

Dokumentation

Madawi Al-Rasheed: Die arabischen Aufstände als Herausforderung für Saudi-Arabien

Aula des Uni Campus im Alten AKH
25. November 2013



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Herausgeber:
Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC)
Möllwaldplatz 5/3, A-1040 Vienna, www.vidc.org

Redaktion: Magda Seewald
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Begrüßung

Magda Seewald: Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am very happy to welcome you all tonight to this lecture on the role of Saudi Arabia in the Arab uprisings. My special thanks go to our lecturer tonight, Madawi al-Rasheed – a warm welcome to Vienna and thanks for coming.

Within the lecture series on the Arab uprising, the VIDC has analyzed the uprisings from different perspectives. We have looked at social movements in the region, at the role of Islam within the uprisings, and at Western interventions in the rebellions. Tonight we will focus on interventions from Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, a player whose role is quite underrepresented in European and Austrian media.

However, one Saudi reaction found its way into the media last October, when Saudi Arabia turned down the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a unique action, never done before by any state. The stated reason for this harsh reaction was that Saudi Arabia is accusing the Council of failure to put an end to the Syrian regime's killing of its people and to reach a just solution to the Palestinian cause. But why such a harsh reaction now?

Tonight we will elaborate on different reasons for that, as well as on the different Saudi interventions in the uprisings, like in Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt and Syria, and we will also look deeper into the US-Saudi relations, especially after the agreement with Iran last weekend.

For this analytical journey we are very pleased to welcome Madawi Al-Rasheed, who will be our guide through this journey. Let me also warmly welcome Helmut Krieger, a consultant to the VIDC, who will not only moderate tonight's lecture but has also curated this series on the Arab uprisings. Helmut Krieger, for those of you who do not know him yet, is a social scientist and a lecturer at the Institute for International Development at the University of Vienna. Currently he is working in a University cooperation project with the Centre for Development Studies at Birzeit University in Palestine. His most recent publication, "Investitionen in den Konflikt. Die politische Ökonomie palästinensischer Staatsformierung" was published by VIDC in 2013. You will find some copies outside on the information desk.

Before handing over to Helmut, let me thank the Austrian Development Cooperation for its financial support for tonight's event and the Institute for International Development at the University of Vienna for its excellent cooperation. I also would like to thank my colleagues from VIDC for their support in organizing this lecture, and last but not least I would like to thank the interpreters Gabrielle Gallo and Brigitte Ornauer.

I wish us all an interesting evening and may I ask you, Helmut, now to present our guest tonight. Thanks!



Helmut Krieger Thank you very much Magda, and thanks a lot to the VIDC for facilitating this event, Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the Arab Uprisings. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for coming here. It's my distinct pleasure to chair this session on Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the Arab Uprisings and for sure we are very pleased to welcome Professor Madawi Al-Rasheed. As Magda already mentioned, the subject of today's event is Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia's role in the uprisings in the Arab World, given the fact that its regional influence is a quite vital one. Be it, for example, its support of some parts of the Syrian insurgency, be it its financial and political support of the military, the Egyptian military regime now, as well as the

Salafist faction of the Islamist movement in Egypt, be it its attempt to contain the Muslim Brotherhood all over the Arab World, or be it its military intervention against the democratic protest movement in Bahrain. Given this situation, the following questions will be discussed at today's event. How can Saudi Arabia's different interventions be understood? In what way are these interventions based, in particular, on geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran? And in what way can it be understood as a struggle for hegemony in the whole Arab World? And how are these interventions linked to Saudi Arabia's internal political as well as societal situation? For example, why is there no organized opposition in Saudi Arabia capable of challenging the balance of power there? And last but not least, what does Saudi Arabia's struggle for hegemony mean for the future of revolt in the Arab World? What does it mean for emancipatory movements in that region? These are main questions, and I hope we can answer all of them, or at least some of them, despite their complexity and the limited timeline we have.

Before we start, let me briefly introduce Professor Al-Rasheed. Madawi Al-Rasheed is a Saudi Arabian-born visiting professor at the Middle East Center at London School of Economics and Research fellow at the Open Society Foundation. Prior to that she was Professor of Anthropology and Religion at King's College in London between 1994 and 2013. She holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from Cambridge University. Before coming to King's College in 1994, she was Price Research Fellow at Nuffield College in Oxford. She also taught at Goldsmith College at the University of London, and the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oxford. Her main research interests are, among others, anthropology of Muslim societies; religion, politics and state in Saudi Arabia; Islamist movements, civil society and mobilization; and gender, religion, and politics. Madawi has written extensively on those topics. Hence, I will name just a few publications. Among them are the following monographs: recently published in 2013, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia* published by Cambridge University Press; published in 2010, *A History of Saudi Arabia* second edition; and in 2007, *Contesting the Saudi States: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* also by Cambridge University Press. Furthermore, I would like to mention just a few edited volumes: *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical*

Memory and Contemporary Contexts published together with Carool Kersten and Marat Shterin in 2012, in 2009 *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World*, and in 2008 as an editor as well, *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*. Last but not least some words about the format of our event: Madawi will speak for about 35 to 40 minutes, and then we will open the floor to questions. So, please let's begin our session and welcome Madawi Al-Rasheed.



Madawi Al-Rasheed: First, I apologize that I will not be able to speak in German. I would have loved to, but this is probably the inheritance of history where German wasn't the language where I grew up. But I would like to thank the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation for giving me this opportunity to address this distinguished audience. My special thanks are for the organizers, Magda and Helmut for this elaborate introduction. I hope we will be able to discuss the multiple questions that Helmut raised. We'll probably need to stay in Vienna for longer

than an hour or so, but I'll do my best.

What I'm going to do in this very short period of time is to go over three levels, which allows us to understand Saudi Arabia through the lens of these three levels. The first one is the internal level, the second one is the regional level, and the third one is the international level. In order to understand what has been going on in Saudi Arabia over the last three years since the Arab uprisings, we really need to consider these three dimensions. In a way they feed into each other, and we cannot understand them in isolation.

First let us agree on the terminology we use. What has happened in the Arab World over the last three years has been called under different names. Some people call it the Arab Spring, others call it protest movement, another group may want to call it the Arab Uprising. There is always politics in a name. Names are not neutral. They reflect an understanding of a phenomenon and sometimes they are normative. In the sense that if you accepted the Arab Spring, there is hope, there is a future, as the word "spring" implies. If you accept "protest" or even "rebellion," then there might be some negative connotation in that. I, myself, would like to choose a relatively neutral term, and that is the Arab Uprisings. There are uprisings in many different ways. They presented us, these uprisings, with a dilemma, especially those of us scholars who have studied mobilization and even other historians who have looked at revolutions in their classical model. The Arab World in 2010/2011 represented something that we have not seen before. Although the conditions are there, and they are historical, and many other societies have gone through them. The repression, authoritarian rule, corruption, marginalization, high level of unemployment, gender inequality, fragmentation, sectarianism, these are conditions that the Arab World had lived through over the last, basically it's a situation that was associated from the very beginning with the post colonial

nation state that was created after, most of them between the First World War and the Second World War, and even after that. So these are conditions that have been there, and the Arab World is not unique in experiencing them, because other countries have seen them in Africa and Asia.

