers began to mobilize to change and that the small Saudi state-building class pressed ARAMCO to honor. I resurrect an explanation that was known at the time but has since been forgotten. To quote from the book,

While all three countries were monarchies, only Iran and Iraq had functioning parliaments, parties, and unions. Populist politics, which emphasized inclusion and redistribution, gained ground in both places after World War II, culminating in the famous nationalization of Anglo-Persian in 1951...and revolution in Iraq in 1958. Conditions for the nascent Saudi labor movement and the relative handful of officials who sought to move Saudi Arabia in a more inclusive and redistributive direction were, to understate the obstacle of absolute rule, inauspicious, and the firm there had a freer hand to deflect, ignore, and counter demands for fairness and human capital development.

Finally, therefore, I try to trace the origins of these myths themselves and analyze their affinity with ways in which many write, equally problematically, about the histories of firms and states more generally.

The path to overturning the foundational myth about ARAMCO began with reading the vast U.S. state department archive for the 1940s and

1950s (and later the 1960s), where we find detailed records of the strikes that rocked the Saudi oil frontier in those decades. Let me simply note that few other scholars have used these records, and those that have, notably Nate Citino and Sarah Yizraeli, all challenge conventional claims about Saudi state formation and U.S.-Saudi relations. It is hard not to. I wrote the first paper on these matters while on leave at Princeton's Davis Center for Historical Studies in 1995-1996 (published in 1999 and reprinted in the 2004 book I co-edited with Madawi al-Rasheed), which drew mainly on these records and the Mulligan Papers at Georgetown University, which comprise a partial set of company records taken from the kingdom by a retired employee. Like any archive, the Mulligan papers have to be used with great caution, and let's just say that all the new, rushed-to-press books in the past few years, designed to instruct us anew on the U.S.-Saudi special relationship, treat the materials a bit too reverentially. I eventually worked in seventeen different archival collections during the course of my research.

Just as important as the records themselves, I began a kind of tutorial that year with two historians at Princeton, Steve Aaron and Karen Merrill, who were new assistant professors specializing in the nineteenth and twentieth century American West. The connection with them began with Wallace Stegner, who I knew only as a guy who wrote a terrible history of ARAMCO's pioneer era, and they knew as one of America's greatest writers (he indeed is) and influential environmentalist who, they insisted, never wrote a book about oil (he indeed did). Those conversations led me to study the history of mining enterprise and the discovery of what I call the unbroken past of hierarchy across the nineteenth and twentieth century mining frontiers (and some readers will recognize my homage to the recently re-released, path-breaking book by Patricia Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*.)

I returned to Princeton University and commuted from there to the New School on a second leave in 1997-1998 to retrain in Afro-American studies with Kevin Gaines, Adolph Reed, and Vicky Hattam, hoping to develop a better understanding of the history of race and racism in the international order during the rise of American dominance or hegemony. I published two pieces on the history of race and international relations that I worked on during the fellowship year, before resuming work once more on America's Kingdom during a third and final leave at NYU's International Center for Advanced Study in 2002-2003. ICA was then running a three-year project on the Cold War as Global History. All these strands are woven together in a book that takes seriously the transnational turn pioneered by black theorists and what Dan Rodgers calls post-exceptionalist history writing.

As I came to understand more about why so many before me have gotten the story so wrong, I made it an objective of my book to explain how bound up our views of the world are with two constructs of the cold war. One is the belief that America is “exceptional,” which a lot of people think translates into “better” or “different” but I think Dan Rodgers gets it right when he says it is more as if we think America is insulated from processes that shape the world at large. The relevant example for my book is the idea that unlike all other great powers or would be great powers of the nineteenth and twentieth (and now twenty first) century, America has resisted the imperial temptation or the ancestors learned to get along without an empire or that the so-called neo-conservative cabal is just getting around to building an empire now in Iraq. The second construct that works basically like a powerful set of blinders on our ability to understand the world is what Toni Morrison calls the tradition of not noticing race. She calls it the “graceful and generous liberal gesture.” The norm against noticing is another construct of the Cold War.

The way I think this all works—to simplify things a little bit here—is that we have an exaggerated sense of time--the distance between the past and present—and space—the distance between something called home and all other places abroad. We might tell one story about the nineteenth century, and even acknowledge some troubled aspects of that “national” history, but as we do so we also distance ourselves from it. The past is always being transcended or obliterated or overcome. Then we believe there is some coherent nationally bounded story to be told about the United States that has intermittent and sporadic connections with some places and more continuous connection with some other places, all of which have coherent national stories of their own. There is even a kind of logic of comparison across all these different places with their distinct national trajectories (otherwise my colleagues who specialize in comparative politics would be in real trouble). So when I started working on the American West as part of my study of ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia, the historian of the Middle East I know best asked if it didn’t make more sense to look at the British empire in Africa? Others asked even more frequently why I wasn’t studying the British East India Company? Of course, these latter histories are also ones that specialists on the Middle East, including American-born and employed ones, are ones they are more likely to know than ones about American empire in the nineteenth-century West.

The goal I set for myself, therefore, was to write a book that tried to undo these conventions. As I put it in the Foreword,

America’s Kingdom shows why it is imperative that we tear down the wall between the 1940s and all that came before, and that we topple that other, more formidable wall, once understood

as dividing races and now as dividing nations or cultures, which protects the myth of an isolated and autonomous history of the United States of America.

Before I do what many or maybe most who are reading the page are anxious for me to do—to stop writing like a professor to other professors and say something about how the book matters for understanding US-Saudi relations today—I want to note for the record that I reject that distinction—it is invidious in fact—that is often made between the campus and the so-called real world. I think the most important thing my book can do—to the extent that readers come away after finishing it with a new view of the past than the one they started with—is to motivate them to do some work on their own in exposing the struts and bolts of hierarchy, as Toni Morrison puts it, in the present. The basic question to ask is what blinders continue to constrict our understanding about the world generally? The same question is relevant whether you are a student, professor, working person, retiree, history buff, bartender or political activist.

