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FOR COUNTRY AND COMPANY: CONSOLIDATING POWER THROUGH DEVELOPMENT AND COMPANY TOWNS IN SAUDI ARABIA, 1947-1969

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
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Andrew Czuzak
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Summary/Abstract

My project demonstrates how the Saudi Arabian government established their control over a dissident Eastern Province. Examining a mixture of ARAMCO, American, and Saudi sources, my thesis aims to expand the historiography of urban history, Saudi Arabia, and company towns in the twentieth century. Through the lens of company towns, urban development, and military modernization, I show how Saudi Arabia was effectively able to disrupt local power structures and replace them with their own. Urban development provides an effective tool through which I assess larger trends in the Saudi-ARAMCO relationship, the ruler-subject relationship, and sedentarization policy during the 1940s through the 1960s.
DEDICATION

To my loving wife, Kristina, whom I owe everything to. Thank you for your unending patience and willingness to let me spend this time apart.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Vivian Ibrahim for her tireless support, not only on this thesis, but throughout my entire time at Ole Miss. I would also like to thank Dr. Trepanier for his help and friendship during both my undergraduate and graduate career. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Marchiel for her assistance in the completion of my thesis. Finally, I thank Chase Young for his patience living with me over the past two years.
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1) Introduction/Context

In 1932, King Abdulaziz formally united the emirates of the Arabian Peninsula into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By 1947, fifteen years later, the kingdom was unified in name only. Despite King Abdulaziz's efforts, sectarian differences, primarily ethnic and tribal, continued to divide the country.¹

In order to remedy ethnic divisions and consolidate his power, King Abdulaziz focused his attempts on national unification through religion. King Abdulaziz’s creation of a national identity relied on the Saud family’s 1744 alliance with Wahhabist clerics. In this alliance, the Wahhabist gave the Saudi dynasty a *casus belli* against all non-Wahhabists. Wahhabism represents a ultraconservative branch of Islam whose adherents wish to reject millenia of scholarly interpretations and scholarly interpretations and return to a strict interpretation of the Qu’ran.² Wahhabists view other Muslims, including both other Sunnis and Shi’is, as falling astray from the true interpretation of the Qu’ran. Meanwhile, the al-Saud family agreed to enforce the doctrine of the Wahhabist clerics, or *ulema*, within their holdings and spread Wahhabist influence across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.³ By the early 20th century, the Saudi family still maintained this alliance and enforced Wahhabist doctrine.

1.1 Religious and Cultural Divides

Despite their attempts to use religion to unify the country, the Saudi government was largely unsuccessful early on. By 1947, the Saudi government decided to change their system of

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³ Ibid., 20.
resource distribution to sway the loyalty of many of their subjects. Ethnic and religious loyalties largely remained fragmented. Despite King Abdulaziz’s military conquests, the Saud family faced opposition from all directions. The Saudi family primarily derived their power and support from Riyadh and its surrounding lands. To the west, the Saudi family faced the remnants of a branch of the Hashemites. The Hashemites, a family claiming to be descended from Muhammad, ruled over Mecca and Medina. In the 1921 Cairo Conference, the British promised the Hashemite family the rest of the Arabian Peninsula for their support against the Ottoman Empire in World War One. King Abdulaziz, however, ignored the Cairo Conference and conquered the Hashemites in 1925. Despite their defeat, the subjects of the Hashemites would resist Saudi rule

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4 Saber Yezli, Figure 1 in “Antimicrobial Resistance among Gram-positive Pathogens in Saudi Arabia”, *Journal of Chemotherapy* vol. 24, no.3, (Florence, Italy: PubMed 2012), 126.

for years after the initial conquest, supported by the neighboring Hashemite kings in Jordan, Iraq, and Syria.6

In the east of Saudi Arabia, a majority of the original inhabitants descended from the Rashidi dynasty, the family who the Saud family ousted from power in the early 20th century, and their subordinate tribes.7 The leadership that survived the conquest of the Arabian Peninsula often did not cooperate with the Saudi Family, refusing to contribute taxes and soldiers to the Saudi regime.8

