

SAUDI ARABIA: RELIGIOUS REFORM AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR MODERNIZING SOCIETY

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Abstract: *The article discusses the most acute challenge faced by Saudi Arabia today - the need to reform religion, which rightfully forms the core of Saudi statehood and society.*

The author raises the research problem as follows: Whether religious reforms will lead to liberalization and democratization of Saudi society and whether they will solve the fundamental problems of modernization of the Kingdom as qualitative changes in this sphere can be destructive for the political system of the state.

Keywords: *Saudi Arabia, state of moderate Islam, religious reforms, societal changes, modernization of society.*

Introduction

Islam has originated in the Arabian Peninsula and had a powerful influence on the formation of a new worldview and social structure, has established the foundations of statehood and politics based on the primacy of religion, as well as determined the lifestyle and economic structure of the region. The establishment of Saudi Arabia became possible due to the military victories of Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Abdul Wahhab's movement for the pure Islam, who later signed an agreement to establish a theocratic monarchy based on the Wahhabi ideology. The history of modern Saudi Arabia goes back to 1932, when the foundations of statehood were established under the leadership of King Abdulaziz, and society was formed from various groups, while the kingdom gained the status of "the center of the Muslim world", which determined the further vectors of domestic and foreign policies. Article 23 of The Basic Law of Governance of Saudi Arabia (KSA) states: "The state stands for the protection of the Islamic faith, implements its regulations, makes sure that there is no sinfulness, hinders vice, and fulfills the duty of spreading Islam" ¹. The King is the embodiment of religious leadership for the entire Muslim *Ummah* and holds the title of Custodian of Two Holy Mosques of Islam, thereby emphasizing his highest status among others as a servant of Allah.

¹ Text of the Basic Law of the KSA. URL: http://legalportal.am/download/constitutions/195_ru.pdf/ (Accessed: 01.06.2023).

Over the past decade, there have been major changes in the world, and in the region, which have led the Kingdom to accept a "new reality". The deterioration of the political situation in the Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring and the social shifts following it, as well as changing economic conditions due to the fall in energy prices in world markets, along with the changes in the internal political course of the new rulers, have posed challenging tasks for the monarchy.

Contemporary challenges are forcing Saudi Arabia to rethink the pillars of its nationhood. The process of reforming Saudi society, including religious society, is well underway, holding a special significance in the political discourse and forming part of ambitious state modernization programs. To achieve positive results, the monarchy needs a more secular, developed and mature society, and no quality implementation of reforms is possible without the above-mentioned factors.

Religion as a conceptual basis of statehood and social development

Unlike the Western political systems that have chosen the path of liberal democracy, in Islam the power of the people is not absolute, as it is limited by the will of God (Allah) and Allah's Laws to which every member of the *Ummah* must adhere, and every muslim can only act within the framework of these laws, which are to be found in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah ². In the Islamic state, religion, determines the people's choice of their ruler, who demonstrates loyalty to them ³. All rulers since Prophet Muhammad have combined secular and religious powers, and their authority was limited only by the will of Allah and Allah's Laws. The determining role of religion in the foreign and domestic policies of the state is further reinforced by the fact that Islam avoids nationalistic prejudices and seeks to achieve spiritual goals, which are paramount, since the Islamic state considers religion as the criteria through which it evaluates all its actions ⁴.

² Сапронова М. А. Эволюция институтов власти в арабских монархиях в новых условиях общественно-политического развития. Вестник МГИМО-Университета. 2008;(2(2)): С.5. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2008-2-2-39-49>. [Sapronova M. Evolution of power institutions in the Arab monarchies in the new conditions of socio-political development. Bulletin of Moscow State Institute of International Relations-University. 2008;(2(2)): P.5. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2008-2-2-39-49>.]