Also, what happened in the Arab World did not really fit any other model that we are familiar with. There were protest movements assisted by new communication technology, although I don't want to go into blaming it all on Facebook and Twitter, which is a really reductionist approach that doesn't give us an understanding of what was going on. Yet, these uprisings had no charismatic leaders, they had no ideology. So far we have not seen throughout history a revolution without ideology, that is, you either want to move from a communist/socialist model into a liberal model or you want to reverse, go from monarchy to republic. But there is usually an ideology. So we struggle to find the ideology of the Arab Uprising in the last three years apart from the basic slogans that people wanted: dignity, freedom, and social justice, which are universal, but they were not linked with an ideological ground or ideological trend. Also, we have found that so many different groups participated in these revolts, in these uprisings, from students, women, men, housewives, professionals, educated people, illiterate people; they all came together in specific countries. Also, we've found that most of these uprisings started peacefully, but then some of them were resolved in a very short period of time. Others required foreign intervention, such as in Libya, and also regional interventions in order to suppress them, such as what happened in Bahrain. Therefore there is a mixed pattern in these uprisings. Now, we know that a certain number of countries had experienced them. But also we know that others have been resilient and haven't experienced any kind of an uprising. In the same way as, for example, in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and even Morocco.

Saudi Arabia, which is my area of research, seems to be resilient so far. Yet, beneath that surface of resilience, there are certain internal indicators that suggest to us that the situation is not as rosy or calm as it might appear to us from the outside. So, in Saudi Arabia with the Arab Uprising, we find that protest was there, but it was limited to a particular region in Saudi Arabia, namely the eastern province where a Shia minority lives. And this protest in that region can be said to be continuity from previous uprisings and confrontation with the regime since the 1950s. I wasn't surprised that the first protest came from this eastern province, because the eastern province has the oil installation, the oil fields, but also it had the first organized labor force in Saudi Arabia. In the 1950s and 1960s, this area witnessed the first mobilization to establish trade unions, mainly people who worked in the oil industry. And as a result there was quite a lot of politicization in that part of the country. Because Saudi Arabia is a vast territory and there isn't really a condensation or a high density historically in one particular area. But in the eastern province it was the first time, whereby workers came face to face with each other as workers. And in the 1950s and 60s there were attempts to form trade unions, there were demonstrations, there were strikes. And these resulted in great repression of the workers' movement at the time and also banning any kind

of civil protest. So from that period, Saudi Arabia inherited this tradition of banning protest – that is peaceful protest.

Yet, the region itself, and especially among its Shi'ite population, they seem to have been more organized in the way they had been protesting against the regime, asking simply for equality, employment, greater educational opportunities, and development of their region. But above all, as a religious minority in Saudi Arabia, they felt throughout the last forty or fifty years that they are discriminated against on the basis of their sectarian identity. And therefore, from 1979 onward, they were engaged in serious mobilization in their own region. However, this mobilization failed to reach other parts of Saudi Arabia. So they remained isolated in their region as a minority that is struggling with some discrimination, objective discrimination, but at the same time, had failed to build bridges with mainstream Sunni society. So there is quite a lot of mistrust between the majority of Saudis, and, unfortunately, very little sympathy for the causes of the Shi'ite in the eastern provinces. And this is one of the first internal factors that militated against a kind of national politics in Saudi Arabia, similar to the one that took place in Egypt or in Tunisia. The lack of national politics, whereby there is a common set of demands that are presented, and along these demands people are able to come together in one group. So the sectarian, internal sectarian divide militated against this national politics. And it's interesting to see that since 2011 and mainly around February 2011, the Shia minority started demonstrations in sympathy with their co-religionists in Bahrain, which is only 16 kilometers away from their area. And this kind of solidarity with the Bahraini Shia deprived them from reaching out or establishing solidarity with mainstream Saudi society. So in a way, this sectarian divide militated against a kind of national politics and a set of national demands.

Then there is the issue of Saudi Arabia as an oil producing country. So with the exception of Libya and Bahrain, most of the Arab Uprising took place in countries where there isn't really a great dependence on oil revenue. So most of the Arab republics are relatively poorer than Saudi Arabia, unable to meet the requirement of the welfare state, and as a result there was quite a lot of impoverishment in real terms. Egypt, specifically, and even in Tunisia despite all the positive reports that had been circulated before 2010 about the Tunisian economy. So, Saudi Arabia, unlike these countries, has oil. And as a result, immediately after the uprising started in January 2011, Saudi Arabia and the king in particular announced a series of subsidies and economic initiatives in order to absorb the potential of Saudi society copying the Egyptian model. They were estimated at billions of dollars. Saudi Arabia did not have unemployment benefits, which means if you are unemployed, you don't get anything. But in that month, in February 2011, a new program started in order to give the youth some kind of benefits, which was very limited really, but it was an initiative to absorb the potential of that youth cohort copying the Egyptian or Tunisian model. So oil is extremely important. Also, there were promises to increase employment, increase health services in terms of new hospitals and new educational institutions, and widen the circle of youth employment. So this was a clear signal that with oil perhaps protests can be bought and loyalty insured. And again, this is not new, because Saudi Arabia, as an oil producing country, had always been

described as a rentier state. A rentier state is a state that does not tax its population. It gets its revenue from oil, and if you could get foreigners also to work on oil fields, it's better, because this way you do not have an indigenous working class, an indigenous workforce that may want to demand communal rights, that may want to go on strike to ask for higher wages, like we know what trade unions and workers do. At least they did up till the neoliberal economy started sort of absorbing this kind of movements and pushing the workers into becoming consumers. So if a rentier state can buy loyalty with money, then that may delay the confrontation or the protest movement. I've mentioned sectarianism as an impediment to national politics, I also mentioned how oil can buy loyalty and delay confrontation.

And the third factor that had actually worked against the Saudi population, expressing mass protest, is the heavy security measures. Since the Arab Uprising, mainstream human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, in addition to Arab human rights organizations, have documented the increase in the number of prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia. Some local civil society organizations in Saudi Arabia are not even legal, because Saudi Arabia does not allow independent civil society. There was one group of activists, who had been working to form a human rights civil society; they called themselves the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, known in the local context as HASM. And HASM was started by veteran activists; some of them have been in and out of prison for a very long time, such as, for example, Professor of Arabic Literature Dr. Abdul al-Hamid, also other human rights activists such as Mohammad al-Qahtani. There are a huge number of activists who have been trying to push for civil and political rights. They took up the cause of the political prisoners; those political prisoners the government says are terrorists or sympathizers with terrorists. However, without open trials, without an independent judiciary, it is very difficult to think that every person in prison is actually a terrorist or sympathizer with terrorism. Some of them are themselves activists who encourage the relatives of political prisoners to protest in the street and because of that, demonstrations are banned, and therefore the activists themselves get put in prison.