Of these families the Rashidi Dynasty and the Eastern Province (A'Sharqiyah) proved the most difficult to subdue. The Rashidi’s family control in Eastern Province represented not only different political aspirations, but also different cultural sensibilities. For example, Hijazis looked down upon the Nejadis for being “uncivilized”, while the Nejadis thought the Hijazis were soft, degenerate, and not living up to Qu’ranic ideals.9 Meanwhile, the Baharna people, who reside in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, maintained a separate dialect from most Saudi Arabians, speaking the Gulf dialect instead of the Najdi dialect.10 While some similarities exist between the two dialects, the Gulf dialect shares a greater cultural affiliation with other Gulf regions like Kuwait and Bahrain, while the Najdi dialect represents central Arabian cultures. The linguistic differences would prove a further obstacle for uniting a non-rebellious population under the monarchy because the Saudi dialect represented an invasion of a foreign culture into the Baharna culture.

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8 Ibid., 207
Furthermore, the subjects in the Eastern Province did not accept Wahhabist rule and remained religiously separate from the ruling dynasty. With these cultural and religious differences dividing Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz struggled to maintain control of the Eastern Province.\textsuperscript{11} While it still remained a part of Saudi Arabia, most internal resistance such as strikes and protests originated from the Eastern Province. A majority of Saudi Shi‘is lived and continue to live in the Eastern Province. Shiism is an Islamic denomination shunned by Wahhabists because Wahhabists deny the perfection of the imams and saint worship.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, Wahhabist destroyed Shi‘i Mosques and tombs because Wahhabism forbids iconography and ancestral worship.\textsuperscript{13} A further source of conflict between the Shi‘is and the Saud family comes from discriminatory policies against Shi‘is. The Saud family and the Wahhabist clerics denied Shiites access to representation and jobs within the government and military, and patronage, yet many still refused to convert. Government officials would be sent from the home province of the Saudis, Riyadh and the surrounding Nejd province, to ensure compliance from the Eastern Province.

In the early 1930s, a lack of funds and a global depression further complicated King Abdulaziz’s position. Without an income, King Abdulaziz could not effectively control the disparate parts of his country as he could not afford to pay the salaries of his officials or soldiers. In 1932 King Abdulaziz sought outside help to bolster the country’s failing economy. Initially, he turned to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (AIPOC) and offered to give them surveying rights in Saudi Arabia in exchange for an allowance and eventual percentage of the oil revenue. The surveyors did not believe surveying Saudi Arabia was a worthwhile endeavour and only offered

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 84-87.
\textsuperscript{13} Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 64.
them a pittance. After the failed negotiation with AIPOC, King Abdulaziz began negotiations with an American oil company, Standard Oil of California. In 1932, Standard Oil signed a contract with Saudi Arabia for mineral surveying rights.

Saudi Arabia, since the discovery of oil within its borders, has been consistently influenced by Western nations seeking its material wealth. The history of British colonialism, however, in Saudi Arabia differs from many of its neighbors because the British government never directly administered Saudi Arabia as a protectorate. Despite this lack of control, before 1932, Saudi Arabia still existed under British imperial control. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, history professors, introduced the idea of informal empires in 1953. In their essay, “The Imperialism of Free Trade” they argue that the free market and British capitalism eventually lead to economic dominance and a system of tributaries loyal to the British empire. Further drawing from “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” I define an informal empire as a system of control in which the imperialist nation can influence their subjects without occupying it in order to secure economic, strategic, or political gain and at the expense of other foreign powers.

