



Saudi Arabia's Forgotten Shi'ite Spring

By Ahmad Khalid Majidyar

For decades the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been America's indispensable ally in the Middle East, and the Kingdom's stability remains vital for US strategic interests in the region. While antigovernment protests in the Kingdom's Sunni-majority regions have been small and sporadic in the wake of Arab Spring, there has been an unremitting unrest in the strategic Eastern Province, home to Saudi Arabia's marginalized Shi'ite minority and major oil fields. As in the 1980s, if government repression and discrimination push the Shi'ites to extremes, some may resort to violence and terrorism, jeopardizing American interests in the region, benefiting Iran and al-Qaeda, disrupting the equilibrium of global oil markets, and adversely affecting economic recovery in the West. To ensure lasting stability in the Kingdom, the United States must work with the Saudi government to achieve gradual but meaningful reforms that include integrating the Shi'ites into the Kingdom's sociopolitical system.

While Shi'ites constitute only about 10 to 15 percent of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's population of 28 million, their geographical location in the oil-rich Eastern Province makes them strategically important for the government.¹ The Shi'ite majority region is the largest of the country's 13 administrative areas and contains almost one-fifth of the world's proven oil reserves. Saudi Aramco, the biggest energy company in the world and the backbone of the Kingdom's economy, is also located in the province and Shi'ites make up more than half of its workforce.² The region is likewise prone to foreign interference as it is the closest to the three Persian Gulf countries with Shi'ite majorities: Bahrain (65 to 75 percent), Iraq (65 to 70 percent), and Iran (90 to 95 percent).³

Most Shi'ites in the Eastern Province are adherents of Twelver Shi'ite Islam, with the biggest concentrations in the two large oases of Qatif and al-Hasa. There is also a small Twelver

Ahmad Khalid Majidyar (ahmad.majidyar@aei.org) is a senior research associate at AEI.

Key points in this *Outlook*:

- The Shi'ite presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, the province's vast oil reserves, and the province's proximity to other Persian Gulf countries make Saudi Shi'ites strategically important to the Saudi government.
- The historical marginalization of Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia and growing antigovernment activism in the Eastern Province threaten regional security, undermine the stability of global oil markets, and allow Iran to exploit legitimate grievances of Saudi Shi'ites to destabilize the Kingdom, to incite anti-Americanism, and to project influence in the region.
- The United States must work with the Saudi government to help it devise a comprehensive policy to end discrimination against the Shi'ites and to integrate them into the Kingdom's sociopolitical system.

community in Medina called Nakhawila. In addition, about half a million Ismaili Shi'ites and several thousand Zaydi Shi'ites reside in the southwestern province of Najran, along the border with Yemen.⁴ Unlike in Kuwait, Shi'ite communities in the Eastern Province do not have tribal and clan ties to Iran and Iraq, except for the Banu Tamim tribe.⁵ However, the Saudi and Bahraini Shi'ite communities are linked by blood ties, as Qatif and al-Hasa were in the past part of greater Bahrain.⁶

Saudi Aramco, the biggest energy company in the world and the backbone of the Kingdom's economy, is also located in the Eastern Province and Shi'ites make up more than half of its workforce.

The Shi'ites suffered immensely from Saudi Wahhabi violence during the military conquests of the eastern region in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁷ When King Abdulaziz Al Saud, founder of modern Saudi Arabia, seized al-Hasa from the Ottoman rulers in 1913, Al Saud's radical Ikhwan army embarked on a vicious anti-Shi'ite rampage, calling for a jihad against the Shi'ites and asking Al Saud either to convert them or to permit killing them. When the king refused, the army acted unilaterally in 1926, massacring a great number of Shi'ites. The mass killings forced Al Saud to contain the Ikhwan by force, and Shi'ites were later tolerated when the Kingdom was unified in 1932.⁸ Saudi Shi'ites, however, continue to be treated as second-class citizens, and sectarian tension in the Eastern Province has escalated since the Arab Spring.

