



Saudi Arabia: A Kingdom in Peril

By Paul Aarts, Carolien Roelants

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The Saudi royal family has survived the events of the Arab Spring intact and unscathed. Any major upheavals were ostensibly averted with the help of oil revenues, while the Kingdom's influential clerics conveniently declared all forms of protest to be against Islam. Saudi dollars bent events to the Kingdom's will in the Arab world-particularly in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, but also in Egypt and Lebanon, Saudi cash has had a profound impact.

Does this mean that all is well in Saudi Arabia itself, which has an extremely youthful population ruled by a gerontocracy? Problems endemic in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria-youth unemployment, corruption and repression-are also evident in the Kingdom and while young Saudis may not yet be taking to the streets, on Twitter and Facebook their discontent is manifest.

Saudi Arabia remains the dominant player in the Gulf, and the fall of the House of Saud would have explosive repercussions on the GCC while the knock-on effect worldwide would be immeasurable. Saudi Arabia is the only oil exporter capable of acting as a 'swing producer', a fact of which this book reminds us. Aarts and Roelants have drawn a compelling picture of a Middle East power which, while not presently endangered, may soon deviate from the trajectory established by the House of Saud.

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Review

"A lively narrative that conveys a wealth of information in an easily accessible way. Their chapters cover a spectrum of topics including oil, education, the demographic time-bomb...the 'digital explosion' of social media, and 'the two-edged sword of Islam' that permits troublesome clerics to criticise the regime in suitably veiled language." -- *Financial Times*

About the Author

Paul Aarts teaches International Relations at the University of Amsterdam. His publications include *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs* (Hurst, 2006, ed. with Gerd Nonneman). Carolien Roelants is senior Middle East editor at NRC Handelsblad.

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