That said, the book demands that the activists work harder on understanding the international politics of oil, starting with the myth that nothing has changed in the decades since the 1950s and that oil companies still dominate Saudi Arabia or other Gulf producing states in the ways I write about (and if you didn't make this argument yourself or heard it at an antiwar rally, then spend a little time on line and you will find plenty of variants of this idea). Those days are long gone and the challenge is to work out how hierarchy is reinscribed today in the world economy, by whom, and to what end.

Lesson two, needless to say, is to trust nothing written about the U.S. – Saudi relationship by the pundits who play geostrategists on television, the second rate scholars, ex-diplomats, adjunct fellows, and the like that are writing from the Upper East Side and DuPont Circle. Do you recall the early days after 9/11, the handwringing by the kingdom's "friends" in response to the "Saudis are our enemies" line of the Christians, Israel-first types, Rand consultants, and spies-turned-authors? Check the archival records yourselves. See who was arguing that the so-called special relationship was suddenly in crisis, allegedly, for the first time since Franklin Delano Roosevelt met Ibn Saud on board the U.S.S. Quincy in the Great Bitter Lake (the location of which the Council on Foreign Relation's Gulf expert is still not quite sure of). My book tells you why 1. I never believed any of this talk and why you should not have either, and 2. Why those same prophets have no good explanation now for why it is business as usual between the United States and the Kingdom. Hint: it doesn't have anything to do with the Carlyle Group.

Finally, there are plenty of so-called experts out there who think that the only thing that stands between the United States and a trouble free relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Middle East states is Israel and the influence of the so-called Jewish lobby. There are people who have argued the same thing every decade since the 1940s. My book shows why it wasn't true then and, by extension, why it isn't true now, no matter how many times the Arabists, lobbyists, and energy consultants repeat the myth.

Reading America's Kingdom

Toby Jones

Bob, your new book *America's Kingdom* is a remarkable achievement. In fewer than 300 pages of elegantly and smartly argued prose, you turn the standard approach to writing the history of U.S.-Saudi relations – as well as the history of the formation of the modern Saudi Arabian state – on its head. *America's Kingdom* is a brilliant intervention in Saudi studies and will hopefully facilitate equally critical and insightful work in the future.

In spite of my enthusiasm that this may happen, we'll have to wait and see. As you would no doubt acknowledge, although the investigative work needed to write *America's Kingdom* required work in seventeen archives (!), the story was there to be told if earlier scholars had only done the necessary mining of the sources. I'm not sure if their inability to do so reflected choice, laziness or more likely, as you suggest, the Cold War era failure to notice things such as race and racism.

Even for those scholars who will no longer be taken in by the claims of exceptionalism, other challenges remain for critical examinations of Saudi Arabia and/or the American role there. Sources remain hard to come by, particularly with regard to the Saudi side of things. I was fortunate enough to get into the kingdom for ten months in 2003 to carry out research. Even so, it took luck and the assistance of Saudi citizens sympathetic to my project – and critical of the Saudi state – to find the most interesting and important resources for my own work.

One of the things I learned in Saudi Arabia is that a remarkable parallel to the story you tell of ARAMCO is the presence of a powerful sense of Saudi exceptionalism. Here, your application of Dan Rodgers' formula, which in this instance might be restated as Saudi Arabia seeing itself as "insulated from processes that shape the world at large", would be appropriate. The volume you edited with Madawi al-Rasheed, *Counter-Narratives*, touches on this to some extent. But I might go a step further and make that claim that the history of race, state-building, and imperial power in Saudi Arabia in the period after *America's Kingdom* ends – say after 1960 – appears to parallel the American story in Saudi Arabia in very interesting ways. I would even argue that to some extent the Saudi approach to the challenges of governing a population that does not see the state as legitimate is to some degree derivative of ARAMCO practices and policies. Hopefully, we can return to this later in the week.

For now, I am compelled by your most basic premise that *America's Kingdom* shatters several myths, the most important of which is the long-unchallenged claim advanced by the giant American oil conglomerate ARAMCO and its chroniclers that Americans were a force

for good in Saudi Arabia. In a rousing bit of myth-busting, you succeed in showing how ARAMCO fits neatly into a long tradition of American corporate racism, in which the oil giant constructed an elaborate discriminatory residential and professional system that institutionalized the worst abuses of the Jim Crow order.

Like me, however, you probably would not be surprised if few readers were shocked to learn that American oil companies were hardly good citizens abroad. After all, we live in an era of hyper-cynicism about big-business. Even so, it is impossible not to be outraged (if this is still possible) to learn in grim detail the wrenching degree to which ARAMCO not only relied on race to order its operations in Saudi Arabia, but also the ways in which company managers ignored and sought to circumvent those (the Saudi victims of racism) who challenged its discriminatory practices.

For me, one of the most revealing aspects of this sordid history is that ARAMCO managers understood well the racist order they constructed – it was a deliberate act – and were even embarrassed enough about it to excise references to their discriminatory practices from the company’s promotional materials, including company histories and even a feature-length film. Not once, did their embarrassment and clear understanding of wrong-doing lead to a reversal in company policy. Not once.

Worse, by the mid-1950s when the company began to face sustained periods of labor unrest and challenges to its racism, ARAMCO stood firm and sought ways to avoid solving the specific problems their discriminatory policies were generating. As you note, ARAMCO managers deployed Cold War rhetoric to mask the substance of the grievances levied against them, deflecting criticism by charging their critics with being communists and agitators for the overthrow of the Saudi and American political order. Given that this was the same tactic used to smear Civil Rights advocates in the United States, this does not come as much of a surprise. It is interesting to note that the Saudi state also came to mimic the same line, charging dissenters with sympathy for communism as a method for undermining their potential appeal, not to mention as a pretext for cracking down on them. In this respect, American Cold War logic and discourse proved highly malleable and portable.

