

## Salman's Legacy: The Dilemma of a New Era in Saudi Arabia

Madawi Al-Rasheed , 2018, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., UK., ISBN: 978-1849049658, Price US\$43.74., 367 pp.

**Reviewer:** Hazal Muslu El Berni

**Received:** 10/24/2020

**Accepted:** 12/23/2020

**Citation:** EL BERNİ, H.M., "Salman's Legacy: The Dilemma of a New Era in Saudi Arabia", Middle Eastern Studies, 13-1 (2021): 151-154

## Selman'ın Mirası: Suudi Arabistan'da Yeni Bir Dönemin İkilemleri

Madawi Al-Rasheed, 2018, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., Birleşik Krallık, ISBN: 978-1849049658, Fiyatı 43,74 ABD doları, 367 sayfa.

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**Geliş tarihi:** 24/10/2020

**Kabul tarihi:** 23/12/2020

**Atf:** EL BERNİ, H. M., "Selman'ın Mirası: Suudi Arabistan'da Yeni Bir Dönemin İkilemleri", Ortadoğu Etütleri, 13-1 (2021): 151-154

إرث سلمان: معضلة عصر جديد في المملكة العربية السعودية

مضاوي الرشيد، 2018 ، سي. هيرست وشركائه المحدودة، المملكة المتحدة، ردمك:

978-1849049658 ، السعر 43.74 دولار أمريكي، 367 صفحة

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تاريخ القبول: 23/12/2020

تاريخ الاستلام: 24/10/2020

الاقتباس: البيرني هـ. م. «إرث سلمان: معضلة عصر جديد في المملكة العربية السعودية»، دراسات الشرق الأوسط، 13-1 (2021): 151-154

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's foreign policy decisions have been on the agenda of the scholars in the Middle East and Gulf politics since June 2017 when he was appointed to the post. Madawi Al-Rasheed, a scholar studying Saudi political history and foreign policy, provides different orientations to our perception of the current political issues, foreign policy crises, and royal family disputes in Saudi Arabia through this edited volume. Al-Rasheed's book is divided into three sections; 'State and Society', 'Saudi Arabia and Transnational *Salafyya*', and 'Foreign Relations', which are contributed by various scholars specialized in Saudi politics. The bottom line of the book is the unpredictability of the evolution of the Saudi decision-

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making process, which in turn pave the way for the ambiguous expectations about the political future and foreign policy directions of the kingdom.

There are plenty of studies on the concepts of political stability and regime security in the concerned literature but each state has its domestic dynamics and political sociology, thus applying regime stability theories in each state requires an examination of their specific institutions, bureaucracies, security politics, and political elites. F. Gregory Gause, through his “Saudi Regime Stability and Challenges” piece, argues that Saudi Arabia is rearticulating its regime security strategy during King Salman’s era, which in turn makes us question the royal family unity because of the articulation of power in the hands of the Crown Prince. The ruling elite does not seem to be united in ensuring the regime security to cope with the domestic challenges and regional crisis such as the decisive and risky decisions in Yemen War. According to Gause, how Saudi Arabia manages to survive through the challenges ahead is still a mystery for the Western countries.

Al-Rasheed’s “Mystique of Monarchy: The Magic of Royal Succession in Saudi Arabia” might be considered the most absorbing piece of the book as she draws our attention to the unpredictability and irrationality of Saudi politics. Al-Rasheed defines this kind of acts prevalent in Saudi policy-making as a result of anesthesia of un-reason as well as irrational impulses. It was insightful to read her elaborations on the emotional dispositions, the power of uncertainty and hope, and political rumors, such as the anonymous letters sent to the Kingdom during 2015-2017, which have long been ignored in the studies on Saudi Arabia.