So this organization HASM started in 2009, and it increased its activism with the Arab Spring. But unfortunately all of its founding members are now in prison. Abdul al-Hamid and al-Qahtani, they were sentenced to between ten and fifteen years in prison. There is also a judge among them, Suliman al-Reshoudi, and he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and also more than twenty or twenty-five years banned from traveling. But the interesting thing is that this judge is 75 years old now, and if he serves fifteen years in prison, then twenty five years of banning him from travel, he might actually be dead by then. What I'm trying to get at is the high level of repression and security measures that were deployed in order to intimidate the population and specifically the activists. The interesting thing is during the high time of the Arab Uprising a group of Saudis announced the establishment of a political party. And political parties are banned in Saudi Arabia. And they call it the Umma Party, which means the Muslim community or the community for the Umma. And this political party, again, the founding members were immediately put in prison.

So this kind of activism has been taking place, but we are not actually able to publicize it, simply because of the restrictions on local journalists and also the restriction on foreign media. Only those who are interested and who are able to follow, I have been following this, simply because it is part of my research. The interesting thing is that the civil society organization that is now banned and the founding members are in prison, started writing petitions before they were put in prison, demanding certain rights. Some of them can be summarized as follows: They wanted to have political participation, which means Saudi Arabia is probably now the only country in the Arab World whereby the population does not elect a national assembly or a parliament. Not that Arab parliaments in the past had been great signs of democracy, we all know what happened with these parliaments. But the experience is extremely important. Even if Arab parliaments had been and are still deprived of real powers, even, for example, in Kuwait, which had a history of democracy dating back to the 1960s, even in those countries, parliaments cannot form governments. Therefore the Emir or the Sheikh would appoint the government, taking into account the composition of the parliament, which basically means it's according to his own decision. But the experience is extremely important, and Saudi Arabia does not have that. It has a consultative council in which all members are appointed by the king. But also this consultative council is limited in even the topics it discusses. So, to just give you an example, recently, one of the female members of the consultative council wanted to put on the agenda for discussion the item of discussing the ban on women's driving. She was told by the head of the council that we don't want to discuss that. And so this is how the consultative council works, but also if it makes any recommendations, they are not binding to anybody. So the government, the king, the crown prince could just dismiss them, and nobody can take notice of them, because they have no power as a council. They are appointed members to discuss certain issues, and this is very limited. They have never discussed foreign policy, they have never discussed oil revenues, they have never discussed any of the major issues that councils usually deal with. So these three elements, the sectarian element, sectarian divide, the oil factor, and the heavy security measures militated against Saudis showing a kind of protest. The interesting thing was that there were calls on the Internet, online, by Saudis to demonstrate on particular days, and all of these calls had failed. We can't simply say because of the security measures people didn't go out, because, you know, even with heavy security, if people wanted to go out and demonstrate, they would demonstrate. So security is not the only concern. But it is this regional element that I would like to move into now.

The Saudis in their own country look around and watch what's going on in other countries. The interventions that had taken place in some of the Arab Uprising countries had meant that there is still no stability; there is still a transitional period towards democracy, or even worse – dictatorship, as we may see in some of these countries. There is also a fragmentation and militarization of societies after the Arab Uprising. If you look at Libya, for example, you find that central government is not in control. But I think it is bound to happen when you have a militarized uprising where arms are readily available. Then you have the Syrian situation, which is still ongoing. So all these kinds of cases have not yet produced a

positive model that people could actually try to look for. The hope was coming from Egypt. Egypt is extremely important for the Arab World. It, as everybody knows, suffers from some serious poverty. Huge sections of the population are below the poverty line. Yet, it is important, not simply because there are over 85 million Egyptians, but Egypt had been central in the Arab World, and it has produced three important trends in the Arab World.

The first one, if you look at the early 20th century, Egypt had brought modernity to the Arab World. Modernity in all its manifestations, from printing, from the press, art, cinema, intellectual productions. Egypt did actually bring it to the Arab World. Obviously, we don't want to bring it to the Egyptian case, but this modernity obviously was the highlight of the first half of the 20th century. Then Egypt produced something else – produced Arab nationalism. From Egypt there was this discourse about Arab nationalism that enchanted almost every Arab in the 1950s and 1960s. And I'm referring here to Arab nationalism in its Nasserite – Nasser's version of it. And finally Egypt produced Islamism to the Arab World as well. So these three projects had come from Egypt, simply because Egypt had the potential, the intellectual, the historical context that allowed it to produce this. What's interesting, if you just cross the Red Sea to the other side, you can see that Saudi Arabia had actually resisted two out of the three productions or Egyptian productions. It had fought against Egyptian modernity, penetrating Saudi Arabia. It had also fought against the Arab nationalism that Egypt produced. And anybody who's old enough can remember the Nasser/Saudi tension, which took place in different parts of the Arab World, one of which is Yemen. You can see how the relationship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia is extremely tense and troubled. Now, with Islamism, it is actually a combination of Saudi money and Egyptian Islamism that had created an explosive situation that wasn't even local, but went global and culminated in 9/11 – September 11. It is this lethal combination between radical Islamist movement and Saudi money that created this situation.

Now how did Saudi Arabia deal with Islamism? Islamism, again, there are multiple variations. There are different trends within Islamism. Saudi Arabia, since the 1950s and 60s, thought that it can use Islamism in order to fight Arab nationalism and also secular or leftist movements in the 1960s. So it tolerated the Muslim Brotherhood, in fact it welcomed quite a lot of Muslim Brotherhood exiles who came to Saudi Arabia in order to escape from the oppression of the Nasser regime. And it is this fusion between the imported Egyptian Islamism and the local Saudi Wahhabism – Wahhabism is the movement that started in the 18th century, the puritanical movement that is literal in its interpretation of Islam, and it is the foundation of the Saudi state. It is this combination that created multiple variations of Islamism. Saudi Arabia tolerated them in order to use them for a wider project. And in fact, Saudi Arabia wasn't the only country that thought that Islamism was a good idea. In fact, the United States and Britain and possibly other countries thought that Islamism could be used as a tool to defeat the Soviet Union during the Cold War. And the Afghan jihad was the ultimate example of how jihad and Islamism – or that part of Islamism that is violent jihadist – was instrumental in fighting a bigger war than Al Qaida or the Islamism that emerged in Afghanistan. But then in the last ten years, after 9/11, Saudi Arabia began to worry about its

support for Islamism and started curbing the Islamist movement inside Saudi Arabia. That actually started in the 1990s.

