Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations: Saudi Arabia
Cultural Field Guide

Country: Saudi Arabia has a population of 22.8 million people. Saudi Arabs make up 80-85 percent of the population; foreign workers make up the remainder. Foreign workers include primarily non-Saudi Arabs (2 million) and South Asians (2.4 million).

Saudi Arabia includes five regions: Nejd, al-Hassa (Eastern Province), the northern region near the borders with Jordan and Iraq, the Hijaz and Asir on the Red Sea coast, and the Rub al-Khali desert (the Empty Quarter).

Although the House of Saud and the House of Wahhab attempted to consolidate Arab tribes on the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th Century, the modern Saudi identity only emerged in 1932, when Ibn Saud created the modern state of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is based on a puritanical version of Islam, known as Wahhabism. Once a poor area with a nomadic economy, Saudi Arabia has experienced rapid development since the discovery of vast oil reserves in the 1930s. The economic prosperity that came from the oil wealth has posed large challenges to the religiously and culturally conservative country and has required the importation of large amounts of foreign labor. These groups of foreign laborers are kept separate from the Saudis.

Religion

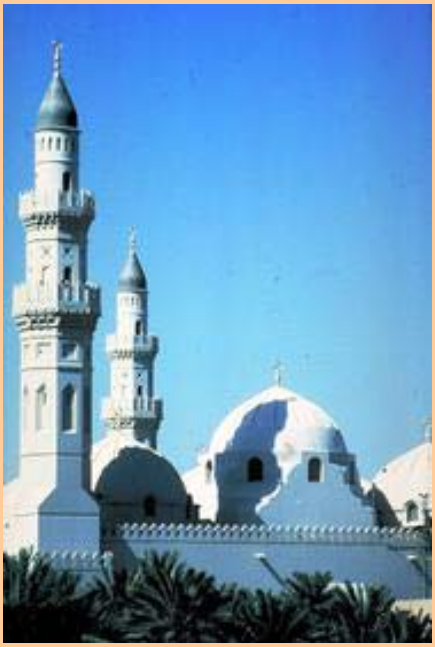
Divisions: Saudi Arabia is Muslim country. The Saudi population is divided between Sunni (95 percent) and Shia (5 percent). Most Sunni Saudi Arabs are followers of the Wahhabi interpretation of Hanbali Sunni Islam, which is the state religion. Non-Saudi Arabs are mostly Sunni Muslims. South Asian workers are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are predominantly Muslim, Indians are mainly Hindu, and Sri Lankans are primarily Buddhist.

Wahhabism condemns any extensive contact with non-Muslim religions or cultures. While Wahhabi Islam was used as a unifying religion to consolidate Saudi tribes, its exclusivist tendencies have led to sharp divides between Wahhabists and other Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The division between the Wahhabi Sunni majority and the Shia minority is particularly sharp in Saudi Arabia. Shia Muslims form the majority of the population in the eastern province of al-Hassa, where the country's oil resources are located. Followers of Wahhabism see the Shia as heretics who have debased the practice of Islam. Shia in Saudi Arabia experience discrimination because of their religious identity and are denied many of the generous benefits that are provided to the Sunni Arab population by the government.

Adherents of religions other than Islam must practice their religion privately in Saudi Arabia. Other than mosques, no other places of worship are permitted.

Geographic Differences: There are differences in religion between the five regions that make up Saudi Arabia. The central region, Nejd, is the religious heart of the country, where the religious-political alliance between the House of Saud and the House of Wahhab was forged in 1740. Abdul al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud agreed to cooperate to extend their respective religious and political authority by using Wahhab's puritanical vision of Islam to legitimize Saud's rule while Saud gave Wahhab protection and material assistance. Nejd remains the stronghold of the conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.



Qubbah Mosque

The Hijaz region on the Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula is more cosmopolitan, as it was an Ottoman territory, and it contains the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which host more than a million pilgrims for the *Hajj* every year.

The population in the al-Hassa region (the Eastern Province) is mostly Shia. Al-Hassa is also the location of most of the country's oil resources. The discrimination against the Shia extends into the economic sphere, because the Shia tend not to benefit from the oil wealth that is produced in their home region.

Major Tenets: Islam was founded on the Arabian Peninsula by the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 A.D. Sources of the Islamic faith are the Koran, regarded as the word of God, and the *hadith*, a compilation of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad.

In the mid-7th Century, soon after the death of Muhammad, Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims split over who should be his rightful spiritual and secular successor. In terms of doctrine and belief Shia and Sunni Muslims are similar. Both follow the Five Pillars of Islam: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and the mosque (house of worship); fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*). However, there are significant differences between Sunni and Shia

Muslims, including views of the Imamate, religious hierarchy, secular authority, and visitation to shrines.

Wahhabism, which grew out of Hanbalite Sunni Islam in the 18th Century, emphasizes the unity of God and forbids anything that contradicts or denies the oneness of God, such as saints or visiting shrines. Wahhabis believe that their practice of Islam is the only proper practice of the religion, and see a sharp distinction between themselves and other Muslims.

Shura Council

Role of Islam in Government and Politics: Muhammad was a religious prophet and political leader. Accordingly, the Islamic political tradition favors a single ruler who embodies the government. In Sunni Islam this ruler is the "caliph." The first four caliphs—all relatives and followers of Muhammad—solidified the religious, social, and political institutions of Islam. Sunni Muslims recognize the first four caliphs. Shia recognize only the heirs of Ali as legitimate authorities, and they gave these successors the title Imam.

The nation-state is a new structure that has no historical antecedents in the political culture of Islam. Because Muslims believe that sovereignty is the exclusive preserve of God, the Islamic notions of the caliphate have no territorial limits. Rather, they are directly related to the concept of rule by a person or dynasty. Islam has served as a source of legitimacy for Saudi rulers since the forging of an alliance between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Abdul al-Wahhab in 1740. The relationship between Al-Saud and Al-Wahhab remains the ideological basis for the Saudi state in the 20th century. The Wahhabi state recognizes no distinction between religious beliefs and the political system, as shown by the fact that the Koran is the official constitution of Saudi Arabia.

Role of Islam in Society: Islam is a pervasive influence in society, guiding social conduct, politics, and family organization.

View of Other Muslims (the *Umma*): Since World War II, the religious bonds among members of the Islamic community—the *Umma*—has been often overshadowed by nationalist affiliation, but it has not been completely abandoned or replaced. Saudi Arabs continue to see themselves as the custodians of the Islamic holy cities and this makes them more aware of the *Umma* than other national Muslim groups.