Shi'ite Grievances in Saudi Arabia

Over the past century, the Shi'ites have suffered from high levels of religious discrimination, political exclusion, and economic deprivation. The Saudi state religion is Wahhabi-Hanbali Islam, which considers the Shi'ites heretics. Shi'ites are not allowed to build mosques or run *husseiniyas* (Shi'a places of worship and social gathering) in cities with mixed Sunni-Shi'ite populations, such as in Dammam and Khobar. While the government has allowed Shi'a courts in Shi'ite majority areas such as Qatif, the ministry of justice appoints judges without prior consultation with the local communities.

Saudi Shi'ites are also denied basic civil rights and are barred from senior positions in the government. At present, there is no single Shi'ite cabinet member, deputy minister, ambassador, head of a university, or even girls' school principal. Similar discriminatory policies exist in the private sector, where the ministry of interior strictly monitors the recruitment process for senior positions.⁹

Al Saud rulers have at times taken measures to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the Shi'ite communities, but most measures have been either inconsequential or short-lived. In his first month as king in 1975, Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud declared an amnesty that allowed the return of many nationalist political activists—mainly leftists—from exile, including Shi'ite leaders, and the release of many political prisoners inside the Kingdom. A decade later, the government implemented a nationwide development plan benefitting the Shi'ite communities.

Moreover, after the 1993 reconciliation between Shi'ite leaders and the government, Shi'ites in Qatif were allowed to build mosques and publish religious books. But reforms soon stalled as King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud became ill and his hawkish interior minister, Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, took charge of state affairs.¹⁰

The Rise of Political Shi'ism

Despite decades of state-sponsored discrimination and oppression, a majority of Saudi Shi'ites embraced quietism—focusing on religious education and shunning political activism—for much of the 20th century.¹¹ In the late 1950s, however, the government imposed a new set of religious restrictions on the Shi'ite communities, including the closure of offices of Shi'ite *marja'iyyas* (*Marja-i-Taqlids* or sources of emulation), which forced many Saudi Shi'ites to migrate to the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala for education or careers in religious affairs.¹² After the Iraqi government crackdown in 1973, several Shi'ites fled to Qom, Iran, among them Sheikh Hassan al-Saffar, the most prominent Saudi Shi'ite political figure and the architect of Shi'ite political activism in Saudi Arabia.¹³

Born in 1958 in Qatif, al-Saffar had been inspired by prominent Shi'ite leader Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammed al-Shirazi since childhood, when he read al-Shirazi's books at his father's library. At age 13, al-Saffar moved to Najaf, and because al-Shirazi had left Iraq for Kuwait, al-Saffar enrolled in the *hawza* (traditional Shi'a center where clerics are trained) of Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei.

After two years, al-Saffar moved to Qom, where he enrolled in the *hawza* of Sheikh Mohammed Kazem Shariatmadari (1904–85), then Iran’s leading *marja’iyya* who later played an active role in the Islamic Revolution.

In 1974, al-Saffar moved to Kuwait and joined al-Shirazi and Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi, adopting a more political orientation. He studied at the Hawza of the Supreme Prophet and later became a preacher traveling across the Persian Gulf. During his frequent visits to Saudi Arabia, he recruited students who went to study at the Kuwaiti *hawza* and formed the next generation of Saudi religious scholars. Almost all the al-Shirazi clerical leadership in Saudi Arabia passed through the Hawza of the Supreme Prophet.¹⁴ The followers of al-Saffar are, therefore, called *Shirazyyin*.

Uprising after Iran’s Islamic Revolution

Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, antigovernment activism among Saudi Shi’ites was not directed by religious leaders, but mostly manifested itself in the form of leftist movements such as Communism, Nasserism, and Baathism.¹⁵ Moreover, Aramco had turned into a hub for leftist activities.¹⁶ But this changed with the revolution, as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s success and revolutionary rhetoric emboldened the Saudi Shi’ites and provided them with a new model for achieving their objectives.