As important as the details of the practice of racism on the ground are in your recounting, America’s Kingdom is perhaps more important for what it suggests about the role of ARAMCO and racism in the shaping of American political power abroad and what we might come to think of as American empire. It is clear from your account that American “hegemony” in Saudi Arabia did not conform to our typical perception of

how empire works. In the kingdom, American political interests followed ARAMCO and, in fact, those interests were subordinate to ARAMCO for several decades. It is beyond dispute that ARAMCO and its racist ways played the paramount role in shaping not only American policy but also the Saudi political order.

You point out the fascinating ways that this took shape as well as the important ways in which Saudi state-builders and leaders pushed back against American power. Saudi Arabia proved no mere puppet and the United States proved no Great Britain. And yet, at the end of the day, American hegemony in Saudi Arabia was no less nefarious than those formal empires that dominated the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. As you show the Americans played no small role in undermining the kingdom's potential transition to a more liberal political order at the end of the 1950s, even if the U.S. did not actually orchestrate the ascension of the highly bureaucratized and institutionalized authoritarian political system that followed.

In later years, in the 1960s and well into the 1970s, other American organizations and firms actually helped strengthen the authoritarian character of the Saudi state (not to mention Saudi sovereignty itself) by bolstering the operation of various police forces and governing ministries. And, given that the ruling al-Sa'ud came to rule over communities and territories that despised them, it may be true that even if the story of ARAMCO and the United States in Saudi Arabia is not one of formal empire, it may well be a story in which they trained the kingdom's leaders how to maintain one themselves.

Reading America's Kingdom

F. Gregory Gause III, University of Vermont

I am tempted to say that the only criticism I can aim at Robert Vitalis' excellent book is that his publishers chose not to use the blurb they solicited from me on the dust jacket. I've lost the e-mail in which I composed it, so I will just summarize here. I think there are four reasons why people interested in America and the myth of its exceptionalism, the history of American foreign policy, race relations, Saudi Arabia, ARAMCO, the oil industry, the Persian Gulf and all sorts of other stuff should read this book. First, Bob takes on really big and important questions about American exceptionalism, American foreign policy and the oil industry. Second, he does so while staying very close to his sources, many of which have never before been utilized in scholarly work. Third, he contributes invaluable to our understanding of Saudi Arabia and Saudi-American relations. Fourth, this is one of the best-written academic books I have ever read. Bob says he wants his readers to take it to the shore (as they say in Philadelphia; the rest of us would say the beach). This is one academic book that actually makes good beach reading.

The big target of the book is the myth that somehow the United States and American companies were different from the bad old colonial countries like Great Britain and France in their dealings in the "Third World." Bob devastates that contention through his careful examination of ARAMCO, which had always put itself forward as an example of how American business dealings with Third World governments and societies were of a higher standard than those of the colonialists. Suffice it to say that ARAMCO World magazine will not be publishing excerpts of this book. Bob shows that ARAMCO basically and unapologetically recreated the racial hierarchies of American mining towns in the eastern Arabian desert. It did next to nothing to advance Saudis in the company. Its labor practices were antediluvian, making Anglo-Iranian's treatment of its Iranian workers (you know, the ones who supported Mossadegh's nationalization in 1951) look good. I am a more credulous person than Bob, but even I wondered as a graduate student studying Saudi Arabia if the stories about ARAMCO as good corporate citizen in Saudi Arabia were all that believable. Nobody can think that any more after this book.

The other big contribution, to my mind, of the book is its treatment of Saudi politics and the Saudi-American relationship in the 1950's and early 1960's. Bob says that this is a book about America, it just takes place somewhere else. But he helps us to understand this fascinating period in Saudi history much better than anyone else who has written about it (with the possible exception of Sarah Yizraeli). His target here is the dominant story of "Faisal the reformer," and he very successfully

calls that story into question. He also makes it clear that the belief that Saudi-American relations were smooth and uncontentious from the arrival of the first Standard Oil of California workers in the 1930's to the oil embargo of 1973 is groundless. Bob is not the first to take on this bit of the conventional wisdom (Safran's book on Saudi foreign policy treated it most directly), but he does an excellent job of showing the ups and downs of Washington's relationship with Riyadh during the period.

So, being an academic, I now have to raise some critical points about the book. Here is one:

I take Bob's general point that the whole "Faisal as reformer; Saud as dissolute idiot" story is bunk. Faisal was not a political reformer. Saud did appoint the most progressive cabinet in Saudi history in 1960. But I am not sure that Bob has provided us with a sufficient understanding of how that internal Saudi political fight worked out the way it did. First, the reformers who are the heroes of Bob's story here (Abdullah Tariki and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Muammar) really did not have much of a political base. I think that they were promoted by Saud in an effort to find allies against Faisal. Once he no longer needed them, they were gone. So I am not sure that they could have accomplished the kinds of changes the Bob implies they could, including building institutions for popular representation in Saudi politics. Also, one could make the case that Faisal's opposition to these guys was not simply the result of his fears of reform (though that would be a part of it). Faisal probably suspected the reformers of being pro-Nasser, and I think he was probably right to do so. (Bob knows the record here better than I; I just raise the points and am open to evidence that I am wrong.) Given that the Saudi ruling elite had plenty to fear from Nasser and Nasserism, Faisal's stance was understandable, even if you do not like the normative implications.

Second, I think Bob misses what might be the essential dynamic in the internal Saudi maneuvering of this period. Saud had lost most of his family allies by 1960, a fact which Bob more than adequately documents. He was left with Talal and the other Free Princes. As a result, or maybe this was part of a previous plan, Saud relied more and more on his own sons in government. There were fears among the other brothers that he intended to institutionalize primogeniture, passing rule on to one of his sons and cutting out the brothers. You do not need to be a tech'ed up rat choicer to figure out that this fear would drive the rest of the family to oppose Saud.