Ethnic Groups

Saudi Arabs constitute 80-85 percent of the population in Saudi Arabia. Non-Saudi Arabs are 2 million of the 22.8 million national population. Of the non-Saudi Arabs, 1 million are Egyptian, Yemenis number several hundred thousand and Jordanians and Lebanese number 100,000 each.

The relationship between Saudi and non-Saudi Arabs is characterized by cultural closeness and economic and social distance. Both groups speak Arabic, and follow Islam. Non-Saudi Arabs, however, are only in Saudi Arabia to work. Jobs are unavailable in their home countries and Saudis need the labor force. Despite cultural affinities between the guest workers and their hosts, the Saudis maintain a divide that keeps these people from fully integrating into Saudi society.

There are 2,460,000 South Asian workers in Saudi Arabia. Indians are the most numerous, with a population of 1,230,000, followed by Pakistanis, numbering 780,000. Bangladeshis make up 450,000 and Sri Lankans 300,000. About 55 percent of the Indians in Saudi Arabia come from the Kerala region of India. Together, South Asian workers comprise 40 percent of the foreign population in Saudi Arabia.

South Asian workers are culturally different from Saudis and do not assimilate into Saudi society, but remain focused on their respective homelands. Moreover, the Saudi government, reflecting the deep-seated Saudi suspicion of foreigners and their potentially corrupting influence on Saudi society, discourages foreign workers from integrating with Saudis by setting up housing that is separate from the rest of the population. South Asian workers do not have access to the political and economic rights and benefits that the Saudi population has.

Ethnic Description

Both Saudi and non-Saudi Arabs tend to be dark haired with brown eyes, and olive or dark skin. However, no single set of racial or physical characteristics defines Arabs in Saudi Arabia. Because of centuries of migration and contact with other groups, Arabs can exhibit Persian, Turkish, Indian, African, and South Asian features. South Asian workers in Saudi Arabia exhibit a range of physical characteristics. However, they tend to share similar characteristics of slight stature, dark eyes, and dark complexion. South Asian ethnicity cannot be reliably determined by physical appearance.

Cultural History

Saudi Arabs grew out of the larger group of nomadic inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula , who were known as "Arab." The prophet Muhammad briefly unified the Arabs of the Arabian peninsula at the beginning of the Islamic religion in the 7th Century, but this unity was short-lived as the newly established Arab empire migrated north into Iraq, where the Abbasid Caliphate was established. The term "Arab" is now largely a cultural/linguistic designation, embracing various national, regional, and religious groups in several different countries.

The inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula lacked a common cultural and ethnic identity until the 18th Century, when Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud sought to unify the peninsula based on their shared religious-political philosophy. Al-Wahhab was a religious scholar who objected to what he called deviations from strict Islamic teachings and practices. Al-Wahhab advocated a return to the original Islam as practiced at the time of the prophet Muhammad in the 7th Century. Al-Wahhab reinforced the notion that the Saudi Arab identity is closely tied to the early events of Islam, which occurred on Saudi territory in the Hijaz in the 8th Century A.D.

Saudi National Guardsmen in English Class

The Saudi state and Saudi identity did not coalesce until the 20th Century under Emir Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Faisal Al-Saud (known as Ibn Saud). Ibn Saud, using the Wahhabi religion and the Wahhabist Ikhwan fighters, consolidated the Saudi tribes into a single state. The Saudi Arab state developed in relative isolation from other influences, which has caused Saudi Arab identity to tend to be insular and wary of change or outside influence.


Saudi Oil Field

The changes in the Saudi state after the oil boom of the 1950s, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the 1991 introduction of U.S. forces into Saudi territory have all led to changes in and challenges to the conservative Saudi Arab identity. The Saudis began to import labor to support the expansion of the oil industry, a trend that continues through the 21st Century, and which has brought large quantities of non-Saudis and non-Arabs into the otherwise very insular Kingdom. The sudden wealth and rapid development sparked by the oil boom jolted the Saudis from an undeveloped impoverished society into a twentieth century environment in the space of several years. The deep-seated traditional values of Saudi society often conflicted with the modernization plans of the House of Saud. In the midst of the "oil decade" of 1973-1982, there were stirrings of a religious revival that peaked in 1979. In the 1980s, the number of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia was reduced by the Saudi government's "Saudization" plan, which sought to increase Saudi self-sufficiency and reduce the frequency of contact with foreigners. Contact with foreigners was seen by many as corrupting the purity of Saudi culture.

During the 1991 Gulf War period, there was increased social and cultural polarization over issues related to the country's rapid modernization, unprecedented openness, and close

relations with the West. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and its threats against Saudi Arabia caused a crisis of legitimacy for the Saudi government. The Gulf War revealed the massive mismanagement of the economy, the costs of the welfare state, the allowances to the royal family, and the excessive spending on an inefficient defense force. Despite this high spending on defense, Saudi Arabia still had to rely on a foreign, non-Muslim power (the United States) and invite foreign troops into Saudi Arabia to defend Saudi territory against another Muslim state. After the liberation of Kuwait, the Saudi government and royal family was faced with a large rift between itself and its own population, a rift that continues into the 21st Century.

King Fahd

Population

Age Breakdown: 42.4 percent of the population is between 0 and 14 years; 54.8 percent of the population is between 15-64 years; and 2.8 percent of the population is older than 65 years. Saudi Arabia has a very high birthrate of more than 3 percent, which is projected to double the population in 25 years.

Language: Both Saudi and non-Saudi Arabs speak Arabic. The Arabic language—a Semitic tongue that is spoken by 200 million people—exists in three forms: the Classical Arabic of the Koran; Modern Standard Arabic, used in books, newspapers, television, and radio; and the spoken language. In Saudi Arabia, the dialects of spoken Arabic correspond to regions of the country. Gulf Arabic is spoken in the northern and southern areas of the Eastern Province of the al-Hasa region. Hijazi Arabic is spoken in the Hijaz region, and is also known as Hijazi and West Arabian Colloquial Arabic. Najdi Arabic is spoken in central Saudi Arabia in the area of Nejd. Dialects used by Arab workers in Saudi Arabia include Egyptian Spoken Arabic and South Levantine Spoken Arabic. The Arabic of the Bedouin is considered the most pure version of the Arabic language.

South Asian workers in Saudi Arabia speak Hindi, Urdu, Bangla (Bengali), Punjabi, Sindhi, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Malayalam, among other languages, depending on their country of origin and ethnic group.