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Islam has become the basis of national legislation and has a regulatory impact on the social and economic structures of Islamic countries. Ghukasyan identifies three aspects of interaction between Islam and the most important areas of economic activity, among which are the following:

- Management of exploitation of natural resource potential;
- Modernization of the national economy and shaping its shares;
- Management of the credit and banking system, which is one of the key segments of the economic mechanism ⁵.

With respect to subsoil use, Islamic law affirms the sovereign rights of the State to regulate, within its territory, activities related to the extraction and processing of minerals and requires the utilization of these resources for the benefit of all members of society. ⁶ The requirement of religion to develop the economy in the interests of all segments of Islamic society has formed the basis of the social contract between government and society in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Islamic norms prescribe the initial authorization of the Imam, the supreme ruler (king), for any natural resource exploitation activity within the Islamic State ⁷. The ruler is not the sole owner of all the natural wealth of the Islamic state, his role is to manage the state – a controlling body acting in the interests of the Muslim society. The state retains a dominant role in the economy. The formation and modernization of economic and social systems in the Arab monarchies of the Gulf in all periods of development took place at the expense of increasing the role of the public sector. At the same time, we should not forget about the participation of religious leaders in these processes, who have their own power in shaping the economic policy of the state, as well as having a strong voice in such areas as education, science, health care, support for the low-income segments of the population, etc.

⁵ Гукасян Г.Л. “Экономические реформы и экономическая программа исламизма: влияние ислама на стратегию социально-экономического развития (на примере арабских нефтедобывающих государств Аравии – членов ССАГПЗ)”. “Арабский Восток: ислам и реформы”, (сборник статей), ИИИиБВ и Институт Африки РАН, М., 2000. С.9. [Gukasyan G.L. "Economic reforms and economic program of Islamism: the influence of Islam on the strategy of socio-economic development (using the example of Arab oil-producing states of Arabia - members of the GCC)". "Arab East: Islam and Reforms", (collection of articles), Institute of Islamic Studies and Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2000. P.9.]

⁶ Ibid. P.10.

⁷ Ibid.

The doctrine of Islam strictly prescribes adherence to norms of fairness in the distribution and consumption of income, both private and public. Every Muslim is obliged to annually redistribute his income in favor of the poor, through one-time donations - *sadaqa* (directly or through religious organizations), to pay property tax - *zakat*, in the amount of 2.5% on the capital as well as trade fees (taxes) - *ushr*.

The functioning of Sharia law in the socioeconomic life depends to a large extent on the economic potential and, to a large extent, on the political influence of a particular Muslim state related to this potential. In this regard, Saudi Arabia has been in a better position, and still continues to be in more favorable conditions in many aspects regarding the development and implementation of Islamic principles and norms in the economy compared to other Muslim countries. According to Danshin, theoretically the economic development of the Arabian states was based on the following principles of Islam ⁸:

1. Equal access to basic services (housing, food, clothing, healthcare, education and the opportunity to build a family) for all citizens;
2. Achieving full employment, including through interest-free credits and the provision of means of production through cooperatives to all those who can work but do not have the means to do so;
3. Freedom of choice of profession, absence of coercion of a person to a certain job and prevention of labor exploitation of others;
4. Preventing causing harm to others, excessive concentration of capital and monopoly (including at the state level), speculation, usury and other actions not endorsed by the Qur'an;
5. Prohibiting excessive approach in all areas of the economy;
6. Undertaking the economic planning of the country in such a way that the form and content, as well as the time of work, allow a person not only to make efforts in his or her field of employment, but also to be engaged in self-improvement

⁸ Даньшин А.Ю. “Экономические реформы и экономическая программа исламизма”. “Арабский Восток: ислам и реформы”, (сборник статей), ИИИиБВ и Институт Африки РАН, М., 2000. С.6-7. [Danshin A.Yu. "Economic Reforms and the Economic Program of Islamism". "Arab East: Islam and Reforms", (collection of articles), Institute of Islamic Studies and Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2000. pp. 6-7.]

and self-education, to raise his or her professional level and to participate actively in the state governance;

7. Engaging science and technology and training specialists in accordance with the needs of the country's economic development;

8. Preventing foreign economic domination over the national economy;

9. Comprehensive protection of the environment in which public life and the development of future generations must take place, with the prohibition of all activities that are inextricably linked to pollution and irreparable damage to the environment.