Before 1932, Saudi Arabia was a part of Britain’s “informal empire”. During the early 20th century, Britain was able to greatly limit Saudi expansion in the early 20th century and keep out other foreign powers through a mixture of treaties, military strength, and economic incentives without ever setting a foot in the country. The British stood to gain both economic gain (oil) and strategic gain (ports along the Gulf). They were able to influence Saudi policies through the use of puppet states (Oman and Muscat) as well as economic incentives like allowances. Finally, this economic influence came at the expense of other foreign powers,

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specifically the United States who were unable to access the oil resources of Saudi Arabia. Due to this control, Saudi Arabia should be recognized as part of Britain’s “informal empire”.

The agreement between Standard Oil and Saudi Arabia represented a geopolitical shift in the Middle East. The formalization performed the dual purpose of giving Saudi Arabia American diplomatic recognition as well as symbolically replacing British-led companies as the primary ally of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, The contract served to formalize Standard Oil’s relationship with the monarchy by importing an oil well and the arrival of foreign engineers in Saudi Arabia. Finally, Standard Oil created the Arab American Oil Company, or ARAMCO, as its Saudi Arabian subsidiary.

The United States never gained informal control of Saudi Arabia because the strategic and economic benefits of controlling Saudi Arabia largely filtered to ARAMCO executives and Saudi royalty rather than to the United States. ARAMCO collaborated with the Saudi Arabian government rather than strictly exploiting them. For example during the Buraimi Dispute of 1953, a border clash between Saudi Arabia and British-administered Oman, ARAMCO provided aerial surveillance, legal assistance, and armored vehicles to the Saudi Arabian government.15 An expansion of Saudi Arabia benefitted not only Saudi Arabia, but also ARAMCO because it expanded the area where they could survey and drill for oil. It was also something the United States government showed itself unwilling to support, even going so far as to publicly declare their support for British presence in Saudi Arabia.16

The dynamic of the relationship between Saudi Arabia, ARAMCO, and the United States is important to define because it helps frame the reasons for why the United States would

16 Ibid., 233.
be willing to sell arms and provide military aid to Saudi Arabia, even if Saudi Arabia was not a part of America’s formal or informal empire.

Area of Study in Relation to Each Other and to British-controlled Bahrain

Three years later, ARAMCO engineers found oil in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. By 1950, oil revenues accounted for an increase of a 100 million dollars in state revenue over 1938’s state revenue. 1950 also marked the beginning of an equal profit sharing agreement. In November of 1950, Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO had agreed to split the profits equally between themselves rather than ARAMCO granting Saudi Arabia an annual allowance. Furthermore, ARAMCO agreed to hire more Saudi Arabians and Palestinians in the wake of the 1948 Palestinian War at the behest of King Abdulaziz. This economic relationship also manifested itself in a physical presence.

17 Google Maps, 2021, “Map of Dammam”, 5 Mile Scale, (https://www.google.com/maps/place/Eastern+Province+Saudi+Arabia/@26.1751957,50.0754265,10z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x3e4019b3e33d8685:0x6db173e402bb58a6!8m2!3d23.1669688!4d49.3653149?hl=en)
18 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 93.
19 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 94.
In 1947, ARAMCO and its employees became involved with the urban planning of Al-Khobar and Dhahran, cities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, warping the pre-existing structures of the city.\textsuperscript{20} While Dhahran had around 7,000 in 1950, it grew to 35,000 people by 1960, many of these new residents Western and non-local Saudis.\textsuperscript{21} These Saudi Arabians, loyal to the crown, primarily came from the Nejd region including the capital city of Riyadh.

The majority Shi’i people of the Eastern Province often faced forced resettlement and destruction of their historic home lands which would then be replaced with Mediterranean-style villas (see link).\textsuperscript{22} Effectively building a city within a city, ARAMCO destroyed older Arabian homes and familial spaces to make way for new streets, Mediterranean villas, and public spaces. To further emphasize the divide between ARAMCO and Saudi Arabians, ARAMCO built a concrete wall between its compound, intended for the Western workers and segregated by race, and the surrounding city, made of Saudi Arabians. Both ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia encouraged

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{American_Camp_in_Dhahran_1950s.png}
\end{center}