Many Saudis and foreign workers also speak English. English is the language used among the large numbers of South Asian workers, as well as between these immigrants and virtually all other foreigners and the local Arab inhabitants.

Influence on Culture: Language is an important aspect of Arab identity. The Arabic language embodies an entire culture that links Arabs across time and space. Arabic was the language in which the Koran was revealed to Muhammad.

Holidays: There are two major annual Islamic holidays: *Eid-al-Fitr* is the end of Ramadan and is celebrated on a different day each year, depending on the lunar calendar. The celebration usually lasts three days. *Eid-al-Adha* is the Festival of Sacrifice. Like most other Islamic holidays, the exact day of celebration varies depending on the lunar calendar.

Customs

Greetings: Arabs often greet each other with a number of ritual phrases and fixed responses. When a Muslim Arab greets another Muslim, the greeting is: "Peace be upon you" (*as-salam alaykum*). The other Muslim must then respond, "And upon you be peace" (*wa alaykum as-salam*). "*Salam*," however, is a special greeting for Muslims only. If a non-Muslim greets a Muslim with the greeting "Peace be upon you," the Muslim is only supposed to respond, "And upon you" (*wa alayk*). Traditionally, the Muslim was not supposed to initiate the greeting of "*salam*" to a non-Muslim, as Prophet Muhammad taught that Muslims "should not greet the Jews and Christians before they greet you, and when you meet one of them in the street, force him to go to the narrowest part of it." The Saudi Arabs continue to teach this *hadith* (a saying by Prophet Muhammad) in Saudi schools. Saudis will not congratulate non-Muslims on their holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, and any other commemoration that might involve something external to Islam. Saudi Arabs believe that to do so would be to validate the other religion, something that they believe is worse than committing suicide or having illicit sex.

Elaborate greetings and inquiries about health and well-being often take up large amounts of time, but are important in establishing friendly relations. These elaborate greetings originate from Bedouin tradition where the nomadic lifestyle led to frequent encounters with strangers. Arabs will often shake hands every time they meet and every time they depart. Arabs will rise when shaking hands and when an esteemed person enters a room. Handshakes are generally long in length and may involve grasping the elbow. They usually do not possess the same firmness as those of Americans.

Upon entering a room full of people, Arabs will greet those present—especially the elderly—before sitting down. Eye contact is important to Arabs and signals respect to the person greeted. Arabs find public displays of affection between the opposite sex offensive.

Arabs typically stand very close when greeting and talking; the concept of personal space in the Western sense is foreign. Hugging and embracing between men is common in the Arab world. Touching noses together three times when greeting is a Bedouin gesture of friendship and respect. Two men kissing each other quickly on the lips when greeting is also an expression of friendship.

Namaskar or *Namaste* is the most popular form of greeting among Indians. Both palms are placed together and raised below the face. It is a general salutation that is used to both welcome somebody and to bid farewell. Other forms of greeting common among India's various communities include the Sikh *Sat-Sri-akal* and the Tamilian *Vannakkam*.

Handshakes are the common form of greeting between two Pakistani males. Close friends and relatives may embrace. Women may greet each other with a kiss or an embrace.

Ayubowan, which means 'May you live long,' is the customary Sri Lankan greeting. Palms held close together against the chest denotes welcome, goodbye, respect, devotion, or loyalty. Gifts should be given or received with both hands.

When greeting non-Muslims, Bangladeshis use the Indian *Namaskar* greeting. When greeting fellow Muslims, they use *Asalaam walaikhum*, which means 'Peace be upon you.'

Gestures/Hand Signs: Arabs, like most people, use gestures and body movements to communicate. It is said that "To tie an Arab's hands while he is speaking is tantamount to tying his tongue." However, Arab gestures differ a great deal from American ones.

Arabs may make the following gestures/hand signs:

- Placing the right hand or its forefinger on the tip of the nose, on the right lower eyelid, on top of the head, or on the mustache or beard means "It's in front of me," "I see it," or, "It's my obligation."
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest immediately after shaking hands with another man shows respect or thanks.
- Touching the tips of the right fingertips to the forehead while bowing the head slightly also connotes respect.
- Holding the fingers in a pear shaped configuration with the tips pointing up at about waist level and moving the hand slightly up and down signals "Be patient" or "Be careful."
- Flicking the right thumbnail on front teeth can mean "I have no money."
- Biting the right forefinger, which has been placed sideways in the mouth, is an expression of regret.
- The "OK" sign, if shaken at another person, symbolizes the evil eye.
- Hitting the right fist into the open palm of the left hand indicates obscenity or contempt.
- Placing the palm of the right hand on the chest, bowing the head a little and closing one's eyes means "Thank you" (in the name of Allah).
- A quick snap of the head upwards with an accompanying click of the tongue signals, "No" or "Perhaps."
- Flipping the hand near the mouth and simultaneously making a clicking sound with the tongue and teeth indicates "Don't worry."
- Holding the right hand in front of the face with the back facing forward and then flipping the hand so that the palm is up means that the person asked for is not present.
- Placing a half closed hand in front of the stomach, and then turning it slightly connotes that the person to whom the gesture is made is a liar.
- Touching the tip of the right forefinger on the tongue and then placing it on the tip of the nose, means "Hurry up."
- Pointing fingers or writing utensils at anyone is considered threatening and is reserved for animals.

Visiting: Arabs are, in general, hospitable and generous. Their hospitality is often expressed with food. Giving a warm reception to strangers stems from the culture of the desert, where traveling nomads depended on the graciousness and generosity of others to survive. Arabs continue this custom of showing courtesy and consideration to strangers. Friendliness,

generosity and hospitality are considered expressions of personal honor. When Arabs are visiting your office, they will expect the same level of generosity and attention.

Privacy is important in Arab culture. It is considered rude to look into someone's house, an act that can be equated with trespassing. When visiting a house, it is customary to take a position next to the door to prevent being able to see inside the home. One should not enter the home unless invited by the host. It is expected that guests will remove their shoes before entering the home; this shows respect for the host. Arabs in villages or the countryside are less likely to have couches or chairs; instead they will have pillows on the floor or ground to sit against. When sitting, it is considered insulting to point the soles of one's feet in the direction of anyone; one should sit cross-legged if possible. It is also considered offensive to put one's feet on any furniture. In an Arabian house, the typical gathering place is called a *diwaniyyah,* which is for male visitors only. Females generally meet in separate rooms; meetings involving the opposite sex are mostly forbidden.