Right after the Islamic Revolution, al-Saffar and other *Shirazyyin* leaders established the Organization of Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (IRO), mobilizing tens of thousands of supporters to protest against the government.¹⁷ In November 1979, Shi’ite protestors defied a government ban on rituals of *Muharram* (first month of the Islamic calendar) and staged demonstrations, calling on the government to end discrimination, to stop supplying oil to the United States, and to support the Islamic Revolution.

The protests continued for four months, and the government arrested hundreds of activists. As a result, most of the leadership went into exile in Iran and later to the West. The *Muharram* violence marked a departure from the quietist atmosphere prevalent in the Kingdom and signaled a shift of power from traditionalist, quietist leaders to revolutionary-minded young activists led by al-Saffar and other *Shirazyyin*.¹⁸

While the Shi’ite uprising in the Eastern Province was mostly homegrown, the new government in Tehran

launched an aggressive campaign to inflame the unrest. Radio Tehran’s daily Arab-language programs, widely listened to in the Eastern Province, attacked not only the “United States, the bloodsuckers of peoples” but also the Saudi monarchy as a “corrupt, mercenary agent of the United States.”¹⁹ Khomeini’s inflammatory audio-cassettes were distributed among Saudi Shi’ites to propagate the Iranian leader’s revolutionary message. Saudi Arabia—as the guardian of Muslims’ holiest sites in Mecca and Medina—was of particular importance for Khomeini, who saw control of the Kingdom as a prerequisite to achieving leadership of the Islamic world.²⁰

Saudi-Iranian relations were further strained during the annual *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca in 1982 and 1983 when Iranian pilgrims protested against American and Israeli policies, triggering a clash with the Saudi security forces and an expulsion of scores of Iranian citizens, including Khomeini’s *Hajj* representatives Mohammad Musavi Khoiniha and Mehdi Karroubi.²¹ Tension between the two countries reached its peak in 1987 when Saudi security forces killed hundreds of Iranian protestors during *Hajj*. Tehran and Riyadh severed diplomatic ties and Iran boycotted *Hajj* for the next three years.²²

Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism: Hezbollah al-Hejaz

Khomeini strongly condemned the murder of Iranian pilgrims by the “treacherous heads of Saudi Arabia who are the lackeys of the United States,” and many Iranian leaders vowed retaliation.²³ When moderate *Shirazyyin* leaders rejected Iranian dictates to engage in terrorism and left Iran under pressure, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) worked with a group of radical Saudi Shi’ites to form a more pliant group to retaliate against the Saudi government.

Under the aegis of IRGC commander Ahmad Sharifi, Hezbollah al-Hejaz, also known as the Saudi Hezbollah, was established in 1987. New members were recruited not just in the Eastern Province but also in religious seminaries and military camps in Iran and Lebanon.²⁴ The clerical wing of Hezbollah al-Hejaz mostly came from Tajamu’ ‘Ulama’ al-Hijaz operating out of the Hawza al-Hijaziyya (Hijazi seminary) in Qom. Like Khomeini, the group used the name al-Hejaz for Saudi Arabia to undermine the legitimacy of the Al Saud regime.²⁵

A small number of *Shirazyyin* leaders also joined the group. After a meeting with IRGC officials in Syria, for

example, Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Mughassil left the IRO and became the leader of the Saudi Hezbollah's military wing and began recruiting young activists in different villages and cities of the Eastern Province. With the help of the IRGC and agents within the Saudi oil installations, Hezbollah al-Hejaz launched a series of high-profile terrorist attacks inside the Kingdom, including the August 1987 attack at a gas plant and the March 1988 bombing of petrochemical installations at Ras Tanura and Jubail in the Eastern Province.²⁶

At present in Saudi Arabia, there is no single Shi'ite cabinet member, deputy minister, ambassador, head of a university, or even girls' school principal.