The history of Saudi statehood is built on the unification of the Arabian lands under the flag of religion, and Islam remains one of the main political and ideological pillars of the state. Alexandrov notes that Saudi Arabia belongs to a narrow group of states where secular and religious power structures are combined or strongly integrated ⁹. The most powerful circle of religious guardians of religion has formed in Saudi Arabia, trying to exert their influence on all spheres of the state and society.

The principles of Sharia are established in Saudi Arabia as the sole source of all branches of law, all secular norms, regardless of the branch and sphere of regulation must strictly comply with Islamic norms, which means that in fact the entire legislative system is subordinated to religious laws.

Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Baz states that, the Saudi Arabia's main duty is to serve Islam and Muslims, and to preserve Islamic ideology and implement the provisions of the Islamic Sharia Law ¹⁰. The Basic Law Governance of the KSA stipulates imperative norms regarding Islam, and prohibits the dissemination of any religion other than Islam, the construction of temples, the importation of Bibles into the territory, and the wearing of the Christian cross in public places by Christian citizens. Article 8 of this document declares that, justice, deliberation and equality - in line with the Islamic Sharia, are the foundations of government in Saudi Arabia, while article 23 states that "the state stands for the protection of the Islamic faith, implements its rules, ensures the absence of

⁹ Александров И.А. Монархии Персидского Залива: этап модернизации. – М.: Издательство «Дело и сервис», 2000. С.204. [Alexandrov I.A. - Monarchies of the Persian Gulf: the stage of modernization. - Moscow: Delo & Service Publishing House, 2000. P. 204.]

¹⁰ Мелкумян Е.С. Регион Залива: конфликты, компромиссы, сотрудничество. М., 2008. С.170-171. [Melkumyan E.S. The Gulf Region: Conflicts, Compromises, Cooperation. М., 2008. pp.170-171.]

sinfulness, prevents vice, and fulfills the duty of spreading Islam" ¹¹. The main source of income in Saudi Arabia prior to the discovery of large oil deposits was coming from pilgrimage revenues ¹². The thesis about oil as a gift from God is particularly popular in Saudi Arabia. Some analytical experts qualify this as a kind of "petro-Islam" ideology, the quintessence of which lies in the idea that oil was given to Saudi Arabia to ensure its leadership in the Muslim and Arab world and its dominance over its co-religionists ¹³. Melkumyan and Kosach point out the missionary character of the Saudi state and emphasize that the Islamic character of the KSA's foreign policy remains unchanged, although it is filled with content adequate to the current stage of development of the system of international relations ¹⁴.

Saudi statehood is based on Wahhabi Islam of the Hanbali madhhab, the strictest form of Islam available. The founder of the Wahhabi doctrine, Abdul Wahhab, established six fundamental principles that govern all aspects of human life:

1. *Tawhid* - belief in a single God (Allah) and refusal to worship anything other than God;
2. *Tawassul* - preventing mediation between the believer and Allah, prohibiting the glorification of objects, people, places, etc.;
3. *Ziyarat al-kubur* - the prevention of visiting (pilgrimage) graves in order to turn them into holy places, including the Prophet and his *Sahabas*;
4. *Bidaa* - denial and non-acceptance of any novelties beyond the Qur'an and Sunnah, i.e. not prescribed by Allah and His Prophet;
5. *Takfir* - an accusation of unbelief, an obligation to punish for deviations from Muslimity;
6. *Ijtihad and taqlid* - recognizing the Qur'an and Sunnah as the only source of knowledge, searching for answers to all questions only in them.