Arab culture stresses the importance of honoring and pampering guests. If a guest praises something that an Arab possesses, he may insist that the guest take it. It is assumed that the guest will refuse this offer. This pattern could manifest itself over and over, as at least one offer and refusal is typically expected. Arabs will expect the same offer of generosity if they praise something that belongs to another. As a general rule, praise is directed at items of personal belonging. Coffee or tea is typically offered upon entering a home or office. It is considered rude to refuse, but just as rude to drink more than three cups. The server will keep refilling the cup unless the guest shakes the cup from side to side to indicate that he is finished.

The host will try his best to ensure that his guests are comfortable and will also serve food in excessive quantities to ensure that every guest will be fully satisfied. Hosts are typically the last to begin eating, and will pretend to continue eating if they finish first.

Indians offer flower garlands to visitors as a mark of respect and honor. Visiting is an important part of Pakistani culture, and hospitality is the mark of good family. Guests are offered refreshments and perhaps invited to share a meal. However, because most Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia share small apartments, it is difficult for them to follow this custom.

Negotiations: Arab culture places a premium on politeness and socially correct behavior. Preserving honor is paramount. When faced with criticism, Arabs will try to protect their status and avoid incurring negative judgments by others. This concept can manifest itself in creative descriptions of facts or in the dismissal of conclusions, in order to protect one's reputation. This cultural trait will generally take precedence over the accurate transmission of information.

The desire to avoid shame and maintain respect can also contribute to the tendency to compartmentalize information. One common manifestation of this behavior comes in the form of saying "yes" when one really means "no." Arabs try to take the personalization out of contentious conversations, which can lead to vagueness and efforts to not speak in absolutes. Fear of shame also leads to secrecy and compartmentalization of knowledge. It is

also considered disrespectful to contradict or disagree with a person of a superior rank or age.

Conflict Resolution: In Arab society, community affiliation is given priority over individual rights. Consequently, familial and status considerations are significant factors in the processes and outcomes of conflict resolution. This emphasis on community helps explain the dominance of informal over contractual commitments and the use of mediation to solve conflicts. Many disputes are resolved informally outside of the official courts.

Business Style: In business meetings formal courtesies are expected. Cards—which should be printed in both English and Arabic—are regularly exchanged. Meetings may not always be on a one-to-one basis and it is often difficult to confine conversation to the business at hand. Many topics may be discussed in order to assess the character of potential business partners. There is a strong preference within Arab culture for business transactions to be based on personal contacts.

In keeping with the Arab customs of studying and deliberating, business discussions and deals are often prolonged. Unlike the high-pressure and quick-moving Western business culture, Arab business moves at a slower pace. It is also common to avoid saying "no" outright to a proposed business deal. Frequently, Arab businessmen will indicate that they want to deliberate about the deal in order to allow the salesman to avoid shame.

Sense of Time and Space: Past and present are flexible concepts in Arab society, with one shading over into the other. In general, time is much less rigidly scheduled than in Western culture. However, it is considered rude to be late to an appointment, as is looking at one's watch or acting pressed for time. Additionally, Arabs believe that future plans may interfere with the will of God. Commitments a week or more into the future are less common than in Western culture.

Standing close enough to smell someone's breath and body odor is a sign that one wants to relate and interact with that person. To stand back and away from someone indicates a desire not to interact, and may offend the individual. Additionally, Arabs feel very comfortable when surrounded by people in open spaces, but can feel uncomfortable or threatened when enclosed within walls in small physical spaces.

Arabs also have a non-Western view of property and boundaries. Traditionally, Arabs do not subscribe to the concept of trespassing. Arabs have conformed to the Western imposition of country boundaries, but do not place the same boundary restrictions within their country as it relates to city, town, village, property, and yard.

Hygiene: Personal hygiene is extremely important to Arabs for both spiritual and practical reasons. Because meals are frequently eaten by hand, it is typical to wash the hands before and after eating. Formal washing of the face, hands, and forearms, called *wudhu*, and general cleanliness of the body and clothing is required before daily prayers or fasting. A formal head-to-toe washing, called *ghusl*, is required after sexual intercourse, ejaculation (for men),

and menstruation (for women). *Ghusl* is also recommended following contact with other substances considered unclean, including alcohol, pigs, dogs, or non-believers.

Gifts: Small tokens and candies are considered appropriate gifts for those invited to Arab homes. It is customary that gifts are not opened in front of people. Unlike Westerners, Arabs do not feel it necessary to bring gifts when visiting someone's home. It is the responsibility of the host to provide for a guest in Arab culture.

Saudi Women Disembarking from a Boat

Cultural Do's and Don'ts:

- It is insulting to ask about a Muslim's wife or another female family member.
- Don't stare at women on the street or initiate conversation with them.
- If meeting a female, do not attempt to shake her hand unless she extends it. In addition, never greet a woman with an embrace or kiss.
- Avoid pointing a finger at an Arab or beckoning with a finger.
- Use the right hand to eat, touch, and present gifts; the left is generally regarded as unclean.
- Avoid putting feet on tables or furniture.
- Refrain from leaning against walls, slouching in chairs, and keeping hands in pockets.
- Do not show the soles of the feet, as they are the lowest and dirtiest part of the body.

Lifestyle

Role of Family: A Saudi sees himself in the context of his family and, to a lesser degree, the tribe. His duty is never to himself but to the group. Within the family there is a strong sense of patrilineal descent, because a man is considered to be a descendant only of his father and paternal grandfather, never of his mother and or maternal grandfather. He belongs only to his father's group, which claims his undivided loyalty. The most sought after marriages are first cousin marriages between children of brothers because by sharing the same grandfather, group solidarity is ensured.

Saudis live in large extended families, a legacy of the nomadic lifestyle of their predecessors who traveled around the desert in family and tribal groups. The extended family functions as an economic unit. There is a distinct hierarchy in the Saudi family, made up of the male members of the family in descending order of age. The oldest male member decides what is in the best interests of the family, and the other family members are expected to agree and

obey. The concept and practice of the intense individualism of the West is foreign to the Saudis. The lack of independent choice, even in matters of higher education, marriage and occupation, is accepted because the family is seen as a refuge that must remain unified to defend itself against the outside world. Similar to the tribal nomadic way of life that relied on the family for defense, modern Saudi families are a support system and safety net for the individual.

Saudi Woman Wearing Abaya in Shopping Mall

Socializing among Saudis is done almost exclusively within the family. There is no socializing among village women as is common in many other societies, and Saudi men visit coffee houses less frequently than in other Arab societies. The small sphere of interaction makes an individual even more dependent on the family and more committed to its protection. Deep friendships between Saudis are infrequent outside the kinship group.