When it comes to the heavily discussed issue of patronage of the state and the distributional state that brought peace and stability for a long time to state-society relations, Hertog’s “Challenges to the Saudi Distributional State in the Age of Austerity” analyzes the alteration of the elite level politics concerning the structural factors since 2015. Hertog views the changing nature of the elite politics as acceptable for the political survival of the Kingdom but underlines its potential to constitute a reason for gradual economic decline related to the fall of oil prices in 2014. In addition to the economy part, one needs to give credit to the concept of regionalism to understand Saudi politics. Alamer’s “Beyond Sectarianism and Ideology: Regionalism and Collective Political Action in Saudi Arabia” questions why some places and cities in Saudi Arabia

such as Qatif and Buraydah show a more mobilized structure while other cities do not tend to go for a demonstration against the domestic politics. Alamer concludes that cities with strong regional identities located in regionally indiscriminative places tend to act collectively against the state. It is because the state does not want nationwide counter-narrative, hence it has territorially concentrated counter-narratives, emerging and reaching to larger areas via the local sites of communication like mosques or intellectual meetings which are not subject to state control.

In understanding the state-society relations, Saudi feminism has often been degraded to the level of state feminism. At this point, Doajji's contribution "From *Hasm* to *Hazm*: Saudi Feminism Beyond Patriarchal Bargaining" needs to be mentioned as an insightful one that conceives Saudi feminism as part of the complex fabric of Saudi political action. While she rejects patriarchal bargaining and an exceptional approach to women portraying womanhood as a pious and modern subject, she underpins the paucity of the feminist literature on Saudi women.

In the section on *Salafism*, the first article is Hammond's "Producing *Salafism*: From Invented Tradition to State Agitprop," which takes our focus to the entrance of *Salafism* to the public discourse and studies in English after 9/11, and in turn reawakens Islam's domination of social and political imaginative focus to prevail in the Saudi society. Hammond's piece was important in defining *Salafism* far from a timeless concept and as a concept grounded in 20th-century thinking. Farquhar's "Transnational Religious Community and the *Salafi* Mission" analyzes the transnational religious community of *Salafism* by looking into the Islamic University of Medina established in 1961. His findings reveal that universal Muslim *ummah* identity through its different levels of attachments, overlapping sets of practices, principles, and texts build on the lessons drawn from previous applications and then are applied to the contemporary conditions in *Salafi* tradition. Bunzel's piece on two *Salafi* intellectuals, Abdullah ibn Jibrin, who was a hardliner and well-known scholar of *Wahhabism* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Turki al-Bin Ali, who is a jihadi ideologue born in 1984, might be worthy to read for the reader who is interested in understanding the main tenets and concepts in the Jihadi *Salafi* movement as well as its relation with the legitimacy of the Saudi state. On the other hand, Samin's piece is quite informative to understand how narratives of kin and faith emerge, combine, and clash in Saudi Arabia. His

study emphasizes that social hierarchies and tribal affiliations in pre-modern central Arabia need to be studied to comprehend the current oil-age social-political transfer of the Saudi state.

The last section covers the Saudi foreign policy during the Cold War, the King Salman era, and Saudi-China relations. Matthiessen's research on Cold war politics raises the necessity of the new regional lenses in interpreting the domestic developments as part of a broader Cold War struggle. He analyzes leftist and Arab nationalist movements' impact on Saudi Arabia through a reassessment of the Saudi role in the Cold War especially throughout the incidents in Yemen and Egypt as well as the Nasser period, the 1967 War, King Faisal's attempts to build Islamic institutions like Muslim World League in 1962 and OIC in 1969, Saudi aids to the Safari Club in Africa and elsewhere in the 1970s. Al-Rasheed's "King Salman and His Son: Winning the USA, Losing the Rest," is an evaluation of current Saudi foreign policy, which describes King Salman's era as interventionist rather than the one adopting a behind the scenes strategy. The last article of the book by Al-Tamimi focuses on Saudi-China relations which gives insight and background of China's aims to secure energy resources and build strategic alliances in the Gulf. As Al-Tamimi discusses, more studies are likely to emerge in the following years due to China's potential of being a valuable source of political support, especially in the cases when Saudi Arabia cannot get support from the US.

Al-Rasheed's edited volume is a solid contribution for the students, scholars, and readers who are confused due to the recent and rapid developments in the region and the domestic and royal family politics of the Kingdom. It will shed light on their perception of Saudi domestic politics, state-society relations, and foreign relations of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, it is inevitable to argue that updates and revisions will be continuously needed owing to the rapidly changing security dynamics of the Gulf, the broader Middle East, and the unpredictable evolution of Saudi domestic politics.