The founder of the Saudi state, Imam Abdulaziz, used Wahhabism for political purposes to mobilize the Bedouins into a powerful military force that

¹¹ Text of the Basic Law (Nizam) of the KSA Government - electronic resource - Mode of access: http://legalportal.am/download/constitutions/195_ru.pdf/ дата обращения – 01.06.2023.

¹² Толипов М.Ш. Форс кўрфази нефть экспорт қилувчи мамлакатлари ижтимоий-иқтисодий ривожланишининг хусусиятлари. Иқтисод фанлари номзоди илмий даражасини олиш учун ёзилган диссертация, ТошДШИ, Т.:, 2001. Б.64. [Tolipov M.Sh. Features of socio-economic development of oil exporting countries of the Persian Gulf. Doctoral thesis of Economic Sciences, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, T.:, 2001. P.64.]

¹³ Малащенко А.А. Ислам: XXI век. М., 2019. С.37. [Malashenko A.A. Islam: XXI century. М., 2019. P.37.]

¹⁴ Мелкумян Е.С. Регион Залива: конфликты, компромиссы, сотрудничество. М., 2008. С.171. [Melkumyan E.S. The Gulf Region: Conflicts, Compromises, Cooperation. М., 2008. P.171.]

ensured the unification of the lands into a single state under his leadership. With the growth of the power of the *Ikhwan* - paramilitary Bedouin groups of religious fanatics fighting to conquer new lands, return to "pure Islam" and establish a community-based model of political structure, - future king realized that the future Saudi state must move away from extremist ideology in favor of pragmatic state governance with the absolute right of the ruler to govern alone and allowing a secular society to flourish properly. At the same time, the shift from extreme conservatism and the determination of the limits of secularism of the state and society had to take place with the permission and under the control of the king himself and people most close to him among the ruling family. This peculiarity of Saudi statehood, which was established by King Abdulaziz, has been preserved up to the present time. The head of state is the main equalizer of the balance of secular statehood and adherence to Wahhabi doctrine, and the king (and/or his crown prince), is the only figure authorized to carry out religious reforms in the state. His exclusive prerogatives were declared to be "declaring jihad" and "concern" for the "welfare of Muslims" ¹⁵. The King has ultimate authority regarding the establishment of the Council of Senior Ulema, the highest religious body of the KSA, which is authorized to decide on the conformity of certain norms, documents, actions, etc. with the sacred sources of Islam, as well as to issue legally binding *Fatwas*. The King is empowered to appoint and remove the Supreme Mufti who heads the council, he also supervises the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance - Sharia judges of all instances are appointed and dismissed by royal decree.

History of the reform trends in the Kingdom

The King of Saudi Arabia is first and foremost the embodiment of secular authority, the laws and regulations he adopts are primarily based on sound pragmatism. After the discovery of giant oil reserves, the need for cooperation with Western companies increased, and it was necessary to attract Western capital, technologies, and foreign specialists to build the economy, infrastructure and industry, which fundamentally contradicts the Wahhabi ideology. Throughout the evolution of the Saudi state, the king gradually reduced the influence of Wahhabi Islam to a minimum - Wahhabism still had an influence

¹⁵ Косач Г.Г. Саудовская Аравия: власть и религия. – электронный ресурс – Режим доступа: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/saudovskaya-araviya-vlast-i-religiya> дата обращения – 01.06.2023. [Kosach G.G. Saudi Arabia: power and religion. - URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/saudovskaya-araviya-vlast-i-religiya>– Accessed: 01.06.2023.]

on the everyday life and social structure of Saudi society, with minimal interference in the economy, politics and international relations of the Kingdom when the tenets of the doctrine are destructive or when they stop the processes of modernization and development. There are numerous examples where only some of the six principles of Wahhabism, which are pillars of Islam, such as *tawhid*, have been fully observed, and the rest of the principles, such as *bidaa*, *ziyarat al-kubur*, *ijtihad* and *taqlid*, have remained only nominal in character.