After a government crackdown, most leaders escaped to Iran, Lebanon, and Syria and shifted their focus to targeting Saudi diplomatic installations abroad, conducting bomb attacks against Saudi embassies from Bangkok to Ankara.²⁷ After Khomeini's death in 1989 and the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Tehran reportedly urged Hezbollah to freeze activities because of convergence of interests with Riyadh at that time.²⁸ The organization instead focused on media propaganda against the Saudi regime by opening publishing houses in Damascus and Beirut.²⁹

Also called *Khat al-Imam* (the line of Imam Khomeini), Saudi Hezbollah's members emulate Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in religious and political affairs. *Shirazyin*, on the other hand, are independent in their political activity and follow Iraq-based Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani and other more moderate *marja'iyyas*. Saudi Hezbollah rejected the *Shirazyin*'s reconciliation with the government, but many of its leaders benefited from the government's amnesty and returned home in the early 1990s.³⁰

After a lull in violence and end of the First Gulf War, the group's militant wing began planning for operations to "remove U.S. forces from the Arabian Peninsula."³¹ On June 25, 1996, the organization carried out a bomb attack against a housing complex in Al Khobar, Eastern Province, killing 19 Americans and wounding more than 300 people of different nationalities. Subsequent investigations found that senior Iranian government officials had "planned, funded, and sponsored" the

Khobar Towers attacks.³² The Saudi government executed or arrested many of the group's members and others fled to Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the West. Four members of the organization remain on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted terrorism list: Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Mughassil, Abdelkarim Hussein Mohamed Al-Nasser, Ibrahim Salih Mohammed Al-Yacoub, and Ali Saed Bin Ali El-Hoorie.³³

From Confrontation to Accommodation

By the end of 1980s, a growing number of Saudi Shi'ite activists had recognized the limits of the revolution. Khomeini was dead and his revolution remained largely confined to Iran's borders. They therefore viewed accommodation with the government as a more realistic approach than confrontation to achieve reforms.³⁴ Furthermore, Shi'ite leaders in exile felt they were becoming increasingly detached from their communities at home, hence they renounced revolutionary rhetoric and adopted an agenda calling for democratization and human rights in the Kingdom.³⁵

In 1990, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the IRO broke ties with other Shi'ite organizations in the region and renamed itself the Reform Movement (*al-Harakat Islah*). "We condemned the attack and expressed readiness to defend our homeland—prompting King Fahd to send a delegation to meet us," al-Saffar acknowledged in an interview.³⁶

In September 1993, a delegation of the Reform Movement arrived in Saudi Arabia and held meetings with senior government officials, including King Fahd and Prince Muhammad bin Fahd, the governor of the Eastern Province. As a result, the government granted the Shi'ite opposition a general amnesty and pledged to improve Shi'ites' sociopolitical conditions in the Kingdom. In return, the opposition agreed to cease antigovernment activism and returned home.³⁷

In subsequent years, al-Saffar not only broadened his group's appeal within the Shi'ite communities but he also had some success in working with Sunni opposition movements. In 2003, Shi'ite and Sunni opposition groups bridged the sectarian gap and launched a series of joint petitions for reform such as the "Vision for the Present and Future of the Country."³⁸

The joint efforts paid off as King Abdullah initiated national dialogue conferences and held municipal elections in 2005. Turnout in the elections was significantly higher in the Eastern Province than in Sunni regions, a

testament to the *Shirazzyin's* ability to mobilize masses through informal networks and religious institutions. In Qatif, the *Shirazzyin* won four of the five seats, and in al-Hasa, they won three of the six seats that were opened for contest. Jafar Mohammad al-Shayeb, a prominent member of the Reform Movement, became the chairman of the municipal council in Qatif.³⁹

The Arab Spring: Riyadh's Counterrevolution

In early 2011, soon after revolutionary protests broke out in the Arab world, the Saudi government initiated a four-pronged strategy to counter the emerging threat to its rule. This included 1) injecting \$130 billion into the economy to create jobs, raise salaries, and provide subsidized housing; 2) arresting or co-opting opposition leaders; 3) taking counterrevolutionary measures to rescue friendly governments in the region, especially the Persian Gulf monarchies; and 4) playing the sectarianism card to depict the protest movement in the Eastern Province as an Iranian–Shi'a plot and to prevent its spread to the Sunni heartlands.⁴⁰