The family is the dominant organizing unit in Saudi society, and its dominant role contributes to the widespread practice of nepotism. Nepotism is seen as a virtue in Saudi Arabia rather than a practice to be discouraged as in the West. It is considered shameful to leave a relative in need, and any Saudi that refused to give a job to a relative would meet with scorn and criticism.

Role of Women: The primary role of a woman in Saudi society is as wife and mother. Saudi society is principally concerned with the honor of men. Women are to build up and preserve the honor of the men in their family and the honor of the men they marry through bearing children, preferably sons, and controlling their personal sexual behavior so that it does not damage the honor of the men. Because it is possible for a woman to lose her sexual honor in Saudi society by speaking to a male stranger, or not wearing a veil and *abaya* (long black robe that obscures the shape of the body), Saudi society is structured to keep a woman within certain limits that make it difficult for her to lose her sexual virtue.

Saudi Boys Ice Skating

There is strict separation of the sexes in Saudi Arabia. Education, banking and public transportation are separated by sex, with separate facilities for women and men. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, and are mostly restricted from going out alone without a male relative. Educational opportunities for women have increased in Saudi Arabian women have access to free education through the university level, although this education is always segregated from that of men and the topics they may study are restricted. Women are

not admitted to the hospital for medical treatment without the consent of a male relative and they may not travel alone either within Saudi Arabia or internationally.

Role of Men: Men are privileged in Saudi society. They are responsible for the material well-being of their family and for guarding the family honor. A man serves as the head of the family and is the sole decision maker. There are no restrictions on the conduct of men as there are on women. Hospitality, generosity, wisdom and piety enhance the honor and status of a man, as does fathering numerous sons.

Dating and Marriage: Dating does not occur in proper Saudi society. Contact between the sexes is highly restricted to within the family. Marriages are arranged by the parents of the prospective bride and groom. First-cousin marriages are preferred because it helps to sustain the solidarity of the extended family.

Saudi Man

Divorce and remarriage are permitted in Islam and in Saudi Arabia. A woman has fewer rights to divorce than a man, and receives fewer of the material assets than the man when a divorce occurs. It is not uncommon for an older man to marry a much younger woman, or even a teenage girl. Whether the man remarries after divorce or the death of his first wife, the marriage to a younger woman is the result of the desire to prove one's virility, and therefore, honor, by fathering many sons.

Role of Children: Children are seen as a perpetuation of the family line to a new generation. Children are expected to obey the decisions of their elders and not disrupt the existing social order. Reflecting nomadic tradition, sons are especially welcome in Saudi Arab families because they are the carriers of the family tradition, and because their economic contribution is usually greater than that of daughters. Sons are usually taught to be protectors of their sisters and to help the father with his duties inside and outside the house, while daughters are taught to defer to their brothers, and to help the mother to take care of household chores. During adolescence, traditionally there is a separation of sexes. Boys have greater freedom than girls and begin to be drawn into the social circles of their fathers during this time. Traditional child-rearing practices in Saudi Arabia place few demands and behavioral constraints on boys, but many on their sisters.

The cornerstone of educating a child in Arab families is teaching him or her complete obedience to authority. Arab families also teach their children to attach tremendous importance to blood ties and bonds of loyalty. They are taught that their identity comes from belonging to a particular primary group such as their family and kinship network. Group affiliation is important and acceptance is achieved by conforming to accepted behavioral norms. Arab children are taught to feel shame as an excruciating punishment and to avoid it in any way possible. There is no real prohibition against distortion or fabrication to avoid shame. Arab children are generally socialized to believe this is an acceptable behavior by which they can avoid shame.

Clothing

Headwear: Arab men often wear a three-piece head cover. The bottom piece of this head covering is a white cap that is sometimes filled with holes. This cap, called *keffiya,* is used to hold the hair in place. On top of it is a square cloth called a *ghutra.* On top of it is the *agal*, which is a thick, black cord woven into two rings that surrounds the top of the head and holds everything else in place. For male children, wearing the head covering is a sign of entering manhood. Inside the house, the head covering is not needed, although when a man has guests in his house he often wears it as a sign of respect. A checked *ghutra* is a symbol of a region. The *agal* cord is a holdover from the days when nomadic Saudis used the cords to tether their camels, and then wrapped the cord around their heads when riding to keep their *ghutra* in place.

Sri Lankan Women

When this headwear is forcibly removed, one's honor is tainted and blood has to be shed to remove the shame. But if the *agal* is removed voluntarily, the wearer is signifying allegiance.

Arab women typically wear a scarf-like cover called *Hejab* that covers the hair but not the face.

Garments: Traditional Saudi male attire consists of a long-sleeved, one piece dress—called a *dishdashah*—that covers the whole body. This garment allows the air to circulate, which helps cool the body. During summer, it is usually made of white cotton; in winter, it is made from heavier fabric such as wool, and comes in darker colors.

Dress is a major mark of identity in Saudi Arabia. Saudis (and other Gulf Arabs) wear a distinctive *dishdashah* or *abaya.* Foreign workers wear either their native clothing or western-style dress. Among male foreigners, the use of non-European style clothes is associated with low-paid, unskilled labor. South Asian women wear brightly colored saris or Western-style clothes.

Saudi women in public in Saudi Arabia must be covered from head to toe in a black, ankle-length, undecorated *abaya* and head scarf (*hejab).* The *mutawwa*, or religious police, will chase and beat women with camel whips if they spot a woman's bare skin—occasionally an ankle or a wrist—in public. Unlike Arab women, however, South Asian women tend not to wear an *abaya* or *hejab.*

Many Indian women wear a pin on their nose studded with semi-precious stones. Once a symbol of purity and marriage, the nose pin is today worn by many unmarried girls as well.

Diet

Saudi Meat and Rice Dish

Type: The Saudi diet varies by lifestyle. A farmer consumes different foods than a nomad, and a city dweller may eat traditional Saudi cuisine as well as Western food. A staple of the Saudi diet, regardless of lifestyle, is dates. They are eaten either raw or cooked, and come in red and black varieties.

The diet of a farmer is based on grains, such as millet, rice, barley and wheat. Fruit and dates are eaten regularly. Lamb is the most commonly consumed meat, occasionally supplemented by goat and camel meat.

The nomadic diet depends on milk products from goats, sheep or camels. Milk is consumed fresh or made into yogurt and cheese. Meat is only eaten on special occasions or when wild game is available. When nomads visit a town they purchase fruits and vegetables to eat. The main meal for nomads is at the end of the day, accompanied by coffee and tea.