Third, Faisal was no political reformer. But he did seem to have a better grasp on fiscal realities than did Saud. Given how much trouble other governments have gotten into when they had to go to the "international community" for help to pay their bills, Faisal's parsimonious ways with

the state budget might have been what Saudi Arabia needed at the time. Bob provides evidence from contemporary observers that Faisal did not rein in the princes; he just cut the government budget. That seems like good self-interested politics for a Saudi leader at that time.

I also want to challenge mildly a point in Bob's posting about the Saudi-American relationship now. He said that he never thought that there was a real crisis in the relationship after 9-11, because there had been problems before (the biggest, the oil embargo of 1973-74, was outside the book's chronological focus) and the fundamental Saudi security dependence on the U.S. and the U.S. interest in Saudi oil always overcame those problems. I do not disagree with that analysis, but I think that in the post-9-11 period it was touch and go as to whether that dynamic could be sustained. Not because of the Saudi side, which quickly fell in line with American policy in the "global war on terror." Bob frequently cites Toni Morrison's insight about the power of "not noticing." On the American side, the entire relationship has been built around the principle of "not noticing," or at least the fact that most Americans either do not notice or choose not to notice what happens in Saudi Arabia. For a brief time (I think it is over) after 9-11, lots of Americans were noticing Saudi Arabia, and did not like what they saw. There was a risk that there might have been a reassessment in Washington of the Saudi-American relationship – if other things had happened: Iraq had gone better, Kerry had won in 2004. None of that happened, and the relationship muddles on. But I do not think it was nearly as much of a sure thing as Bob does.

So much for mild disputation. This is a great book. It certainly has changed the way I think about Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-American relationship. It has changed the way I will present those subjects in my classes. It is my nominee for the Albert Hourani book award at MESA next year, given to the best book written in the previous year in the field. (Too bad I am not on the committee.) I know it was a hard slog writing it. Thanks for the effort, Bob.

Discussion

Posted by: Bob Vitalis | December 05, 2006 at 11:57 AM

In a section of my framing comments that was deleted in order to talk about how the book matters today, to bloggers and not just professors (although the two identities are clearly not mutually exclusive), I said that even if we can't overturn exceptionalism we can still write Saudi history and political economy better than we have done until now (not least by reading those who did it well before us). But what I said was

"It is hardly surprising that many otherwise smart people would get the history wrong. It is, after all, only about thirty years since the American historical profession began to acknowledge what the giant of the twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois, had revealed to be the myths about Reconstruction in the United States. It is only a generation since the creation of Black Studies departments in America and the desegregation of faculty in elite U.S. institutions. And only a generation since writers and literary critics such as Toni Morrison launched their brilliant attacks on racism in the history of letters, the construction of literary canons, and the criticisms worth making about the canonical texts. The social science disciplines are now facing the same kind of challenge. And with new studies en route to publication by people like Tim Mitchell, Katayoun Shafiee, Michael Dobe, Nate Citino, and, not least, Toby Jones himself, the historiography of oil and state formation in the Middle East that imagines American companies more like development missions than like rent-seekers is unlikely to be taken seriously much longer."

So more than a nod to Toby and others who might lead us out of the desert.

That said, I think--and my girlfriend backs me up on this one--I introduce the discussion of exceptionalism not with American history but Saudi Arabian history, using the anecdote of the prince who imagines Saudi Arabia being dropped from the sky rather than as emerging as part of the historical process. I suggest when that particular kind of Saudi exceptionalism narrative arises and why.

I think though you raise the important point that telling the story of institution building and institutional change after ARAMCO's moment is over, as the Utah sociologist Thomas O'Dea wrote, presciently in the mid-1960s, is the task at hand. And you hint at the answer. The institutions are in part borrowed and adapted certainly. But, and this is the part that I feel completely inadequate to handle so I am counting on you, we need an account of what is new or separate from what the Americans brought to Dhahran.

Sometimes when I give talks on this subject people--John Lewis Gaddis for one!--want to point out that the Saudis are busy overseeing a hierarchical order of their own creation. Of course they are. I say so in my book. I just also say that that fact tells us nothing about the order the Americans constructed--as if it were in response to Saudi needs or wants or desires, as some before me have tried to claim.

Hierarchy is the problem that we need to be wrestling with much more seriously than we have for a while now.

Posted by: Bob Vitalis | December 05, 2006 at 09:44 AM

Greg: I am going to refrain from commenting in great detail, if only to avoid putting anyone foolhardy enough to read our exchanges to sleep (and maybe that is the solution for me--go read comments on someone else's site, since I am writing this from Seattle where I have come to give a talk and woke around 4 a.m. sigh). On the other hand I am geeky enough to see--my eyes have been opened--the value of places on the web where folks who care about the arguments in books and articles can talk about them. Imagine, a seminar where everyone has actually done the reading (and they are all a lot smarter than you!) So a bit of an answer or two answers.

First, on fiscal reform. What I think is true is that Saud basically continues down the road paved by his father. The kingdom was in arrears throughout the 1940s and 1950s, spending more than they earned in oil revenues, borrowing from merchants and even better banks and so on.

What leads to a bit of a crisis is the shock or extra costs associated with the 1956 war.

Still, as I note in my book, the IMF guys show up and Saud signs on to the plan. There is no reason to think that, had Saud not been forced to cede control of day-to-day running of the government to Faisal that the IMF plan wouldn't have been followed for the next few years. And it is not the fiscal problems that drove the process of Faisal taking over, of course. So, as I said, let's give Faisal half credit for staying the course, but then let's remember that his doing so leads to defections from Saudi merchants but also the Americans, and the beginning of the criticism of Faisal for being clueless about development. To be cynical about it everyone wants the Saudis at that moment to put their financial house in order and yet somehow spend more on development, buying of US goods, subsidizing the Syrians or the Jordanians, bid for regional hegemon

status against Nasser. The prescriptions to do both are incoherent to say the least.