American Camp in Dhahran 1950s\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{23} Scott McMurray, \textit{Energy to the World, Volume 1}, (Aramco Services Company, Houston, TX, 2011) 127.
\end{footnotesize}
the physical division of Saudi subjects and foreign workers because ARAMCO believed it could drive down labor costs by segregating its white employees, while Saudi Arabia did not want to reward workers from the Eastern Province with improved housing, services, and jobs.24

By the 1950s, however, this policy of segregation would reverse and local workers would be invited in as Saudi Arabians from the “loyal provinces” (like the Nejd, where the Saud’s powerbase originated) immigrated to the Eastern Province. Unravelling why and how ARAMCO and the Saudi Arabian government favored policies of integration, urbanization, and immigration are critical to understanding Saudi control in the Eastern Province.

2) Problem Construction

My research will study the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia between 1947-1969 to better understand how the Saudi Arabian government established their control over the Eastern Province through the usage of company towns, urbanization, and the development of institutions. The case study of Dhahran, the city where ARAMCO chose to place its Saudi headquarters, and its surrounding cities will show how company towns became a model for dominating the Baharna people of the Eastern Province. Through the usage of military policing, forced immigration and emigration, and the creation of centralized infrastructure and transportation links, the monarchy attempted to replace tribal sympathies with monarchical loyalties.

As Saudi Arabia extended and solidified its power in the Eastern Province, the government’s system of resource distribution changed. Instead of directly giving patronage to tribal leaders in order to control their members, Saudi Arabia began distributing resources directly to its subjects via housing, utilities, and transportation links in order to shift their loyalty from tribal to national.

Looking at company towns in Saudi Arabia also raises other smaller questions that illuminate hidden aspects of Saudi development.

- How did Saudi Arabians resist, accept, or subvert ideas of joint ARAMCO-Saudi urbanization projects?
- To what extent did the exportation of American values abroad succeed
- To what extent was the relationship between Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO coloniali
2.1 Saudi Arabian Literature Review

While the last question about understanding the ARAMCO-Saudi Arabian relationship may seem secondary to my research question, the connection between the two is essential. The relationship between the different actors determines our understanding of why Saudi Arabia developed certain projects or programs. Was the Saudi Arabian government the victim of a neo-colonial conquest by ARAMCO and the United States government? Or did the monarchy assert themselves in the relationship and make deliberate choices in order to exert control over their subjects?

Preliminarily, I find evidence to challenge the narrative of company towns as a wholly colonialist endeavour in Saudi Arabia as advocated by Robert Vitalis, a political scientist studying oil and the Middle East. Vitalis argues that Saudi independence during the early half of the 20th century was a myth created by ARAMCO to hide their exploitation of Saudi Arabia. Instead, I argue Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO’s relationship was in fact collaborative because ARAMCO showed itself willing to disobey American government policy, like when ARAMCO halted the construction of American governmental oil reserves in Saudi Arabia in 1944. Rather than allowing for the creation of a strategic oil reserve for the United States, ARAMCO’s lobbying and internal connections led to the continued ownership of the oil by their private group. ARAMCO’s control of the oil primarily led to the growth of their private wealth rather than the oil becoming a strategic asset for the United States.

ARAMCO worked with Saudi officials to keep as much wealth in the hands of ARAMCO executives and Saudi royalty. This can be seen in ARAMCO’s petitioning for

25 Vitalis, America’s Kingdom: 10
American foreign aid to Saudi Arabia. Rather than paying from their own pockets, ARAMCO used American taxpayer dollars to cover Saudi deficits. ARAMCO’s ability to manipulate congressional funds and policy for their own gain shows the company’s autonomy from American policy.