Saudis who live in towns and cities have a variety of foods available to them. A typical Saudi meal consists of rice with spiced chicken or lamb, or kebabs, with dates, and dairy products. The meal is accompanied by flatbread.

Commonly prepared dishes are *tabbouleh*, a salad made with *bulgar* (cracked) wheat and mint; *hummus*, a dip made from chick peas; *mutabak*, pastry turnovers stuffed with cheese, banana or meat; *salig*, lamb cooked in a mild spiced sauce and served with rice; *mihammar*, stuffed lamb in a yogurt sauce; *kabbza*, lamb or chicken with onion, tomato, cucumber and grated carrot; *thurid*, chicken in a cream sauce served on leaves of dough; *sambustik*, triangles of dough filled with spicy meat and onion and then fried in oil.

Coffee is offered at every social gathering, business meeting and meal. To accept less than three cups of coffee is considered impolite. To indicate that one is done, wobble the cup before giving it back to the host.

Food and beverages cannot be consumed in public during the holy month of Ramadan, even by non-Muslims.

The South Asian diet includes *biryanis* (rice with saffron, meat, fish, or chicken), *dhal* (a lentil-based soup), and several types of bread. Cows are sacred to Hindus; chicken and lamb are the most commonly consumed meats. The Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan diets contain more rice and fish than the Indian and Pakistani diets.

Influence on Culture: The Saudi diet reflects the nomadic roots of the people, who continue to eat the same types of food as before the country became developed and urbanized. The foods that are available in the cities are a mixture of traditional dishes typical of Saudi cuisine, plus a growing number of Western-influenced fast foods and carbonated beverages.

Alcohol/Drugs: The consumption of alcohol by Muslims and non-Muslims alike is banned in Saudi Arabia. Drug dealing and smuggling is punishable by death.

Dwellings

The dwellings of the Saudi Arabs have gone through an evolution since the creation and development of the modern state of Saudi Arabia. At the time the state was formed, the settled population lived in huts of mud and straw while the Bedouin inhabited their traditional goat hair tents. Saudis live in towns and cities in houses made from mud brick or modern construction materials.

The Bedouin tent is divided into three sections by curtains: the men's section, the family section and the kitchen. The men's section is used for receiving guests; the women are restricted to the family section and the kitchen area. The traditional village house is designed much like the Bedouin tent, with its divisions based on gender and utility.

Arab houses are constructed to maximize privacy. Walls are big and solid, while entrances and windows are positioned to prevent occupants from invading the privacy of their neighbors, and vice-versa. When Saudi Arabia decided to initiate a major modernization effort, it resulted in a complete change to traditional housing patterns, and new residential developments were built around the original mud-brick cities.

Crown Prince Abdullah

Many workers live on the outskirts of the city in which they work, and share a dorm, house or even a single room in a house. Accommodations of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers are frequently owned by their employers, but facilities are often inadequate for the number of people living there. Female domestic workers usually live in their employer's house.

Societal Framework

Self/Group: Arabs tend to interact as members of a group, rather than as individuals. As a result, they are subjected to immense family and community pressures to conform to group norms. Conformity is related to and reinforced by a reverence for tradition. Loyalty to the group is highly valued, and responsibility generally falls upon the group in its entirety rather than on any particular individual.

Tribe/Clan: The tribe and the family remain the most significant social structures in Saudi society. The significance of the tribe and clan is a legacy of the nomadic tribal lifestyle of the Bedouin who inhabited the Arabian peninsula before the Saudi state was created. The Bedouin lifestyle required tight group solidarity to provide for the physical needs of the tribe members and to protect the group from raids by other tribes. The Bedouin developed a fierce loyalty to their group that continues today. Social status in modern Saudi Arabia is highly dependent on tribal membership; one is not part of society if one lacks a tribal identity.

Modern Nation State: The territory of the Arabian Peninsula has existed as the state of Saudi Arabia for only eighty years. The modern nation state, with a centralized government, was not a familiar concept for the Saudi Arab. The inhabitants of the peninsula lived according to the tribal system that developed out of the unique conditions of a nomadic way of life. Social organization above the level of the tribe was unknown because of the constant need to seek out more grazing land for animal herds.

The Saudi nation state is based on the political philosophy of Ibn Saud, which in turn was drawn from the religious-political alliance formed between Ibn Saud's ancestor Muhammad ibn Saud and Abdul al-Wahhab. The royal family is closely associated with the state itself.

Saudi Arabs feel tied to the nation state through loyalty to the king and the Saudi family in much the same way that they feel a bond with other members of their family. In Saudi culture, the family is an entity to be protected from outside meddling and intrusions in order to preserve its honor and purity. The royal family, and the population as a whole, believe the country should be protected from foreign influences to prevent the corruption of society, and internal problems should be shielded from the eyes of outsiders.

Saudi Policeman

Foreign workers' relationships with Saudi Arabia are contractual, based on the exchange of labor for wages. Saudi policies discourage any non-contractual ties, as they run counter to the principle of migrant transience. Foreign workers maintain ties to their home countries and see themselves as overseas citizens of, and eventual returnees to, those states.

Centers of Authority: The principal center of authority in Saudi Arabia is the ruling family, the House of Saud. The second center of authority is the *ulema* (religious scholars). Ibn Saud founded the state in 1932, and his sons have ruled the state since then. Ibn Saud was a descendent of Muhammad Ibn Saud, who formed an alliance with religious scholar Abdul al-Wahhab in 1740. The religious-political alliance between Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud forms the philosophical basis of the state.

Rule of Law: The legal system in Saudi Arabia is based on Islamic law known as *sharia*. The purpose of the *sharia* is not to protect the rights of the individual but to safeguard the stability of the social order and prevent disruptions in society. The disruptions that do occur are swiftly and harshly punished to prevent their reoccurrence. The goal of *sharia* law is not rehabilitation but defense of Islamic society, and the idea of justice is inseparable from the idea of punishment.

Within the Saudi legal system, all men are considered equal regardless of rank or status in society. However, women do not share equality with men. Women do have limited property rights, but their testimony in court is worth half that of men, requiring two women to testify to equal the testimony of one man. In the case of a divorce, women must go through a long, complicated process to end a marriage while a man may divorce his wife quickly. A mother who divorces her husband loses custody of her children to their father when the children are five years old (boys) and seven years old (girls).