The strategy achieved its political purpose, at least in the short run. There was no Saudi Spring. Tens of thousands of Saudi activists—both Shi'ites and Sunnis—signed petitions on Facebook calling for a nationwide protest on March 11, 2011, dubbed the “Day of Rage.”⁴¹ But the day passed almost quietly as opposition groups failed to translate their online activism into street protests. Civil society institutions—legal political parties, youth associations, women's organizations, trade unions, or independent human rights organization—are largely nonexistent in Saudi Arabia. In the capital city of Riyadh, only one person showed up to protest and was immediately arrested.⁴²

In the Eastern Province, however, hundreds of Shi'ite activists defied the government ban on demonstration and protested. Unlike in the early 1980s, however, protestors did not call for the overthrow of the regime, but for an end to discrimination, a release of political prisoners, support for uprising in Bahrain, and a fairer representation in the political power. Predictably, the Saudi interior minister vowed to crush the protests with an “iron fist” and unleashed an anti-Shi'ite media campaign to discredit the protestors as agents of Iran.⁴³

The three different Shi'ite groupings in the Eastern Province—traditionalists, reformists, and radicals—took different approaches in the wake of the Arab Spring. The ultraconservative and traditionalist leaders opposed

antigovernment activism and their leaders rushed to Riyadh to renew allegiance to the regime.⁴⁴ The Reform Movement members, on the other hand, wanted to take advantage of the changing geopolitical landscape across the Arab world to push for more reforms. However, they wanted to seek concessions through dialogue with the government rather than through confrontation, realizing that the Shi'ite minority would achieve little without support from Sunni groups, which were largely silent.⁴⁵ Many young activists, however, saw outright opposition as the only means to achieving reforms. A Shi'a religious scholar, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who in 2009 had called for the secession of the Eastern Province, played a leading role in mobilizing the masses.⁴⁶

On June 25, 1996, Saudi Hezbollah carried out a bomb attack against a housing complex in Al Khobar, Eastern Province, killing 19 Americans and wounding more than 300 people of different nationalities.

Since the government's arrest of al-Nimr on July 8, 2012, there have been continued protests in Qatif demanding his release.⁴⁷ Once a second-tier leader, al-Nimr's popularity has soared since his arrest.⁴⁸ On March 25, 2013, prosecutors at the first court hearing called for al-Nimr's “death by crucifixion,” which drew condemnation from Shi'ite leaders inside and outside Saudi Arabia as well as massive antigovernment demonstrations in the Eastern Province.⁴⁹ The Saudi Hezbollah has vowed to target Saudi oil installations if the cleric is executed.⁵⁰

Iranian Influence in the Eastern Province

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has tried to exploit legitimate grievances of the Saudi Shi'ites for political ends, albeit with mixed results. While Iranian leaders such as IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Suleimani incorrectly claim that worldwide, Shi'ites “have transformed into a single base and have found a single leader” in Iran's supreme leader, only a tiny number of Saudi Shi'ites emulate Khamenei in religious and political affairs.⁵¹

Saudi Shi'ite leaders acknowledge that there are long-standing ties between the Saudi Shi'ites and *marja'iyyas*

in Iran and Iraq. They send *khums* (religious taxes) to *marja'iyas* in Iran and Iraq and frequently visit shrines in Iraq's Najaf and Karbala and in Iran's Qom. But Saudi Shi'ites assert that religious allegiance to foreign *marja'iyas* does not amount to loyalty to foreign governments.⁵² Government religious restrictions mean that Shi'ites are barred from higher religious education at home and their loyalties are questioned when they seek education abroad.