Rather than establishing a colonial arm of the United States, ARAMCO attempted to foster a culture of kleptocracy, a system where the ruling class would attempt to extract as much wealth from their subjects as possible for personal gain, as the means to best enrich themselves. Furthermore, the Saudi-ARAMCO relationship is different from other Middle Eastern countries with their colonial rulers for two additional reasons. First, ARAMCO was not state controlled and thus could exert the same political dominance that the British or American government could. Second, Britain granted Saudi Arabia recognition and independence long before any other Middle Eastern nation. Independence from the British government allowed them the freedom to negotiate with other Western powers which granted them a stronger bargaining position than other Middle Eastern countries who were forced to obey British-imposed administration.

Two trends dominating ARAMCO-Saudi scholarship provide scholars different ways of understanding how the monarchy and ARAMCO interacted. The first school of thought argues for a Western-dominated Saudi Arabia. Historians like Irvine Anderson argue that Saudi Arabia’s lack of state capacity until the early 1950s led them to become effectively another colony in the Middle East, albeit American-controlled and not British. Instead, it was ineffectual American policies and a desire to secure allies in the Middle East during the Cold War that led to more

29 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 14  
30 Anderson, ARAMCO, X
equitable trade concessions. In the same body of literature, Robert Vitalis, a political scientist, argues that Saudi statesmanship and independence during this period is a myth.\textsuperscript{31} Saudi Arabia, he argues, was another imperialist puppet and ARAMCO was simply an extension of the American government.

Other scholars from the Saudi-ARAMCO body of literature argue for the importance of Saudi independence and Saudi statesmanship. Scholars like Madawi al-Rasheed, a leading scholar on Saudi Arabian history and anthropology, argue Saudi independence led to SOCAL’s (ARAMCO’s predecessor) ability to negotiate with King Abdulaziz without British intervention.\textsuperscript{32} Without their independence, granted in 1927, the British would insert a state-controlled administration into Saudi Arabian government as evidenced by their neighbors in Kuwait, Iran, and Bahrain.

Another historian Reem Alissa, a specialist in urban development and oil in the Middle East, disagrees with Vitalis about the ineffectuality of Saudi state capacity. Alissa instead credits King Abdulaziz’s statesmanship for his ability to play American and British interests off each other to insure more equal deals for Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{33} Similar to how King Abdulaziz turned from the British state-run petroleum companies in order to negotiate better oil concessions, Alissa demonstrates how the Saudi royalty renegotiated better oil concessions through their participation in OPEC.\textsuperscript{34}

Both Alissa and Al-Rasheed represent a newer wave of Arab historians who are reinserting an Arab voice into the Saudi Arabian historiography. While an older generation like Vitalis tend to represent western scholars who argue for an impotent Arab state, Rasheed and the

\textsuperscript{31} Vitalis, \textit{America’s Kingdom}, 10
\textsuperscript{32} Madawi Al-Rasheed, \textit{A History of Saudi Arabia}, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{33} Reem Alissa, “The Oil Town of Ahmadi since 1946: From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City” \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East} 33, no. 1, 2013. 43
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 45
other Arab scholars argue that while there was inequality between the West and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia made the best of a bad situation and managed to extract wealth, knowledge, and concessions that other nations did not.

I intervene into the Saudi Arabian historiography by arguing that while ARAMCO at times was exploitative, they primarily acted collaboratively with the Saudi royal family separate from the interests of the United States government. ARAMCO’s interests and the Saudi government’s interests aligned much more frequently than ARAMCO’s interest and the American government’s interest. American interests were primarily to secure a cheap source of oil for both domestic and military matters, whereas ARAMCO sought to earn the highest profit possible. The symbiotic relation between ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia became essential to both of their continued existences.