Second, about the chances for political reform. I was careful not to argue about prospects for success, not least since I tell the story of the reformers' defeat. But what is interesting to me is the moment itself, that there were folks openly organizing, writing planning documents, imagining a different political order, and so on. It is a moment I think before the kind of politics that we are now familiar with get locked in. Steffan Hertog's work I think will help to show this (as does the great and unfortunately unread Yizraeli book) This is also why it is important to go back to commentators at the time rather than repeat what has now become the way too simple stories of two guys, one a drunk, the other abstemious (Muhammad Heikal had lots to say about this one in the mid-1950s by the way) that books all repeat now like a mantra--and I am reading Larry Wright's Looming Tower right now. Go look at all the errors in his short discussion of this same moment.

What is true though, too, is that at least some reforms were implemented, namely the system of local elections that are put in place. We don't have the story of that process straight yet unfortunately. But what we might say about it is once in place the regime it takes work to undo. Same goes with the national planning process--on the economic side--that Talal and allies begin to build.

Posted by: Tom Lippman | December 07, 2006 at 10:59 AM

I want to congratulate Bob Vitalis on the publication of this most interesting and provocative book, even though I take quite a drubbing in it. That's OK, I don't take it personally; Bob must know that I don't accept his basic premise -- which is that the Americans in Saudi Arabia were historically indistinguishable from the Belgians in the Congo or the Spanish in Peru. I do however take exception to the assertion on Page 17 that I chose to ignore the issues he raises rather than confront them. There is an entire chapter in my book Inside the Mirage devoted to the issues of American racism, discrimination in housing and promotions, and local workers' resentment. Bob may regard my treatment as shallow or biased -- I don't doubt that he does -- but I did not "ignore" these matters.

Posted by: Bob Vitalis | December 08, 2006 at 07:41 AM

Tom: You "take a drubbing" (I would have said some of your ideas are criticized) in my book because your own is unreliable on matters of fact and, in ways I make painfully clear, unconvincing as an account of the era and the events, relationships, and institutions that underpin it. We

get some clues in your post as to why that might be the case. That is, you are just not that good a reader, and in one of the matters here, dishonest, to be blunt about it.

1

You make the following claim: That you “don't accept” what you say is my “basic premise -- which is that the Americans in Saudi Arabia were historically indistinguishable from the Belgians in the Congo or the Spanish in Peru.” This seems to be your explanation for the drubbing.

Readers now have my statement here of what the basic premise of my book actually is. They have two additional accounts by others. And they can pick up the book and judge for themselves. No one says anything like what you think you see on the printed page because it is nowhere to be found, not least because I hold no belief of the kind. You are dishonest because I told you as much in our one phone conversation about these matters some two years ago. I also tried to explain to you what I actually think. Maybe you just don't remember or weren't taking notes. Then again, it is not hard to find my various articles, talks, and so on and read them.

I speak of the “American Empire” in the nineteenth century when writing broadly about the episodes of conquest, war, extermination of native American peoples, the Supreme Court's designation of the Cherokee as domestic dependencies, and the like. In doing so I follow the great historian and writer for Harper's from the 1930s, Bernard DeVoto, and his heirs, men like Richard White and women like Patty Limerick. But perhaps you still prefer the version of the past that was taught in cold war civic classes, those that spoke of manifest destiny, empty continents, and civilizing missions.

In turning to write in detail about one firm, ARAMCO, in one place, the kingdom, beginning in the 1930s, I tend to speak about “economic imperialism” rather than about empire, as did—as I show—the New York Times, the first US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, his British counterpart, and this country's first Saudi Arabian expert at State when discussing ARAMCO, and President Harry Truman when discussing the actions of British and American oil companies in Mexico around the same time. The only comparisons I make are between American policy in its Caribbean protectorates, Salvador and Panama in the 1920s, and Great Britain's policies in its Middle East protectorates. Here I followed the lead of the Harvard Ph.D. who headed the research program of New York's American Foreign Policy Association. But I do note how FDR's government took over some of the obligations of the British imperial power toward its client, Ibn Saud, during World War II. I say nothing in America's

Kingdom about King Leopold in Belgium let alone about sixteenth-century Spain.

What I told you in our phone conversation, when you first accused me of this bizarre idea, is that I believe it makes little sense to imagine and compare distinct national styles of empire, and the example I used for you was the British Empire. So British practices in the 1700s I said are different from British practices in the twentieth century. I said it made more sense to think structurally in terms of epochs or eras, and one of the goals would be to explain what accounts for the changing face of empire over time. This view is woven into the narrative I have crafted in America's Kingdom.

You can accept or reject this way of thinking about the problem (if you understand it) but, once more, I make no argument about equivalency of any sort across national imperial styles. I make an argument about the similarity of practices by oil and other mining enterprises, focused on the racial wage system (which you say nothing about) across about a century of history in and outside the North American continent, a proof that I think goes far in countering the idea that when the Americans get to Dhahran they are busy pioneering some new style "partnership in progress and development." The same system was in use by non-American-owned firms as well.

2

You write "I do however take exception to the assertion on Page 17 that I chose to ignore the issues he raises rather than confront them. There is an entire chapter in my book *Inside the Mirage* devoted to the issues of American racism, discrimination in housing and promotions, and local workers' resentment. Bob may regard my treatment as shallow or biased -- I don't doubt that he does -- but I did not "ignore" these matters."

Readers are invited to turn to that chapter and compare our accounts, so that they can gauge how well your claims stand up to scrutiny and, to use an old-fashioned word, the facts. I'd say shallow, yes, but certainly no more biased than my or any other account. That is, I don't think about things as biased or unbiased. American Journalists do, and it is a peculiar norm of your profession.