But we come to the Arab Spring, and as I said earlier, the Arab Uprisings themselves, they were not started by Islamists. The Islamists were not the ones who called for protest and demonstration. In a country like Egypt, they were in fact negotiating with the military regime in order to gain some kind of place. They had participated in elections in Egypt. They had been part of the established political game, whereby they are allowed a small number of seats in parliament that were actually hardly important. But immediately after the Arab Uprisings when people went to the ballot box, we find that in Tunisia and in Egypt and in other countries, for example in Morocco, they won elections. They moved from being in the opposition to being in government. And here there was a crisis for Saudi Arabia. One may ask, why would Saudi Arabia be upset or worried about Islamists coming to power in a country like Egypt? Why was Saudi Arabia worried about the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi coming to power in a neighboring Arab country? Given that Saudi Arabia claims that it rules according to Sharia Islamic law, that it is an Islamic state. So one would expect an Islamic state like Saudi Arabia would welcome the rise of Islamists to power in a country like Egypt. But obviously this wasn't the case. Saudi Arabia, in fact, was supporting Mubarak, as we all know, since the 1979 Camp David Agreement, first Sadat and then later Mubarak, and it preferred a military sort of dictatorship to the ballot box and the rise of Islamists or them coming to power as a result of election.

So this may intrigue people, and we start asking questions. Basically Saudi Arabia wants to have a monopoly on being the only country that rules according to Islam. And what it cannot tolerate is the combination of democracy and Islamist movements. So, if we are talking here about a Turkish model, like what happens in Turkey, whereby an Islamist political party is capable of being in government as a result of democratic election, which was almost going to happen in Egypt, Saudi Arabia cannot tolerate that because it exposes its own conditions as an Islamist state. It offers another model of being Muslim and being democratic. And this could not be tolerated in Saudi Arabia, simply because of the domino effect of this model reaching the country. And therefore, after the election of Morsi to power, Saudi Arabia together with other Gulf countries, it's not the only one, tried very hard to cripple Egypt and again, when the coup took place in July 2013, Saudi Arabia, together with other Gulf countries – mainly UAE and Kuwait – supported General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and also increased their subsidies to Egypt. Now, why this happened is something that Egyptians must discuss. But from the Saudi point of view, the fall of Morsi was the desired outcome. Because there was a chance that this model of Islam and democracy is surviving. Then it becomes a challenge to a country like Saudi Arabia, where, as I mentioned, an elected national assembly is not there. So, from the very beginning it was important to contain the Egyptian experience and even act as a force to prevent the emergence of a democratically elected Muslim government.

Now, let me move to the regional one and briefly talk about three, again, three actions that Saudi Arabia had taken in response to the Arab Uprising. The first one is counter-revolution,

and there is no doubt that Saudi Arabia acted in a counter-revolutionary potential in places like Bahrain, which was the extreme counter-revolutionary action as Saudi Arabia sent its own troops under the Gulf Council umbrella in order to assist in suppressing the Bahraini revolution. Now it was a symbolic act to send troops to Bahrain, although most of the reports indicate that they didn't really do much in order to suppress the rebellion that had been going on since February 2011. But it had a very important symbolic message. It sent the message to Saudi Arabia, the population, and specifically to the Shia population just across the causeway that links Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, that the fall of monarchy is not something that people should entertain as an idea. And it went there to support the monarchy as a model in the Gulf. So that was the first counter-revolutionary act that actually gave Saudi Arabia the name of a counter-revolutionary force. And in a way it was expected from a conservative monarchy to maintain the status quo and prevent any kind of change, because conservative monarchies don't like change. They feel threatened by change. In their propaganda, change means something bad, that it will not lead to anything positive. Then let's look at other countries. In Egypt, as I mentioned, the counter-revolutionary force was possible as a result of subsidies and again, using oil rent in order to abort an Arab Uprising in one of the most important Arab countries for the very reasons that I mentioned. In Libya Saudi Arabia was very cautious. Libya was the insignificant other, really. It had bad relations with Gaddafi over the years and the situation was extremely tense. But strategically, Libya wasn't that important to Saudi Arabia. The same thing with Tunisia. Tunisia was important in uniting that spirit of the Arab Uprising, but in terms of strategic weight, for Saudi Arabia Tunisia was secondary to Egypt. And therefore Saudi Arabia didn't get too involved in the Libyan uprising, although it would have welcomed the fall of Gaddafi, simply because of the historical animosity between the two.

Yet again, even Tunisia was small and remote somehow, Saudi Arabia did not approve of the change that had happened and even went as far as antagonizing the Tunisians by welcoming Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Saudi Arabia. So that created a rift from the very beginning between the new Tunisian government and Saudi Arabia, as Saudi Arabia became the host for Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Now we move from this sort of counter-revolutionary force in multiple locations to another model that Saudi Arabia adopted as a regional power, and that is containment. Containment took place in Yemen. Again, Yemen, like the other Arab countries, experienced serious uprisings for several weeks and days, but Saudi Arabia knew from the very beginning that the Yemeni situation is too complex to be reversed and therefore they opted out, together with other Gulf countries, for an agreement that doesn't really change the regime, but changes the head of the regime. So Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president of Yemen, had to be convinced to step down and elections were arranged. In the interim period his deputy became the president. Therefore, together with other Gulf countries, they organized the Yemen Accord, which meant that the situation doesn't change that much, but the contentious figure of Ali Abdullah Saleh will be removed and also, they secured for him not to be put on trial, and they gave him immunity. Therefore, Saudi Arabia regarded Yemen as a

security threat from the very beginning. It is too close to the borders of Saudi Arabia to leave it or ignore Yemen. Therefore the Yemeni revolution or uprising had to be contained in such a way as to insure that the previous links with Saudi Arabia are honored.

Now we come to the final case, where Saudi Arabia is a revolutionary force. And that is in Syria. From the very beginning, Saudi Arabia supported the demand of the Syrian people for democracy, for dignity, for an end to repression and authoritarian rule. And you'd think if Saudi Arabia had been a counter-revolutionary force in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain and containing the Yemeni uprising, why suddenly would Saudi Arabia become a revolutionary force in Syria? And here we go back to the original internal issue that I mentioned, and that is sectarianism inside Saudi Arabia. So in a way, quite a lot of the foreign policy of certain governments reflects local and national interests. So Saudi Arabia has supported the rebels, and this is not a secret anymore. Publication after publication and reports all indicate how much Saudi Arabia is spending on the Syrian rebels. Now which Syrian rebels, this has to be established, and I think in terms of creating a political leadership that can be an alternative to Assad, the Saudis had already managed to, or micro-managed the situation to create the best outcome at that level, while the military situation on the ground I think is flexible and fluctuating. But it is certain that Saudi Arabia is supporting the Syrian rebels. Now why Saudi Arabia could suddenly become in favor of democracy for the Syrian people, and this is basically a reflection of its own sectarian agenda. Saudi Arabia's regional rivalry with Iran since 1979 has almost blinded the country, and on the other side as well to the extent of wanting to go to war by proxy. So what happened in Syria is that Saudi Arabia wanted to defeat Iran in Syria, not really the democracy for the Syrian people. Saudi Arabia, since the occupation of Iraq in 2003, saw Shi'ite access spreading from Baghdad to Beirut passing by Damascus. And its origin is Tehran. Therefore Saudi Arabia could not possibly confront Iran in the Gulf if it had grievances against Iran or there is a serious rivalry. Therefore, Syria became the proxy war, where Saudi Arabia wanted to achieve two objectives from the very beginning. One, to defeat Iran in Syria, and second, to defeat Hezbollah also in Syria. Both of them had been archenemies of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia felt, since the occupation of Iraq, that it has actually lost quite a lot of its influence between Baghdad and Beirut. In Iraq it has the worst possible relationship with the al-Maliki government, and it has not been able to reconcile or go beyond the historical animosity, simply because Iraq now is dominated by a Shia majority. In Syria, Saudi Arabia had always had good relations with Assad the father and the son until very recently, but I think Saudi Arabia exhausted all its influence in Syria trying to move Bashar from the Iranian sphere of influence. And it has failed to do that. The same also goes for Hezbollah. In Lebanon, Saudi Arabia has lost quite a lot of its influence, especially after Hariri is no longer the main Sunni actor in Lebanon. There is a serious shrinking of Saudi influence in this arch between Baghdad and Beirut, and therefore, Saudi Arabia considered Iran to be the main rival that is drawing these Arab countries away from the Saudi sphere of Influence. Therefore, Saudi Arabia became the supporter of the Syrian uprising.