Saudi Arabia has a separate police force that has responsibility for enforcing religious and moral standards of conduct. The *Mutawwa,* or Religious Police, operate under the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice which receives its funding from the government. Due to recent excesses, the Mutawwa and the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice have been moved under the Interior Ministry. The *Mutawwa* have the power to arrest people behaving in contradiction to Islamic religious law. Common examples are violations of strict codes of dress and behavior and socializing between members of the opposite sex. The *Mutawwa* are the modern version of the religious police from the Ikhwan era, who were responsible for ensuring the Ikhwan's attendance at daily prayers and conducted religious instruction in the Ikhwan settlements.

Labor laws in Saudi Arabia restrict the movement of foreign workers who must have the required documentation to travel in the country. Saudi labor laws prohibit the right to organize and bargain collectively and give employers extensive control over foreign workers' freedom of movement. There is little labor protection and labor courts rarely rule in favor of a foreign laborer.

Role of State vs. Role of Ethnic Group: The role of the state in Saudi Arabia is an extension of the family and tribe because loyalty to the state means loyalty to the ruling family. Through Ibn Saud's marriages into more than forty tribes, many Saudis are related to the ruling family, however distantly. The role of the state ballooned during the oil boom as the government was able to provide a wealth of social services that the population had not previously known. The population became dependent on the state for housing, education, employment and health care. The decline in oil revenues in the 1980s and 1990s has reduced the ability of the state to provide the same high standard of living, and the role of the state had declined in relation to its height in the 1970s.

For non-Saudi Arabs and South Asians, the Saudi state is a monolithic structure with which they have limited, formal interaction. Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia remain focused on their homeland and interact mostly with other workers from their ethnic group. The role of the state is limited to work related issues, such as obtaining visas and work permits, and

occasional encounters with law enforcement, particularly the religious police who often target foreigners.

Attitudes

United States: The overall attitude of Saudis toward the United States is positive, but tempered by ambivalence, with a small portion of the population harboring feelings of strong dislike. While Saudis appreciate U.S. assistance and support, Saudi dependence on the United States is demeaning because it reveals Saudi weakness and lack of self-reliance.

Bangladeshi Worker in Saudi Arabia

Attitudes toward the United States among non-Saudi Arab workers in Saudi Arabia are mixed. These attitudes tend to reflect the general state of relations between their homelands and the United States. Despite close cooperation between the United States and some Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, Arabs view America unfavorably on a number of issues. At the same time, many Arabs are attracted to the democratic principles and economic opportunities represented by the United States.

Other Ethnic Groups: South Asians are seen as a group apart, who have few connections to the Saudi Arabs, though most of them are Muslim. Non-Saudi Arabs are seen as having certain cultural characteristics that are shared with Saudis, such as Arabic language and Islamic faith, but they are still set apart from the Saudis because they are not Wahhabis and are not members of the Saudi national group.

Neighboring States

Yemen: Saudi relations with Yemen have been problematic over time, but have experienced improvement since September 2001. The Asir province of Saudi Arabia is culturally similar to northern Yemen. Both sides of the border near the Asir province share problems of smuggling, crime and other security issues that complicate monitoring of the border. The history of disputes between the two countries is fading, but the Saudis still look at Yemen as a place where lawlessness and religious extremism are allowed to flourish, and which may pose a danger to Saudi stability.

Gulf States: Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman: Relations with the Gulf states are generally positive. However, many Saudis disagree with the numerous liberal reforms that are being implemented in these countries and resent the pressure that such reforms are putting on Saudi Arabia to make similar changes.

Iraq: Saudi-Iraqi relations turned sharply negative with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Saudis felt betrayed by the invasion because the kingdom had provided billions of dollars to Iraq

during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Saudis feel an affinity for Iraqis because they are fellow Muslims and Arabs, but the two states do not share a deep relationship.

Iran: The Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi population look at Iran with wariness and trepidation. At its founding, the Saudis viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat to internal Saudi security because of Iranian propaganda that targeted the Saudi Shia population in the oil-rich Eastern Province. As the relationship has moderated, the Saudi view of Iran remains suspicious, but less acutely fearful.

Regional Powers

Israel: There is sympathy for the Palestinian cause in Saudi Arabia. The government encourages this sympathy, which serves to distract from the domestic problems within Saudi Arabia.

Cultural Economy

Young Saudi Office Worker

The pre-oil Saudi economy varied by region. In the Hijaz, the primary source of revenue was from the Hajj pilgrimage. Pilgrims required lodging, transportation and food while making the Hajj, and were a source of customers for local craftsmen. In al-Hasa (the Eastern Province) pearling, fishing and agriculture provided livelihoods for the region's residents. Al-Hasa was the only area capable of supporting large scale agriculture. In Nejd limited agriculture and the production of dates for consumption and sale, as well as livestock raising, were the main industries. At the time of the formation of the Saudi state, with the exception of the Hijaz, most of Saudi territory was isolated from trade.

After the discovery of oil, the country's economy became focused on petroleum exports. When the price of oil declined sharply in the 1980s, the entire Saudi economy declined as well. The long term effect has been a budget shortfall that has complicated government efforts to maintain the same level of social welfare benefits that the population has become accustomed to. The government has diversified and acquired investments abroad, but the economy, and therefore state spending, is heavily reliant on oil.

With the decline in oil prices the government launched a labor program aimed at replacing foreign workers with Saudis, in an effort to deal with high unemployment.

Cultural Geography

Saudi Arabia is composed of five distinct regions that were not unified until 1932. This accounts for the variation between the regions, particularly between the relatively cosmopolitan Hijaz and the conservative Nejd.

The geographical and cultural heart of Saudi Arabia is Nejd, the home of the state's founder, Ibn Saud, and his predecessors. The Al-Saud family had been rulers of the town of Dariya for multiple generations before they were displaced from power in 1891. Ibn Saud returned from exile in Kuwait to retake control of the area from the Rashidis in 1902 and continued to consolidate his rule throughout the peninsula. Nejd's central location on the Arabian peninsula left it isolated from foreign conquest and influence; it was never part of the Ottoman or European empires that controlled territory in the region. Riyadh, at the heart of Nejd, is a unique urban area where many of the cultural characteristics of the different parts of Saudi Arabia mix together.

The Hijaz (the Western Province) runs north–south along the Red Sea coast. It includes the port of Jiddah (Jeddah) and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Its location along the sea, as well as the presence of the holy cities, have made the area subject to foreign influence far exceeding that experienced by the Nejd. The Hijaz was under Ottoman control until the armies of the Egyptian Pasha Mehmet Ali were defeated by the Saudi Ikhwan. Hijaz is more urban and culturally diverse than Nejd, a result of the yearly contact with religious pilgrims making the *Hajj*, some of whom would stay to live there after the pilgrimage. The areas around Jiddah are particularly densely populated and culturally cosmopolitan. The areas around Mecca and Medina are culturally influenced by the overriding religious identity of these cities.