As I said, though, you are just not that careful a reader. What I actually wrote is

"And in 2004 the ex-Washington Post journalist Thomas Lippman would simply ignore the inconvenient facts of Saudi protests against American discrimination rather than wrestle honestly with the argument." So, nowhere in your book can we find an account of what the leaders of the 1953 strike were arguing for and against. Worst of course is that there is

no account at all of the many other strikes before and after, and not just by Saudis, but by all segments of the labor force, against the Jim Crow system. To read Lippman, one wouldn't know that a decade and a half of protest ever took place. And the argument you ignore is mine, not the fact of racism, which you explain by resort to the old Myrdalian idea, and that is indeed unconvincing, for reasons I show.

In the world of scholarship, we read carefully, consider the strongest arguments of those we disagree with, and attempt where we can to undermine them. That is how knowledge advances (not that I am overly-idealistic about these matters). In your world, by contrast, one sees or imputes or detects the hidden, secret premise in books and the ideological leanings of people, hence calling me a Marxist (when Toby Jones asked you why you ignored the main arguments of my work on ARAMCO), which would amuse the few actual Marxists I know given that I have written a book that never once uses the concept of class or talks about the needs of capitalism and the like. You do the equivalent of what Michael Moore likes to do in his movies, and you are about as reliable a guide as he is.

Anyway, readers of books, including Gause and Jones and many, many others are smart. They will read what I actually write rather than making up what I don't, so they will see that I attempt to write in the tradition of the great American progressive historians, Charles Beard and W. E. B. Du Bois, and the greatest of the twentieth century students of American empire, William Appleman Williams. These same readers will easily be able to determine who has produced the better, more coherent, and compelling account of life in the ARAMCO camps in the 1940s-1960s.

Posted by: Toby Jones | December 08, 2006 at 04:54 PM

Greg, you mentioned in your comments that Tariki and ibn Muammar probably did not have much of a political base in Saudi Arabia. If that is true, then your conclusion that they could not "have accomplished the kinds of changes the Bob implies they could, including building institutions for popular representation in Saudi politics" is likely right. But I wonder if this is in fact a fair characterization of popular sentiment in the kingdom. In the end, because we have so little evidence, it will be hard to know. The absence of widespread organization or any substantive demonstration of public political interest seems to strengthen your argument. Even Bob notes that Iraqi and Iranian laborers received a better deal than their Saudi counterparts partly because they were better able and did successfully organize. But the absence of organization outside ARAMCO camp did not mean that (some) Saudi citizens in far-flung communities did not have strong feelings about local and national affairs or that they would did not support a

more inclusive or representative polity. It is impossible to know what this might have meant long term, because the Saudi state grew increasingly capable of snuffing out and crushing any potential opposition or political alternative.

In the Eastern Province – and perhaps this is not a representative case considering most residents there were/are Shiite – the local press in the 1950s was full of criticism of the state (not so much of ARAMCO, although some) and support for Arab nationalism. The frustration and political ideas expressed in the pages of periodicals such as *Akhbar al-Dhahran*, which first operated from 1954 to 1956 and was closed for calling for education for girls (Bob, this closure happened under Saud's and not Faisal's watch), showed that both the paper's columnists and a large number of op-ed contributors supported exactly the kinds of politics that Tariki, et al articulated at the heights of power. While much of the political ranting contained in the paper was immature and only emerging, it was passionate, well articulated, and seemed to be widely held or at least representative throughout the Eastern Province. Empirically, the example of *Akhbar al-Dhahran* is not enough to draw sweeping conclusions about the country more generally, but it is important.

Bob, I fully support your argument that Faisal was not a political reformer or a developer in the best sense of those words. You do a very nice job of demolishing that particular myth and along with Yizraeli restore some sensibility about both his and Saud's place in Saudi history. But I think there is another way to tell the story of development in the 1950s and 1960s that while not inconsistent with your accounting, is nevertheless different from it. I also want to point out that there is some slippage in our discussion and perhaps in America's Kingdom as well about what development, modernization, and reform actually are. I might be wrong here, but I don't think Bob ever really defines development in any substantial way, except to note that ARAMCO and the US government had very strong beliefs about whether Saud or Faisal were pursuing it earnestly enough. This matters because I argue that Saud and Faisal did care a great deal about using science and technology to master space, nature, and people as well as to strengthen/create a national economy, and so on. In fact, in this respect, they were following the tradition of their father who first brought in Karl Twitchell several decades earlier to explore and harness the Arabian Peninsula's water resources.

I see little difference between Saud and Faisal, especially on the issue of development and what they believed its appropriate role to be. I suggest that neither had any particular interest in pursuing development/modernization in a manner that was consistent with

American expectations nor in service to Saudi society generally. But, I think that was at least partially deliberate. While they both demonstrated a keen understanding of what the Americans thought development could and should achieve, those principles were not consistent with their own political objectives – which was shoring up their own personal power first and the secure sovereignty of the royal family second. There were a number of technological and scientific projects, some undertaken by ARAMCO and others contracted out to foreign firms by the Saudi government, undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s that were intended to strengthen Riyadh's political reach and power.

Posted by: Bob Vitalis | December 10, 2006 at 05:25 PM

On Toby's Comment (Prospects for a Different Order, Akhbar al-Dhahran, Saud v Faisal, and Development)

Once again (and this time on a train to Lewistown, PA) I am struck by how great it would be to read new books collectively and to read what folks as good as Greg and Toby have to say about them. In this case, there are others well-placed to enlighten, including Madawi, Abd al-Muhsin al-Akkas, Abd al-Aziz al-Fahad, Stefan, Robert Lacey (that book holds up!), and the Tel Aviv School as I refer to to them. And there are at least ten other books I'd like to be reading and seeing smart people discuss.