So these three examples of counter-revolution, revolutionary support in the case of Syria, and containment, had been strategies that the Saudi regime tried to implement when it faced this “turmoil” in the Arab region.

Now let me move to the final phase, and that is the international level. And I’m just going to talk briefly about the last agreement between the US and Iran that was achieved in Geneva on Sunday. Saudi Arabia, since 1979, in a way enjoyed the full attention of the US, because the US did not have an alternative at that time. It had a very tense and hostile relationship with Iran following the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis. Therefore from the 1980s Saudi Arabia and the US had a partnership that was a continuity of the old relationship after the Second World War, but it got extremely intimate. In a way, I think the Americans must have felt that they had no alternatives apart from the obvious case of having Israel as their partner and also Egypt. So Egypt provided a good support for American policies, but the main focus was on Saudi Arabia with the Saudis providing oil at reasonable prices and also able to pump it as the market requires, while the Americans provide security. So it was this relationship – oil for security – that was maintained basically since after the Second World War, but it got more intimate.

Now we come to 9/11 and obviously there was a serious rift between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Immediately, I think, in the American administration there was quite a lot of thinking about diversifying their source of support in the region. And I think this is the moment when the Americans pulled their troops from Saudi Arabia and moved them to Qatar. So, Qatar was actually invented as a place where there might be a counter base to the Saudis. Obviously the Americans didn’t want to put all their eggs in Saudi Arabia, in the basket of Saudi Arabia, so Qatar assumed that importance at that moment of diversifying their relationship. Obviously there are other states that are extremely important like Kuwait and Bahrain where the American fifth fleet is, also there is Oman. But again, Saudi Arabia wasn’t sidelined, but there was, I think, a search for more players to lessen this dependence on Saudi Arabia, to make it less important. And I think this episode, final episode of US/Iranian agreement, although it is not very clear yet where it’s going to go, how it’s going to develop, but it is celebrated on both sides as a great success. I think the Iranians are very excited about it and the Americans too, especially Obama. I think if it does lead to something positive, it may be the only thing that he has achieved in the Middle East.

Now, we come to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia wanted, for the last ten years, the Americans to intervene and limit the Iranian expansion in the region, and they insisted on a military strike in the same way that they insisted on a military strike against Bashar al-Assad. So, this became clear when King Abdullah, as a result of Wikileaks, it is documented that he asked the Americans to basically cut the head of the snake, mainly Iran. Obviously the Americans didn’t do that, and this is an important moment for Saudi Arabia, because they had relied on American support against any kind of military threat. And the military threat of Saddam Hussein was a classic example, where the Americans were enlisted to defend Saudi Arabia. So the fact that the Americans failed to respond to the Saudi request to do a quick military strike on Iran, the fact that the second issue was that they were also reluctant to do a

military strike against Bashar al-Assad, although Saudi Arabia insisted on it. The fact that they had been holding secret talks with Iran, it just transpired that they were organized by Sultan Qaboos of Oman recently. He played an important role in mediating and making arrangements for some behind-the-scene talks, which led to the final Geneva Agreement. All this had made Saudi Arabia worry about its relationship with the US. And the fact that it did not intervene in supporting Mubarak added sort of almost insult to injury. In a way, the American administration under Obama failed to respond to Saudi requests. And the Saudis got worried that although the American administration does not promote democracy, at least at the level of rhetoric, but it is not willing to intervene to prevent it from happening, which the Saudis wanted them to do. Therefore, now we are in this final phase, whereby Saudi Arabia is making noise about pursuing its own national interest and finding new partners, meaning that they are going to open up to China perhaps or Russia, I'm not sure. But they are limited in what they can do now. I think, also at the level of the Gulf, we find that three countries had welcomed the agreement as contributing to more peace and security in the Gulf: Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, which has very strong economic connections with Iran, Oman, and Qatar as well. So Saudi Arabia has remained silent over it so far, and it has expressed in the past its disappointment by rejecting the non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council, which was a unique protest, I think, by Saudi Arabia.

I think what we are going to see is possibly some serious shift in the politics of the region. I think the critical moment will be in Syria to test what is going on between the US and Iran, how Saudi Arabia would respond. Would Saudi Arabia, for example, augment or increase its support for very radical Islamist groups in Syria? I think, and here I step back and just talk about a scenario that can be worrying. I think if Iran was rumored to have the capacity in the future to produce a nuclear bomb or enriched uranium in the pursuit of that objective, I think Saudi Arabia has a very lethal bomb, and that is these groups that are inspired by Saudi religious thinking that are capable of draining the region and making it fall into a serious sectarian bloody war. It has already happened, and I think the critical moment was Iraq. Since 2003 I think by some kind of design or accident, the global jihadi movement that had been associated with Afghanistan mutated into a sectarian jihadi movement with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Since that critical moment we see that Al Qaida and its affiliates, whether they call themselves the state of Iraq and Al-Sham or al-Nusra or all the other groups that are emerging almost everywhere now. They have mutated and become sectarian fighters, and the enemy now is hardly the West. It is the other Muslim basically, who is different, and mainly they are targeting the Shia. And this has also created conditions for the Shia themselves to have their own sectarian militia and sectarian brigades named after their important imams. So what we are seeing now is that Saudi Arabia may feel disappointed with this agreement and not comfortable with this rapprochement between the US and Iran. I think moving the region even further into a sectarian war, whereby peace and co-existence between local communities is shattered forever, may actually change the geopolitics of the region and even the maps of certain countries.

On this note, I'm sorry it's not very optimistic, but I feel that this is something that we are beginning to see and the level of sectarian violence in the world between Iraq and Lebanon, in addition to actually moving into other areas beyond the Arab World, is extremely important and it may be the lethal weapon that delays the development of some kind of stability in the Arab World. Thank you for listening.