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, the Iranian government has stepped up soft-power efforts to influence events in the Eastern Province. Iranian Arabic television and radio channels urge the Shi'ites to rise against the Saudi and Bahraini regimes. Launched in 2003, Iran's Arabic television network Al Alam has become popular among Shi'ites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia for providing wide coverage of unrest in the two countries. Many Shi'ites say they watch Al Alam because popular Arab channels such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera largely ignore the Shi'ite protests. "Because there's no coverage from the international or free media, everybody is focusing on Al Alam and the (Lebanese Hezbollah's channel) Al Manar," said a Shi'ite activist in the Eastern Province.⁵³

Iran's interference in the region is not, however, limited to soft power. The IRGC appears to maintain Saudi Hezbollah's sleeper cells in the Kingdom and to use them for acts of terrorism inside and outside Saudi Arabia. On August 15, 2012, hackers attacked Saudi Aramco and erased data on three-quarters of its corporate computers, replacing all data with an image of a burning American flag. American intelligence officials alleged that Iran was the real perpetrator in that Iran used its agents within Aramco to stage the attack.⁵⁴ The cyber attack showed that with Iranian aid, only a small number of Shi'ites could do a great deal of damage to the Saudi oil industry.

There are also growing fears in the Persian Gulf monarchies that Iran might reactivate the Saudi Hezbollah to carry out acts of sabotage and terror to shape the outcome of the Arab Spring in the region, especially in Bahrain and Syria. In August 2011, an article in Middle East Online claimed that Riyadh was concerned about the increasing presence of Saudi Hezbollah members in Syria and Lebanon and believed that Tehran was reactivating the organization to counter Saudi support for the Syrian rebels.⁵⁵ In August 2012, United Arab Emirates daily *Akhabar al-Arab* reported that more than 50 Saudi Hezbollah militants received financial aid and military training in IRGC camps near Qom and Tehran and were

then deployed to Karbala in December with forged Iraqi passports.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The Arab Spring has reinvigorated the Shi'ites' call for reform in Saudi Arabia. Continued government discrimination and oppression radicalize Shi'ite youth and undermine the position of moderate leaders who prefer engagement to confrontation with the Saudi state.

The Saudi government must devise a comprehensive policy to end discrimination against the Shi'ites and integrate them into the Kingdom's sociopolitical system. This could help ensure security and stability in the oil-rich Eastern Province and undercut foreign influence in the region. As Arabs, Saudi Shi'ites would have no desire to have a pro-Iranian orientation if they were treated fairly in their own homeland.

The current unrest in the Eastern Province is also important because it is happening at a time when calls for reforms are gaining momentum in Sunni regions as well. Although the royal family yet again showed its sticking power by weathering the Arab Spring storm, a revolution in the Kingdom remains a possibility in the future. In the past two years, the government has bought citizens' loyalty to remain in power, but it has not taken serious steps to address the root causes of widespread discontent across the country.

Indeed, the same economic, political, and demographic challenges that prompted revolutions in other Arab countries are prevalent in Saudi Arabia: a very young population struggling with rising unemployment, official corruption, a bloated public sector, extreme gender discrimination, lack of freedom of expression, and a growing demand for reforms in social media.⁵⁷ A cross-sectarian opposition could rock the Saudi state to its core. Instability in Saudi Arabia would jeopardize American interests in the region, benefit Iran and al-Qaeda, disrupt the equilibrium of global oil markets, and adversely affect economic recovery in the West. To ensure durable stability in the Kingdom, the United States must work with the Saudi government to achieve gradual but meaningful reforms.

Notes

1. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Estimated Percentage Range of Shia by Country," www.pewforum.org/files/2009/10/Shiarange.pdf; and Central Intelligence Agency,

"The World Factbook," updated July 10, 2013, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html.

2. US Energy Information Administration, *Saudi Arabia* (February 26, 2013), www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/Saudi_Arabia/saudi_arabia.pdf.

3. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Estimated Percentage Range of Shia by Country."