But on to some points

1

For all the reasons I suggest in my book—the presentism of the 1970s generation of scholars, the money that was being spent to consolidate a particular account of the past, the lack of access to sources, and so on (but also see 3. below)—we have tended to accept the myths rather than think hard enough about the state building process in the first couple of decades of oil development. You can see this again by looking at Tom Lippman's and Rachel Bronson's (especially the first draft of the book before she got my critique via Lindsay, but that is another story) books where it is the same old stupid Saud, brilliant Faisal (I told Lindsay in fact that the Council would never sanction such a simple-minded story about politics in any other place on the globe). The moment was a relatively open one that we have imposed a (too simple) narrative on retrospectively. In fact what you see someone like the NY Times reporter, Dana Adams Schmidt doing, is trying it out, first with Saud as the star (when they were still even acknowledging Tariki, Talal, Wahba, Bin Muammar, and others) and then with Faisal taking over the role.

Institutions were not decaying ala Chaudhry (who, to acknowledge the contribution, is too smart and interesting to buy into the Saud v Faisal story. Her predecessors are people like Lackner, Islam and Kavoussi, al-Naqeeb, with their interests in regions, class formation, and so on). Rather institutions were emerging. Yizraeli and now Hertog are are best guides on some of this, and many of the materials I uncovered support this point, just to name one source, the O'Dea report (and those guys at Utah should protect it! It is a tiny treasure).

We also shouldn't lose sight of the significance of the wider currents shaping the kingdom in a moment when Nasserism, Bathism, and Communism are all in play in people's ideas about the present and future.

You didn't need "classes" or vast "coalitions" to change the future course of events either. Military coups were by all means possible (but the Americans were vigilant! And perhaps, as I suggest, some of the nationalists took that crazy talk about the Americans being behind the Nasserist project way too seriously, and seeking American support).

Segueing into my discussion of Saud v Faisal, while we can't get into their heads obviously, the documentary record shows Faisal in particular engaged with Nasserism in some sense early perhaps because people close to him were. Who knows? But the Americans saw Faisal more as their enemy and Saud more as their ally up through around 1958 (especially once the Onassis deal is scrapped). They attributed many of what they saw as anti-US actions to F and his clients, including Tariki. So the censorship of Akhbar al-Dhahran (and I agree, a great source) has to be considered carefully along with other steps domestically and internationally when trying to figure out who is behind the repression. The Americans though tended to see Faisal generally as more of an architect of repression at any moment, and some of their own informants of course support this, and Saud as the guy buying the tribes and so on.

2.

On Saud v Faisal, my point is not to switch them around to make Saud the hero and Faisal the um goat. I fully agree with Toby that there aren't any real differences in their outlooks, and I say as much, through some of the sources I used to make this particular point. (Both though are more um enlightened then their father, to betray a prejudice, and to get all those Abd al-Aziz as wise desert warrior and leader of his "people" fans agitated). What is most interesting, and what underpins the writing of chapter 8, is the fact that we have told this way too simple story for so long. And what I try to show is that depending on the moment, early 1950s, mid 1950s, 1960, etc. it is being told variously about one or the other as good guy and bad guy, and who gets the good guy crown depends basically on who is seen as serving or not US and/or ARAMCO

interests. This is incontrovertible and, as I suggest in the book, a pattern that can be seen in the westerners' various accounts of Egyptian politics and personalities too in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is always fun, for instance, to see Caffery and other Americans lauding King Farouk's vision rather than...well...you know... carrying on about him being fat and lascivious (the version that Larry Wright now reproduces in *Looming Tower*) Jeez. Imagine a book that explains US politics and foreign policy after the cold war primarily in terms of someone's penchant for blow jobs from his interns.

If the two, Faisal and Saud, basically share the same outlook but at the same time keep switching positions and arguments, well there is more going on here. Yes, they are jockeying for power, and that matters, and Greg and others continue to provide good grounds for keeping this aspect of the decade in the forefront of our analyses, but when they are switching, that is a signal too that the story has to be complicated. We have tended to complicate it primarily in terms of the king's and crown prince's reactions to "foreign policy shocks" (the Safran school?) and so on, but that is only part of the story. We need to build (although I hate to adopt political science simplifications like these) a "domestic politics" component more centrally, and I try what I can do with the evidence I uncovered to do so. Wouldn't you have loved to be at the Yamama hotel during those strategy sessions I report with Muammar and others? Someone really ought to get Shaykh Mustafa Wahba to talk for the record about this remarkable moment (and get Hisham Nazer and others to talk for the record about Tariki but, in the meantime, watch for Muhammad al-Sayf's forthcoming biography).

And some smart graduate student ought to take the transnationalist turn of those like Dan Rodgers, Gilroy and Brent Edwards, among others, to reframe the history of the Arab World in the long decade of the 1950s. Dudes! Now that would be the book that would replace Fouad Ajami's *Arab Predicament* on my shelf. There were many amazing thinkers and moments we still don't know enough about, like Tariki's encounter with Bustani at the Arab Oil Conference. Ideas, films, books, development projects, labor migration.... Ahmad Osman in the kingdom building the airport that Minoru Yamasaki designed in Dhahran before going on to design the Twin Towers.

3. On Development. Toby, I would politely resist your suggestion about defining what real development actually is. I see why you would care about that in particular. But the criticism may also suggest a misreading or more likely my failure to convey what I was up to in that crammed last chapter with enough clarity.

Anytime the Americans were pissed off at either Faisal or King Saud they offered one of two basic criticisms. So, as we saw, when King Saud was busy building ministries, the university, renovating the holy sites (and Larry Wright is way off on his account of this one, for you geeks out there! 1950? With Talal as minister? Fact checking alert), subsidizing the Syrians, paying off the Egyptians, the tribes, and so on, and while doing so he has done something to earn the wrath of the administration, well then it is, oh my god, we can't believe it, the kingdom is in arrears! He better get the house in order. Particularly when ARAMCO is cutting off the spigot too, even while it was, as I suggested a few posts ago, the way the fiscal regime worked generally under Abd al-Aziz, and there wasn't any moment with a particular um surplus in the treasury, needless to say.