Krieger: Thank you very much for your, I would say, wonderful and inspiring lecture, ranging from the internal level to the regional up to the international level. And I think there are a lot of questions and comments on all those topics Madawi has touched upon. Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for your questions and comments. Could you please use the microphones, and maybe it would be also fine to

introduce yourself briefly.

Audience: It's always necessary to have a nice break. Thank you for your highly interesting analysis. Thank you very much. I missed in your analysis the role and the interest of the Europeans, of the EU. Maybe you can add some of your thinking on it.

Audience: Hello, I have a question about, let's say, the regional level. According to some media reports, Saudi Arabia is currently expelling foreign workers, leading to the breakdown of certain services. And my question is why and why now?

Audience: There have been rumors that Saudi Arabia has purchased atomic equipment or maybe expertise from Pakistan. Is there some truth behind it?

Krieger: Okay, so let's make the first round.

Al-Rasheed: I'm sorry I missed the Europeans. On the plane I was reading an article in the Economist, and I think they quote Brzezinski or someone like that and they say, Europe has become like a retirement home. Anyway, I don't believe that, I think the regional conflicts that are so close to Europe, and actually Europe should take a more active role, and they have been, unfortunately in Egypt. We saw the Europeans taking a leading role in going there and trying to reach an agreement with Sisi and with Ashton. Yet, that hasn't actually made a big difference I think so far. I think the Europeans at the moment are with this sort of double leadership, with Germany and France; it is very difficult to manage a kind of common foreign policy. I'm not an expert on European matters, but just from my observation I find that it is very difficult for Europe to be active now, given also the economic problems that are experienced in Europe. Yet Europe is probably more destined to play an important role,

because what goes in the southern Mediterranean affects Europe directly. What goes on on the borders of Turkey is bound to haunt Europe, simply because of this geographical proximity. Therefore, if there is a role for Europe to play, unfortunately we find in North Africa that European leaders and countries like France had been great supporters of authoritarian dictatorships and in fact, a French minister had to resign because she offered to support Zine El Abidine Ben Ali with some troops from Paris. Europe's history with that region is very troubled, and it is very difficult. People do remember these kinds of moments and they're not easy, also Europe has a strong phobia of anything that has got to do with Islam and Islamism. If you have that phobia, you cannot deal with a region whose main actors are Islamists. You have to go beyond this historical phobia, and it's very difficult for Europeans to deal with that. There's the issue of Turkey that is still unresolved, nobody wants Turkey, and this is seen from the other side of the Mediterranean as an indication of where Europe sees the threat. Europe has decided that the threat comes from Islam in many countries, unfortunately. Therefore it's very difficult for Europe to be a detached active partner if it regards main political currents as basically against civilization or humanity even. This doesn't apply to all European countries. For example, in Britain you'll find more flexibility on these issues, whereas in other European countries – France, for example – is just the opposite.

Your question about the regional factor and the foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, this has been going on for a while, but it came to sort of a conclusion just recently over the last two/three weeks. Saudi Arabia had been trying to implement what is called Saudization, which means gradually replacing foreign workers with the indigenous population. This has been going on since the 1970s and at the same time, the number of expatriates or foreign workers has increased. It has never subsided or decreased, simply because, remember I mentioned that 1950s and 60s episode where foreign workers inside Saudi Arabia demonstrated, wanted to have trade unions, and they were very active. Saudi Arabia decided from that moment that it's better to rely on a large population of foreign workers who have temporary residence, who can be basically expelled from the country at any time, who have no rights to stay. And any kind of activism is punished. People are deported and cannot even come back. So a foreign population of workers is part of the strategy to divide the population. Also it is important for Saudis to feel that as citizens there is always somebody who is worse than them, and that is the foreign worker, obviously not the European one, but the Bangladeshi, Filipino, or the Asian population or African population. Initially, historically, Saudi Arabia did not have the skills and the manpower to run an economy based on oil. So it was a necessity at the beginning to bring not only workers in the oil sector, but teachers. Quite a lot of people in my generation, all our teachers were foreign Arab teachers in schools. It's only in the 1980s when a new agenda, the first generation of Saudi teachers, women teachers, came to teach in schools. Before that, all schools had foreign teachers. So from that moment there was this dependence on foreign workers. Seven months ago Saudi Arabia had accumulated almost like one million illegal immigrants – they are called illegal immigrants. But we don't want to go into the details of those and how they ended up in Saudi Arabia. But there is a market in visas, there is a market in bringing

people to work, then they leave, or they are allowed to work in other jobs, and there is a substantial Saudi population that benefits from this situation, which perpetuated it. Therefore these illegal immigrants were given seven months to regulate their status; otherwise they face deportation. The problem is the sheer number of immigrants from different countries, their embassies could not deal with their situation very quickly, and also the Saudis lost patience. And it was a good show, basically. I mean, we've seen how governments even in established democracies use the issue of immigration in election campaigns and therefore it brings in sort of the worst kind of nationalism. Because it's like a quasi momentary nationalism against these illegal immigrants, and nothing pleases the population at difficult economic times more than seeing these people deported, because they are accused of taking the jobs, accused of crime, petty crime, theft, etc. There is this euphoria of a quasi-nationalist sentiment emerging to cover the serious structural issues that make Saudis unemployed. So basically, taking away thousands of Ethiopian or other immigrants is not going to allow unemployment figures to go down, because they work in certain unskilled professions at the very bottom of the hierarchy. We will see, I would like to see how these jobs are filled in the future, whether Saudis will take them or not. So yes, why now? There is this sort of quasi-nationalism, that, you know, people feel good about if you round up some immigrants, unfortunately.

The talk about Saudi Arabia acquiring or sponsoring Pakistan's nuclear program, yes, there is talk, but I simply don't know. And I think if this was a certainty we would have had more serious reports on it. I mean after all, the Americans are spying on heads of states. I'm sure they could find out what is happening. So I'm not sure. But there has been some media reporting on this, and I really can't confirm or answer it.

Krieger: Thank you. Another round of questions and comments. Yes, please?

Audience: Why does Saudi Arabia so strongly withhold rights from women, like for instance in driving? Why does it not act like Iran, for instance, incorporating women into daily, everyday life? Because it's 50% of your workforce and strength of a country.

Seewald: I have a question to Palestine, since it was stated that the failure of the UN Council to find a just solution for the Palestinian cause was also a reason why Saudi Arabia turned down its seat. And Saudi Arabia brought a peace initiative years ago for the resolution, which wasn't successful because Israel didn't really take it into consideration. On the other hand, now in its opposition to Iran, probably Israel is its closest ally. So, how is the relationship here in this conflict?

Audience: Hello, good evening. I would like to ask you, what do you expect from the world championship in soccer that is going to take place in 2018 I believe in Qatar? What do you expect from this in sociological terms? Will it lead to a social movement?