The entire previous era of the Saudi state is in one way or another associated with actions that can be characterized as reformist. After all, the creation of a single sovereign entity is nothing but the transformation of old institutions of society and power, changes in the system of governance, transformation of forms of interaction and relations between the elite and its subjects, etc.¹⁶. King Abdulaziz signed the historical Quincy Pact with the United States, which made him a major US ally in the Middle East, attracted British-American capital to exploit oil treasures, and in 1931, a year before the KSA was established, Abdul Aziz signed contracts with foreign companies to mine oil deposits in the territories under his control.

After independence, the king has made contacts with almost every state in the region and major world powers. The Communist USSR was recognized by Abdulaziz's government in 1921, and by 1930 a Soviet Union diplomatic mission was opened in Jeddah.

The principle of banning Muslims from all over the world from visiting the burial sites of the Prophet and His Sahabas had to be gradually abandoned, as it was an economically beneficial decision. Religious pilgrimage revenues generate the majority of Saudi Arabia's budget after oil revenues and are instruments of soft power towards the Islamic and Muslim worlds.

All subsequent Saudi kings up to the current King Salman have tried to find compromise solutions for governance, taking into account the views of influential religious communities. Nevertheless, they have tried to maximize the participation of secular administrators in the affairs of the state on the basis of kinship, but strategically important areas such as security, finance and foreign policy have been occupied exclusively by members of the Al-Saud family.

¹⁶ Филоник А. О. Саудовская Аравия: реформы и власть. Ближний Восток и современность. Сборник статей (выпуск тридцать второй) М., 2007, С.125. [Filonik A. O. Saudi Arabia: Reforms and Power. Middle East and Modernity. Collection of articles (thirty-edition second) М., 2007, P.125.]

Ironically, the time of greater pushback of fundamentalists from the state apparatus was during the reign of King Faisal, who was brilliant in religious knowledge. Since his reign, the Saudi state has been relying on moderate members of the religious clergy to support reforms and has begun to increase the doses of secularism in politics, economy and society to the limits necessary for the effective management of the state and society. At the same time, King Faisal supported the clerics in every possible way in all aspects of public life arrangement. He allocated huge funds for the construction of mosques in the Kingdom and beyond, spent his personal money on charity, and was an ardent opponent of westernization.

Since the reign of the second King Saud, the Wahhabi clerics have begun to lose total control over the education and outreach fields. Eventually, closer to the 2000s, all schools in the Kingdom turned into secular schools, with no more than 30% of the curriculum consisting of religious subjects. Furthermore, the first universities preparing specialists in secular sciences were established by 1957. Today, there are 52 universities in Saudi Arabia, including some religious ones. All religious educational institutions were opened at the expense of state funds. The government obtained the arm to influence the important sphere of the theologians' activity through financial control over religious education ¹⁷.

Sharia courts and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Deterrence of Vice under the Council of Ministers of the KSA, both founded by King Abdulaziz, have been an effective instrument for the influence of Wahhabi dogma on society. The Committee has its own structures called the religious police, responsible for checking all areas of human life, morals and ethics for compliance with the Sharia Law canons. However, the rule that ensures that absolutely all cases are transferred from the Sharia courts to the secular courts when the law requires it, i.e., when the issue is outside the scope of the Sharia, was introduced during the reign of King Fahd. Regarding the institution of the Mutaween (religious police), Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) reforms led to a drastic reduction in this authority's powers in 2016. The religious police are now limited to only preventing and recording violations and then handing them over to the regular police force.

¹⁷ Косач Г.Г. Саудовская Аравия: власть и религия. – электронный ресурс – Режим доступа: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/saudovskaya-araviya-vlast-i-religiya> дата обращения – 01.06.2023. [Kosach G.G. Saudi Arabia: power and religion. - URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/saudovskaya-araviya-vlast-i-religiya>– Accessed: 01.06.2023.]