Riyadh

The Hijaz blends into the region of Asir in the south. Asir was culturally part of Yemen, but was annexed to Saudi Arabia by Ibn Saud. The climate and geography of the region is distinct, with mountains, pine trees and a significantly cooler climate.

The Eastern Province (al-Hasa) is on the eastern side of the peninsula, along the Gulf coast. The population of Al-Hasa is mainly Shia Arab. All of Saudi Arabia's proven oil reserves are located in al-Hasa and the adjacent Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter). The inhabitants of al-Hasa were from many different lifestyles; townsmen, farmers, fishermen and desert nomads lived in the area until the oil industry overshadowed and displaced the original economy and culture.

The provinces of Jawf, Hail and the Northern Frontier comprise the northern region. They serve as a gateway to Nejd and are geographically part of the Syrian Desert. The area was crossed by caravan routes for thousands of years. It is primarily a grazing ground for nomadic and semi-nomadic herders.

The Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter) encompasses the southeastern one-fifth of the kingdom and is the most arid desert on earth. The only inhabitants of the area are nomadic Bedouin tribes.

Urban vs. Rural Culture

Saudi society has undergone increasing urbanization since the discovery of substantial oil resources, particularly since the oil boom of the 1970s when an estimated 26 percent of the population lived in urban centers. In 1990, an estimated 73 percent of the population lived in urban centers. This change signifies not only an increasing city population, but a sharp decline in the number of people still living as nomadic Bedouin.

While urban culture tends to be more sophisticated and advanced than in rural areas, the conservatism of Saudi society permeates life in both the city and rural environments.

Culture's Effect on Warfare

Conventional Warfare: Cultural factors have made it difficult for Arab militaries to adopt Western war-fighting doctrine. Western warfare has emphasized offensive action and shock effect, whereas Arab warfare has emphasized standoff, attrition, deception, and surprise. Martial traditions also influence which military units are most prestigious. Fighter squadrons and commando units, for example, perform raid-like missions, which have a high profile in Arab-Islamic history.

Arab militaries have not been highly effective in the modern era. According to several observers, Arab culture encourages patterns of behavior that are not conducive to modern military operations. Arab officers (especially junior officers) are hesitant to exercise independent judgment, frequently lack extensive technical training, and are prone to selectively transmit information in order to avoid the loss of face. These types of Arab cultural behavior patterns cause Arab militaries to have weak information flows. Arab military personnel often cannot take full advantage of their weaponry and equipment and have difficulty in weapon and equipment maintenance.

In training, Arab armed forces taught their soldiers that there was only one right answer to a military problem and only one right way to handle a situation. This approach was employed in battle regardless of other factors such as terrain, mission, forces available, or the enemy's strength or disposition. Arab training exercises tend to be scripted and unrealistic. Training manuals are treated as cookbooks to be followed to the letter regardless of the specifics of the situation.

There is no military tradition in Saudi Arabia that resembles military traditions in Western counties with standing armies and training in strategy and tactics. While the warrior ethos is an important component in the Saudi identity, in reality it does little to prepare Saudi military forces for modern combat. The Saudi military experience is limited to raiding, which was the primary method of economic redistribution, and was a way to build the power of individual tribes. The goal of raiding was to enhance one's honor, not to engage in actual destructive combat.

A lack of discipline has been reported among the lower ranks of the Saudi military. Just as Saudi Arab men are disinclined to plan events in the future because it restricts their freedom of activity, they also dislike submitting themselves to the discipline required of members of a

modern military. Overcoming the Bedouin mentality, which prioritizes freedom above rigor and order, is a challenge for the Saudi authorities. In contrast, the well-educated officer corps is status-conscious, with an interest in high-technology weapons that require extensive maintenance, which is not provided with consistent quality by the disinterested servicemen.

The National Guard is a unique entity in the Saudi military forces. The National Guard was formed from the membership of the Ikhwan movement in the 1930s. The Ikhwan were created by Ibn Saud to assist in the consolidation of territory into the Saudi state, but later came into conflict with him when he advocated they adopt a more moderate religious philosophy. To control these rebellious elements, Ibn Saud placed them in the newly formed National Guard, which was charged with territorial defense. The National Guard remains organized along tribal lines and enjoys power distinct from the conventional military. The cultural significance of the National Guard is contained in its origins and role as a representative of the military legacy of Saudi Arabia, which began with the religiously fanatical Ikhwan. While some of the ultra-conservative tendencies of the Ikhwan brethren can still be seen in the National Guard, it does operate as a modern conventional security force.

Unconventional/Tribal Warfare: Arab warfare stems directly from nomadic traditions and experiences. Historically, nomadic tribes alternated between accommodating central authority and defying it. In the first case, they were employed as frontier defense forces or as auxiliary light cavalry. In the second case, they posed a threat to settled populations by attacking small, isolated garrisons and raiding poorly defended towns. Although the nomadic population of Saudi Arabia has dramatically decreased in the 20th Century, the image of the nomadic warrior has remained powerful. Because the extended family is the fundamental unit of political and social action, a kin group has traditionally looked first to its own fighting men, not to the state's armed forces, to ensure protection and promotion of its interests. In general, the resort to arms for the sake of tribe and clan remains a higher ideal than military service to the state.

The glory of the raid—whether against another nomadic tribe, settled enemy, or caravan—is a key aspect of Bedouin tribal warfare. In many cases, the raids were carried out with minimal violence; however, they could become a flash point for larger tribal conflict. Tribes commemorated their raids through poetry and song. Although it varied greatly as to numbers involved and distances traveled, raiding followed certain norms. Raiding tribes traveled light, avoided detection, moved quickly, minimized bloodshed, and took camels only—no captives or other spoils. When raiding led to a larger conflict, the objective was usually not to force submission, but to restore the balance of honor or the balance of livestock. Tribal warfare tended to become more intense and bloody when central authorities tried to impose political control on a rural population.

Participation in a raid was considered a dramatic test of courage, skill, and dedication to the goals of the tribal group. The resort to combat usually bestowed honor on both sides. For Arab tribes, honor is the dominant value. In the collective sense, honor means defense of the tribe, the group, or the society as a whole against its challengers. Lost honor, according

to tribal tradition, must be retrieved by violence. A man's failure to fulfill his duty as a fighter results in shame.