Now, say you are Faisal, and you have chosen not to throw out the IMF advisors that Saud brought in (like you did the World Bank advisor a few years later), and you have stopped the modest military modernization project, the ministry building and the like (but not the dole to the family of course) and ARAMCO is loaning you money again, hoping you are gonna get rid of Tariki. But you don't. And you are still wheeling and dealing with Nasser, and threatening to close down the US Base in Dhahran and so on. Well, jeez, oh my god. The Saudis are failing to use their resources to develop the kingdom! Wink Wink to Saud.

Lo and behold. More ministries, Mecca renovations, contracts for Bechtel and ARAMCO turning on the spigot (hoping you are gonna get rid of Tariki).

So all I said in addition to pointing out this pattern, from which we get, to repeat the point, our scholarly and journalistic accounts until today, was that Faisal remained the main obstacle to the real would be developmentalists that the king for his own purposes was supporting or enamored of, or manipulating (depending on the analyst's presumptions since we can't really know which, right? or am I missing something?). For way too long. But because he was our man or Kennedy's man (um, not least, for finally getting rid of Tariki!), we canonize him as the reformer who saves the kingdom (although there was no real threat and there were no reforms save one, ending slavery, that can hardly do the heavy lifting analytically, as I show, the election regime is ended, and some other institution-busting takes place over his first years).

It is the stories we tell that are the problems. The origins of them are now obscured, and they take on a life of their own. So when I was in Cairo, presenting a draft of the last chapter, where I praise Yizraeli and where I draw on US documents to develop my critique of Faisal, I was criticized by Mustafa al-Sayyid who said it couldn't be right 1. because I was using

American sources and citing an Israeli but was not reporting what Arabs know are true, which is 2. of course Faisal was a great leader because. The proof of this is he supported Pan-Arab nationalism by using the oil weapon in 1973. Cool! But what does this have to do with the 1960s when the same great Pan-Arab leader was obsessed with destroying Nasser? How do you build this aspect of the history into your portrait of Faisal? So, I hope you see, that equally um selective (and problematical) accounts gets canonized elsewhere.

Finally, of course, the practice has by no means ended in the U.S. We continue to swing back and forth between the two parables. I attended a CFR session in the 1990s when Greg was at the Council where Saud al-Faisal's stand in (if I am recalling correctly but you can find the account in MERIP) was beaten up for the kingdom spending too much (remember the weapons sales after the Gulf war?) and so on, contributing to fiscal crisis, and threatening stability. Meanwhile a year or two later, I listened as the US embassy's political officer carried on about Crown Prince Abdallah's genuine efforts "to take Saudi Arabia out of the middle ages and into the twentieth century." It was like a time warp, and I told him so, to which his response was, "are you telling me my analysis is stale." Duh.

Posted by: Toby Jones | December 11, 2006 at 09:30 AM

Bob -- this is great stuff and I am entirely in agreement with your arguments about Faisal and development both here and in the book.

That said, I do think it is important to acknowledge that the meaning(s) of development is contested and is significant beyond the rift between Tariki and the Americans, although I do not want to suggest that there is such a thing as "real" development. Rather there are many different meanings of development, all of which, as you show, are in the eye of the beholder. I think more than anything, my desire to emphasize this point is to show that while the Americans used development to frame their political frustration and to criticize Saud and Faisal when they did something the Americans didn't like, development did in fact mean something to both Saud and Faisal much like it meant something to Tariki, Bin Muammer, et al. Development, in fact, is at the heart of the Saudi and the American story in Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and after. This might be an overstatement, but it is also possible that the story of development is THE story of Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s.

Perhaps my most important argument, beyond the fact that "development" was a political instrument that served American and Saudi power in different ways, is that it also came to have symbolic political and ideological meaning in Saudi Arabia. After all, it is Saudis --

as you point out clearly – who most revere Faisal as modernizer/developer/reformer. Although the Americans manipulated the reformer label for various reasons and then jettisoned it when their interests were not served, the appellation has garnered its most relevance specifically in the Saudi domestic political context. Madawi al-Rasheed has also smartly argued that this continues to be Faisal's legacy.

To be brief, in the 1960s Faisal was particularly effective at promoting development/modernization as having domestic significance and meaning. He may have been an Islamist (whatever that might have meant at the time), but that label obscures more than it reveals. This was part of my criticism of Bronson's book in Foreign Affairs.

Development work came to form a central part of the political contract that Faisal formulated in that decade. I believe, although I might be taking something of a leap from the evidence I do have (that said, I don't think so), that the state came to see development as a kind of surrogate ideology for a comprehensive Saudi nationalism. It was of course, blended with Islam. Later on this all takes shape in the worn out/hackneyed arguments about Saudi Arabia being both modern and traditional. The substance of how this came to be is important and fascinating -- and often overlooked. Under Faisal the scale and range of promises made to Saudi citizens (technical services, social services, and so on) were expanded and these promises were framed in the kind of American-style modernization theory and development talk that became popular during the Cold War. Not ironically nor un-noticed in the literature, Faisal failed to deliver on much of it. But the promotion of modernization and the Saudi state as a development agency of sorts was as important as the failure and perhaps helps explain why the response to the failure was often so violent (see my piece in IJMES May 2006 on the 1979 Shia uprising for an example). At first, these responses had little to do with traditional societies rebelling against modernity, although activists tagged anti-modernism onto the rhetoric later on. Again, see the kinds of things the Shia Organization for the Islamic Revolution said in the 1980s compared to what it said during the unrest itself.

Why bring this up here? Well, my suggestion in an earlier post that there might be a need for clarity on development's meaning and that there might be some slippage is based on my concern that allowing the American's to do all the talking about development also allows them to define it. While the American story is important, I want to make sure that we leave room – or carve out the room -- for further discussion of development and the various roles it played in the kingdom.