Building a "moderate Islamic state": problems and prospects

The large-scale reforms and modernization program of Saudi Arabia initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are remarkable for having touched the most sensitive area for Saudi society. His vision of the kingdom's future as a "state of true moderate and tolerate Islam" is truly revolutionary. In one of his speeches, MBS emphasized that "70% of the Saudi population is under 30, and we will not waste another 30 years in dealing with extremist thoughts." ¹⁸.

Saudi Arabia positions itself as "the heart of the Arab world and the center of the Muslim world," and in this context, pursuing religious reforms and increasing doses of secularism raises new questions about the state's political future now more than ever before. It is not a secret nowadays that the most influential part of the Saudi monarchy's elite has reformist positions, and Wahhabism is an obstacle for them to pursue their political course ¹⁹.

Since King Salman ascended the throne and his son Mohammed bin Salman became the de-facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, there have been many historical events that demonstrate that the crown prince holds a hard line on minimizing the influence of the religious clergy and downgrading their political importance. Saudi Arabia, as the homeland of Islam and the flagship of the Muslim world, has begun the process of reforming Islam, a crucial step to preserve internal order and the regime of the ruling family.

The Arab Spring showed the instability of conservative authoritarian regimes, which have been aloof to the "voices of society", and locked in the illusions of growing prosperity of the population and public welfare, which has led to irreversible social explosions. Unlike the first protesters who demanded economic reforms in other Arab states, in the Gulf monarchies the agenda was focused on political freedom, conducting elections, ensuring government agencies transparency, delegating some of the powers of rulers to people's representatives, allowing freedom for the media, etc. By positioning themselves as opponents of repressive and eccentric regimes and strongly advocating

¹⁸ Saudi crown prince promises 'return to moderate Islam' URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/25/saudi-crown-prince-promises-return-to-moderate-islam/> (accessed: 01.06.2023).

¹⁹ Малащенко А.А. Ислам: XXI век. М., 2019. С.52. [Malashenko A.A. Islam: XXI century. M., 2019. P.52.]

against tyranny in other states ²⁰, the monarchies have learned a good lesson – uncompromising and completely ignoring the demands of society can lead to catastrophic results for the ruling regimes. The Arab Spring brought mostly surface changes for the Gulf monarchies, but it was a wake-up call for the political elites. By engaging in the processes of geopolitical reformatization of the region, Saudi Arabia has become convinced that socio-economic reforms are the "vaccinations" necessary to retain power.

The Saudi Kingdom is a unity and struggle between two opposites, represented by a clear modernization trend on the one hand and a conservative discourse on the other ²¹. It is obvious that a closed, religious and traditional society like the Saudi one cannot be instantly transformed into a modern and secular like Western societies. The challenge of the Saudi reforms is to ensure a less painful transition from one state of society to another (1), and to prevent a possible negative impact on the mindset of Saudi society (2), which is searching for ways of development that are in line with the national mentality, Islam and tradition ²². From this point of view, MBS undertakes social and religious transformation under the cover of economic transformation, primarily to ensure the resilience of the political regime. Therefore, in proclaiming an active phase of reform, the Crown Prince chose the method of moving toward the big through the small. This is the least that concerned the form of the relationship between the authorities and the population ²³. The government needs a mobile and more modern society to effectively implement modernization programs. Especially if the reforms encounter serious resistance among the traditional part of society and religious groups in the political elites, who used to consider themselves as "defenders of the moral values of society". It should always be kept in mind that the Kingdom's internal stability is based on the conservative mentality of the population.

Some researchers are confident that in the long run the reforms will not lead to liberalization and democratization of Saudi society, the system, that was

²⁰ Коатс Ульрихсен К. Арабские решения арабских проблем? – электронный ресурс – Режим доступа: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/arabskie-resheniya-arabskih-problem/> (дата обращения: 01.06.2023). [Coates Ulrichsen K. Arab solutions to Arab problems? URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/arabskie-resheniya-arabskih-problem/> (Accessed: 01.06.2023).]