4. "Wazeyat-e Shi'ayan-e Arabistan: Dar Goftogo ba Sheikh Hassan bin Musa al-Saffar Motafaker-e Barjasta Shi'a va Imam Juma Shahr-e Qatif-e Arabistan," [Shi'ites' Situation in Saudi Arabia: Interview with Sheikh Hassan bin Musa al-Saffar, Prominent Shi'ite Intellectual and Friday Prayer Leader in Saudi Arabia's Qatif City], *Hawzah*, October–November 2008, www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/5658/6887/82900. See also Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 180; 194. For detailed information about Ismaili Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia, see Human Rights Watch, *The Ismailis of Najran: Second-Class Saudi Citizens* (September 2008), www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/saudiArabia0908web.pdf.

5. WikiLeaks, "The Saudi Shi'a: Where Do Their Loyalties Lie?," February 5, 2006, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/05/06RIYADH3312.html>.

6. "Wazeyat-e Shi'ayan-e Arabistan."

7. See Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*, 180. Muhammad ibn Saud, the founder of the Saudi dynasty, and Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, a Salafi Islamic scholar, formed an alliance and established the first Saudi state in 1744. Ibn Saud first captured the Shi'ite-dominated eastern region at the end of the 18th century. The region was contested among Saudi and Ottoman rulers until 1913.

8. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 97–98.

9. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif Municipal Council, on July 26, 2013.

10. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif Municipal Council, on July 26, 2013. For more information about social, economic, political, and religious discriminations against Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia, see International Crisis Group, *The Shi'ite Question in Saudi Arabia* (Middle East Report No. 45, September 19, 2005), www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Saudi%20Arabia/The%20Shi'ite%20Question%20in%20Saudi%20Arabia.pdf; and Human Rights Watch, *Denied Dignity: Systematic Discrimina-*

tion and Hostility toward Saudi Shia Citizens (September 2009), www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/saudi0909webwcover.pdf.

11. Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 51.

12. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif municipal Council, on July 26, 2013.

13. Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 145.

14. *Ibid.*, 145–46.

15. "Wazeyat-e Shi'ayan-e Arabistan."

16. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 42.

17. "Jeryan-Shinasi Mokhalefan Al Saud dar Bedari Islami" [Studying Opposition Movements to Saudi Government in Islamic Awakening], Fars News Agency, January 15, 2013, www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13911026000976. See also Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 164.

18. Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 50.

19. "Saudi Minority Sect Is Restive," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 20, 1980, www.csmonitor.com/1980/0220/022048.html/%28page%29/2.

20. Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 150.

21. Nima Tamadon, "Iran va Arabistan Saudi: yak Rabeta Mo'alaq" [Iran and Saudi Arabia: A Fragile Relationship], BBC Persian, July 14, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/mobile/iran/2012/07/120528_123_lp_neighbours_iran_saudi_arabia_nt.shtml.

22. Martin Seth Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (Edison: Transactions Publishers, 1996), 176–77.

23. "Baazkhani Payam-e Tarekhi Bonyangozar-e Kabir-e Intghelab-e Islami: Saran-e Khayen-e Arabistan-e Saudi Nokaran-e Amerika Astand" [Rereading the Historic Message of the Great Founder of Islamic Revolution: Saudi Arabia's Treacherous Leaders Are America's Servants], Fars News Agency, March 21, 2011, <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9001010045>.

24. International Crisis Group, *The Shi'ite Question in Saudi Arabia*.

25. Toby Matthiesen, "Hizbullah al-Hijaz: A History of The Most Radical Saudi Shi'a Opposition Group," *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 179–97. See also "Hezbollah al-Hejaz. . Waraqat Sorya le-enteqam men al Saudi-ya" [Saudi Hezbollah.. Syrian Front To Take Revenge from Saudi Arabia], Middle East Online, August 18, 2011. <http://middle-east-online.com/?id=116048>.

26. *Ibid.*

27. "Taqrir: Iran Tadrob Tanzeem 'Hezbollah Al Saudi' le-qeyam be Amal" [Report: Iran is Training 'Saudi Hezbollah'

Organization To Carry Out Acts of Sabotage], *Akhbar al-Arab*, August 8, 2012. www.akhbaralarab.net/index.php/regional/52793-q-q.