Al-Rasheed: No, but you know Qatar has risen too quickly, and then there's an eclipse in the sense that only after the Arab Uprising – and Qatar did support the Arab Uprising, at least at the level of media in some countries initially like Tunisia and Egypt, but then later with support in Libya and in Syria. Suddenly I sense that there is a change in the way Qatar is assessed. This issue of the treatment of foreign workers has become extremely important in the press. It's basically, now, global civil society tries to play the role of pushing for some kind of, more human rights on the ground, because it is facing the silence of governments. I mean no Western government would challenge any Gulf country or Saudi Arabia on human rights. When it comes to Saudi Arabia, for example, then trade and armament will take precedence. They are more important than human rights. And therefore global civil society, the UN agencies, tries to fill that vacuum. But I think it will not actually lead to much, simply because, I have a feeling that this soccer was something that Qatar is now building towards. And it will go ahead, and it is the responsibility of the companies that are actually bringing these foreign workers to work on the building site, that they have to comply with international labor standards. So the more these companies are named and shamed, the better perhaps for the workers.

On Saudi Arabia and rights of women, it's very important and there's one difference between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi women now represent a maximum of 15 or 16% of the labor force, and therefore they're not a pressure group. I think we find that historically in all societies, until women become a substantial part of the labor force it is unlikely that they will get rights. And even in countries where they are substantially involved in the economy, we find that the struggle hasn't finished. And there are problems with equal pay and all sorts of other legal issues. But in a way, I think the issue of gender equality in Saudi Arabia is very complex. And it is a combination of multiple factors. Now in the media we find that it is all going to be blamed on religion. So Islam, in its Wahhabi version, is responsible for discrimination. This is the media position. But I think it is more complex than that. It is the combination of three factors: local cultural tradition, state position, and oil. One would say that oil is a very masculine state. It is not like building a textile factory where you could employ women to do the sewing, such as for example what happened in Morocco, where quite a lot of textile factories were established and women were drawn into the labor force. Oil by its nature is a masculine industry that is not friendly to women. From the very beginning in Saudi Arabia, the percentage of women employed in the oil sector, which is the main sector of the economy, was very low. Simply because it's in remote areas, and only at the administrative level in recent times that women became employed, for example, at Aramco. Therefore, the economic side is against women. Oil is a double-edged sword. It allowed women to have education and allowed women to have healthcare, but it acted against their employment, simply because you can afford to run your economy without women, simply because you have the money to bring a foreign worker. And therefore, the combination of these three factors perpetuates this situation of gender inequality in Saudi Arabia. But the driving is neither here nor there. There are more important issues that need to be resolved before this issue of driving, for example custody of children after divorce, guardianship system, there are a series of issues, and driving is simply the tip of the iceberg.

It's just the issue that everybody talks about, because it's so unusual. It's the only country in the world now that bans women from driving.

In terms of Palestine, yes, Saudi Arabia, I agree with you, sighted the issue of the UN failing on Palestine. But the peace initiative was offered almost a decade ago now. And Saudi Arabia didn't actually protest at the UN or suspend its membership, and it can list so many grievances, Syria, failure to act in Syria and the Palestinian issue and Iranian issues. But even in the Palestinian situation, Saudi Arabia has actually become a divisive force. It tried initially when Hamas was elected to bring the two Palestinian factions together, but it turned out to be a divisive force. And it failed to bring any kind of progress to the Palestinian issue. But also Palestinian issues are always good for leaders to talk about. They could sort of summon support and popularity, but it's been exhausted. I think the Arab masses now are more aware and very suspicious of anybody who started raising the flag of Palestine, simply because they've had all these leaders who did that before and always reached the conclusion that if you're in trouble, always raise the flag of Palestine. You try to sort of absorb some of the tension. But I think it's just basically propaganda. The real issue, the real threat is Iran. And the interesting thing is both Netanyahu and Saudi Arabia are both in agreement over rejecting the Iranian-American Agreement.

Krieger: Would you say that there is a kind of hidden agenda in the relation between Saudi Arabia and Israel, ranging back to the last decade?

Al-Rasheed: Well, there are reports and meetings that take place behind the scenes, and also there are reports about some kind of technological cooperation. But I think Saudi Arabia would be in a very, very problematic situation if this becomes an established pattern, simply because it has a constituency that would reject that. They may have to balance their internal interests with the regional interests again.

Krieger: Thank you. Another round of questions and comments?



Audience: Thank you very much for your talk. I have a question on the internal perspective for Saudi Arabia. Could you tell me some of your ideas on what could happen if oil gets less or is not this dominant economic factor anymore and maybe the succession to the throne would also be a future development.

Audience: In Europe there's a lot of criticism of capitalism, a growing discussion against capitalism because of the crisis. Is this phenomenon of criticizing capitalism in the Arab World existent? Is it a hope for the people to overcome capitalism? Is it a hope for some kind of democratic socialism?

Audience: We've seen that the situation itself is very complicated and complex. Now would you or do you have any ideas or would you, I would almost say, dare to speculate how the Arab and the Islamic World will develop short-term, mid-term, long-term, maybe between the next 10 years, 50 years, 100 years, which we won't be around for, but still. Because at the end of your talk I had this feeling that you were almost warning of a violent phase. When would that happen? How long could that take? What would it take to end? I know there are a lot of question marks.

Krieger: Thank you. So the questions range from oil to democratic socialism and the perspective in the Arab World.

Al-Rasheed: In terms of oil, if less oil, what would happen? Obviously there is sort of a contract, a social contract between the government, an oil dependent government, and the people. It's that oil is distributed through all sorts of ways, from health services to salaries to employment in the public sector, etc. Now the capacity of the government is limited if, for example, there is a serious short fall in oil prices. And this may happen even before Saudi Arabia runs out of oil, as it used to happen. It's one market, the price is beyond the control of many countries, and now with this US-Iranian deal we might get more oil from Iran on the market, which would lead to oil prices falling, which would impact Saudi Arabia, because it has committed itself and promised its population all sorts of benefits in the coming 10 to 15 years and committed to projects that have already started. So what would happen if it had less? Okay, it can rely on reserves, and it has a lot of reserves, which may protect it against the shock of a drop in oil prices. But long-term, I think the population would start, if there's nothing in return for loyalty, how are you going to keep a population happy? Already there are campaigns that are taking place online such as one famous campaign that was really extremely popular. And that is "the salary was not enough". It was a hash tag on Twitter that millions of Saudis contributed to, simply to say that because of inflation the salary is not enough, and they demanded an increase. But obviously it didn't happen yet. So if unemployment figures continue to rise then again, you're creating the conditions for upheaval in the country.