²¹ Филоник А. О. Саудовская Аравия: реформы и власть. Ближний Восток и современность. Сборник статей (выпуск тридцать второй) М., 2007, С.126. [Filonik A. O. Saudi Arabia: Reforms and Power. Middle East and Modernity. Collection of articles (thirty second edition) М., 2007, P.126.]

²² Ibid. P.128.

²³ Ibid. P.140.

established will not solve the fundamental problems of the kingdom, but will only postpone them for the future ²⁴. There is an opinion that such changes are quite controversial, since on the one hand they are meant to reduce the influence of the religious component on politics, but on the other hand they only concentrate more political power within the royal family, which in reality may be the true goal of the government, especially since religious preachers who speak unflatteringly about the ruling family are often targeted ²⁵.

Nevertheless, the model of a "moderate Islamic state" is essential for Saudi Arabia at this time in order to overcome the challenges facing Saudi society. According to Filonik, the success of reforms at the top can be achieved only with the survival of the monarchy as well, since radical, explosive changes in the system of state administration will certainly be destructive for the state, the establishment and for the entire society as a result of a crude, revolutionary intervention in the conservative structure of the local environment ²⁶. The religious reform being undertaken in Saudi Arabia should cement the ruling family as the guarantor and the architect of social welfare, economic sustainability and political stability.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia is slowly and gradually moving towards the secularization of the state and society. During the reign of King Salman, the process moved at a rapid pace. Historically the rulers and their political orientation played an important role in the processes of modernizing Saudi society towards a more secular evolution. It should be taken into account that the processes of modernization were accelerated during the reign of progressive monarchs.

Years of high oil prices and stability have produced growing expectations, and along with them, greater social dependency in Saudi society. The Saudi

²⁴Фроловский Д. Перестройка по-саудовски. Каких реформ ждать от будущего короля Саудовской Аравии? – электронный ресурс – Режим доступа: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/75125> (дата обращения: 01.06.2023). [Frolovsky D. Restructuring in the Saudi way. What reforms to expect from the future King of Saudi Arabia? URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/75125> (Accessed: 01.06.2023)]

²⁵ Гейдарова А. Саудовская Аравия: ветер перемен – электронный ресурс – Режим доступа: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/saudovskaya-araviya-veter-peremen/> (дата обращения: 01.06.2023) [Geydarova A. Saudi Arabia: the wind of changes. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/saudovskaya-araviya-veter-peremen/> (Accessed: 01.06.2023)]

²⁶ Филоник А. О. Саудовская Аравия: реформы и власть. Ближний Восток и современность. Сборник статей (выпуск тридцать второй) М., 2007, С.129. [Filonik A. O. Saudi Arabia: Reforms and Power. Middle East and Modernity. Collection of articles (thirty-second edition) М., 2007, p.129.]

establishment would benefit from dealing with an improved version of society as opposed to a population of 35 million people with growing grievances. The political history of modern Saudi Arabia shows that the prospect of the country's development depends entirely on the position of power. In traditional societies like the Saudi one, success depends on the orientation of the ruling elite - whichever direction it heads, that's where the majority of the population will end up.

Throughout all stages of development, the process of secularization involved the subordination of radical clerics to secular administrators in the state apparatus and the gradual reduction of their control over society. The secular component in the state and society was introduced by the ruling elite to implement large-scale programs to modernize the economy, create modern societies, and maintain political stability as well as to ensure the longevity of political regimes.

The experience of the reforms being implemented in Saudi Arabia, shows that the authorities proved to be stronger than adherence to the conservative values, having clearly demonstrated a healthy pragmatism, while reforms turned out to be more preferable than blind adherence to the religious dogmas.

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