28. "Hezbollah al-Hejaz . . ."

29. Ibid.

30. Matthiesen, "Hizbullah al-Hijaz."

31. "Hezbollah al-Hejaz" [Saudi Hezbollah], Rasid News Agency, December 6, 2005, www.rasid.com/?act=artc&id=8931.

32. Carol D. Leonnig, "Iran Held Liable In Khobar Attack," *Washington Post*, December 23, 2006.

33. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Most Wanted Terrorists," www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/@@wanted-group-listing.

34. Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 52.

35. WikiLeaks, "The Saudi Shi'a."

36. "Wazeyat-e Shi'ayan-e Arabistan."

37. Foud Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia* (Lebanon: Saqi Books, 2006), 178–208

38. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 245–46.

39. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif municipal Council, on July 26, 2013.

40. Neil MacFarquhar, "In Saudi Arabia, Royal Funds Buy Peace for Now," *New York Times*, June 8, 2011.

41. Mike Giglio, "Saudi Arabia's 'Day of Rage,'" *Daily Beast*, March 10, 2011, www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03/10/saudi-arabias-day-of-rage-the-next-uprising.html.

42. Summer Said, "Saudi Protests Draw Hundreds," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2011.

43. Glen Carey, "Saudi Arabia Threatens 'Iron Fist' after Shi'ite Town Attacks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 6, 2011, www.smh.com.au/world/saudi-arabia-threatens-iron-fist-after-shi'ite-town-attacks-20111005-119m4.htm.

44. Madawi Al-Rasheed, "No Saudi Spring: Anatomy of a Failed Revolution," *Boston Review*, March 1, 2012, www.bostonreview.net/madawi-al-rasheed-arab-spring-saudi-arabia.

45. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif municipal Council, on July 26, 2013.

46. Al-Rasheed, "No Saudi Spring."

47. "Masira Hasheda fi Qatif Tazamana Ma'a Sheikh Nimr" [A Large Protest Rally in Qatif in Solidarity with Sheikh al-Nimr], Rasid News Agency, April 5, 2013, www.rasid.com/?act=artc&id=52932.

48. For details of antigovernment protests in the Eastern Province in the wake of Arab Spring, see Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 72–92.

49. "Saudi: Sheikh Nimr's Crucified Fate," *Al Akhbar*, March 30, 2013. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15395>.

50. "Tahdid-e Chah-hai Naft Saudi Tavasot-e Hezbollah Hejaz" [Threat against Saudi Oilfields by Hezbollah al-Hejaz], *Raja News*, July 11, 2012, www.rajanews.com/detail.asp?id=131643.

51. "Sardar Qasem Soleimani: Taseer-e Entekhabat-e ba Shokoh dar Iran Besh Az Manavr-e Nizame Ast. Dar Entekhabat, Nabayad Eshtebah Kard" [Sardar Qasem Soleimani: The Impact of Magnificent Elections in Iran Is More Than a Military Maneuver. Mistake Should Not Be Made in Elections], *Khabar Online*, April 16, 2013, <http://khabaronline.ir/detail/287004/politics/parties>

52. This information comes from my interview with Jafar al-Shayeb, a senior Shi'ite community leader in the Eastern Province and former elected chairman of the Qatif municipal Council, on July 26, 2013.

53. "Battle of the Box," *The Gulf Online*, January 2012, www.thegulfonline.com/Print.aspx?ArtID=4238.

54. Nicole Perloth, "In Cyberattack on Saudi Firm, U.S. Sees Iran Firing Back," *New York Times*, October 23, 2012.

55. "Hezbollah al-Hejaz.. Warqa Sorya Le'enteqam men al-Saudi-ya" [Hezbollah al-Hejaz.. Syria Front to Retaliate against Saudi], *Middle East Online*, August 18, 2011. <http://middle-east-online.com/?id=116048>.

56. "Taqrir: Iran tadrob Tanzeem . . ."

57. Bruce O. Riedel, "Saudi Arabia: The Elephant in the Living Room," in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011), 159–68.