Capitalism and the critique in Europe – the interesting thing is in the Arab World there wasn't capitalism. There was something that was often referred to as crony capitalism. It is basically state and private sector all mixed up with connections, corruption. It's a familiar story from Egypt to Syria to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. I think the left, which would have been in a position to engage in some critique, is very weak in the Arab World now since the 1960s and 70s. They have lost a lot of the credibility, and what even made it worse is that quite a lot of them in recent years have become defenders of neoliberal economies, and therefore there was a shift, an ideological shift that weakened them. They are not seen as the vanguard of democracy. The interesting case of Egypt, when the left and the liberals sided with the military in the recent round, had actually made it very difficult to have a credible left in a country like Egypt with its history, let alone in a country like Saudi Arabia. Of

course there's talk about social justice and all that, but it's still not really strong. And a lot of people are in a position of power to reject any kind of equalizing or creating some kind of social justice.

How would the Arab World develop in the short, medium, and long term? I think what I mentioned about these sectarian conflicts was that they had already started – the rise in sectarian killing in countries like Iraq since the last 8-9 months, in Syria since the beginning of its uprising, and even in Lebanon. In Egypt, Egypt that had never actually been associated with any kind of sectarian conflict, it had been associated with sort of Muslim-Christian conflict, but not between Sunni and Shia in Egypt. Even Egypt has experienced that kind of tension at the social level and political level. But I think, in my view, there is no sectarian war that becomes extremely volatile without other states supporting it. The history of Europe is very clear. Sectarian wars don't just erupt. They might erupt, but they go away very quickly unless you have states, governments pouring money in to promote them and keep them in flames. And this is exactly what's happening in Saudi Arabia where there are two clear camps. You have the Saudi camp trying to present itself as the defenders of Sunni Muslims and you have Iran, trying to also present itself as the defender of Shia Muslims. And the voices that are not falling within these two camps have no chance if you write or talk or give lectures and promote non-sectarian belonging. If you are not with us, it means that you're an agent for the other camp. It's become extremely difficult, even at the social level in countries where there had been some kind of co-existence. It hasn't always been great between Sunni and Shia, but these are not historical conflicts from the early days of Islam. They are contemporary political conflicts and the postcolonial government had a lot to do with these conflicts. It's a heritage that they inherited. The state was very sectarian. The state tried to use the sectarian card in order to fragment the population, and they have succeeded when the state doesn't provide for its own people, like in places like Syria or Iraq or Egypt. Then people are bound to go to these primordial identities, and you get sectarian entrepreneurs who sell people hope. And sort of, you know, if you come together as a sect, as a group, you'll be better. Therefore any kind of national politics has become very difficult. I think the volatile scenario has already started, and it will continue for a while unless there is an agreement between these regional players to stop funding these groups. But as long as the money is there, the weapons are there, they will continue, unfortunately. And they already started in a very, very ugly way in the region.

Krieger: Maybe we should not conclude with such a pessimistic picture on the future of the uprisings in the Arab World. If you have any kind of questions, last round.

Audience: Saudi foreign policy seems to be very realist power politics somehow, but what of ideology? Does Saudi Arabia try to promote its causes on an ideological level beyond narrow sectarianism, and how?

Audience: I agree with you that the revolution shouldn't be trivialized by calling it Facebook or Twitter revolutions, but could you comment about the whole phenomena of the Internet

as a cultural anthropologist perhaps and the way it opens up alternatives to confused adolescents about their identities and to break out of primordial identities. Could you comment on what effect that's having, not just the Internet, but also satellite television too.

Krieger: Thank you.

Al-Rasheed: There is something called a secular logic of the state in politics. Like regardless of how entrenched in religion a state is, it tries to act in a secular way, because simply political interests are fluctuating and they cannot be put in a straight jacket of ideology or sectarian thinking. And therefore at one point Saudi Arabia will have to be flexible in its foreign policy in order to survive. Those who are embedded in ideology will find that they cannot deal with politics. I think this secular logic of the state would force it to act and promote its interest regardless of religious or sect. They already do that, so for example in the 1960s, during the Yemen War, when Nasser in Egypt was fighting a war in Yemen against Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia supported the monarchy, the royalists who were not Sunni; they were Zaidi Muslims, Shi'ites basically. And this is an example of how a state is really driven by its national interests, not by religion. Because if they're always driven by religion they might find that their national interests are not served. So yes, it is possible to be realist and shift sides. And it is the same thing in terms of their position vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a Muslim state that boasts about its Islamic credentials, it should be supporting the Islamists, but in fact it saw them as a threat and supported the coup.

This is a very interesting question about the role of the Internet. The interesting thing is, I think we have to moderate our enthusiasm and positive evaluation and assessment of the Internet. The Internet doesn't always mean freedom and liberty, but it is part of this neoliberal sort of mentality that you go on Twitter, you are an individual, your voice is heard and in 140 words. I do that sometimes. In 140 words you could change the world and change public opinion, and then you set up your Facebook and all your friends come. It is part of this hype about a neoliberal kind of individual who is out there to change the world. But this is the myth really, and we have to moderate ourselves, the fact that everybody's on the Internet. By the way, Saudi Arabia has one of the highest Twitter use in the Arab World. In fact, it reaches 33-40% of Saudis active on Twitter. It doesn't mean that they are all going to be democrats. In fact, if you follow what is being written, technology itself is neutral. And you find the most bigoted, the most violent, the most almost revolting statement made on the Internet, on Twitter definitely, simply because people don't use their names, they can make these calls to kill people. So technology itself cannot really change the world. It is humans who change it, and it could actually enforce sectarian identities, tribal belonging, because now every sect has its own website. Each tribe in Saudi Arabia has its own website boasting about its heritage and past and therefore it is what people make of technology. And technology itself is not neutral. I mean, you could use it for all sorts of purposes. But obviously, once there is the background for mobilization it may help, but it doesn't create democrats, unfortunately.

Krieger: Would you like to end with a last statement in a not so pessimistic way?

Al-Rasheed: Well, the last statement is I just simply want to say that as scholars, as researchers, we were all enthused by the Arab Uprisings, we did have great hope. But then you retreat into your academic knowledge, and you have to actually separate wishful thinking from the facts. I remember immediately after the Arab Uprising I wrote an article about Saudi Arabia, and I argued that there will be some kind of protest, but the structures are not there. And I explained why. In fact, it was published in Foreign Policy; you could access it. And the editor changed the title and put it “Yes, it could happen here.” Simply because he wanted it to happen here. But if you read the article it shows that the conditions are there, these are the internal constraints, and these are the outcomes. But the title was catchy; everybody in 2011 wanted these things to happen including myself, but obviously I had to be realistic, because I’m dealing with facts, with empirical evidence. I cannot, I can’t write a wishful thinking article. It would be nice. But it’s not what I do. And therefore we are coming into the third year of this Arab Uprising, and I think it is a transition that may actually take a long time towards something stable. We shall see. The final point is I would like to say thank you very much for interesting questions that have actually directed my attention to important issues that I have overlooked in my presentation, and I hope in the future I will be able to work on them, at least some of them, not all of them. And thank you very much.

Krieger: Thank you, thank you for your wonderful and inspiring lecture and comments. Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for joining our event, and I should add that snacks are already prepared in the next room. Goodbye for now or goodnight.