While there was certainly American government intervention, as Vitalis and Anderson argue, into Saudi Arabia-ARAMCO affairs, ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia had a vested interest in ensuring as little interference as possible from the American government. In particular, ARAMCO desired to sell their oil for the best price possible. While this often meant selling to the United States, this was not always the case and ARAMCO fought to ensure their freedom to sell to the highest buyer. Vitalis undersells the state capacity of Saudi Arabia often crediting ARAMCO for any change (positive or negative) in Saudi Arabia, whilst Alissa exaggerates King Saud’s statesmanship. Instead, a blend of conflicting American interests combined with Saudi independence led to more equitable trade concessions for Saudi Arabia and a more equal relationship with ARAMCO than other nations shared with foreign oil companies. The monarchy fought to maintain as much independence as possible and they wanted to ensure a weaker trade partner in order to receive more favorable contracts.
Meanwhile ARAMCO wanted to avoid losing their monopoly to smaller American oil companies as well as to an American-led national oil company, the Petroleum Reserve Company (PRC). The PRC was an initiative created during the Cold War by the Secretary of the Navy to protect American strategic interests and to provide oil to the American military. The company would have replaced ARAMCO and in supplying the U.S. military only would have lost out on a significant amount of income as there would be no competition to shape prices. Without aggressive lobbying from the oil industry, Saudi Arabia’s oil would have become directly administered by the government (via the PRC) as its neighbors were and ARAMCO would have lost its source of wealth. This delicate balance of being able to beholden to the United States government while also being able to influence it, pushed ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia closer together.

This thesis will demonstrate how the Saud dynasty worked with ARAMCO to adopt the model of company towns across the country as a means to unify Saudi Arabia and suppress their political and religious dissidents. Company towns were not the result of Saudi submission to colonialism, but because Saudi Arabia needed systems of institutional control and ARAMCO employees expected Western accommodations.

Systems of control for Saudi Arabia meant a way to control the Eastern Province other than through state violence and threats. In this thesis, I argue the Saudi government wanted to subdue the Baharna population by resettling outsiders and Nejadi Saudis, who were more loyal to the throne, and outnumbering the native population.

Finally, the main divide between Saudi acceptance or rejection of American development, depended on the subject’s relationship to the Saud family. Members of the royal family, their close supporters and government officials tended to accept Western development

35 Anderson, *ARAMCO*, 42.
because it benefited them, whereas those unaffiliated or opposed to the Saud family tended to reject Western ideas either out of rejection of Saudi control or because these groups found the Western styles odd and discomforting.\textsuperscript{36} Mashary Al-Naim, a scholar of architectural history, argues that some Saudi residents rejected concrete and relied on traditional materials like mud in order to show their opposition to the modernization and westernization of Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{37} Mashary A. Al-Naim, “The Oil Town of Ahmadi since 1946: From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City” \textit{International Journal of Architectural Research} 2, no. 2 (Bingley UK: Emerald Publishing, 2008) 125
3) Primary Sources

My project will draw primarily from the United States State Department Archives (American and Saudi) as well as private records from ARAMCO found in ARAMCO’s digital archives. Ideally, I would be able to draw primarily from Saudi archives. However, without personal access to Saudi Arabia, it would be nearly impossible to rely primarily on sources from Saudi Arabia due to censorship policies, current COVID-19 restrictions, and a lack of digitization.

One limitation of this project is the limited access to Saudi Arabian archives. Many of the accessible Saudi government records that do exist in the United States can be found in Georgetown University’s library in the Arab and Middle East section. During COVID-19, however, there was no access to these resources digitally despite social distancing policies. If I were to do the project in a non-pandemic year, I would access these documents and use them. The sources found at the Georgetown library may reveal: to what extent did the Saudi government and ARAMCO actually work together, what reservations did the Saudi government have about working with ARAMCO, and how did Saudi Arabian view the relationship between themselves and ARAMCO?

The first contribution of this paper is the study of primary sources from ARAMCO. These sources include both their publication, *ARAMCO World* as well as internal business documents such as employee counts and loan documentation. During the 1930s through the 1950s, ARAMCO became heavily involved in Saudi Arabian affairs and kept extensive records of their negotiations and dealings that are now (partially) public. In particular, one can look at
ARAMCO World, ARAMCO’s publication during this time period to understand the dynamics of day to day life for an ARAMCO worker. Furthermore, the University of Mississippi has access to the ARAMCO handbook, which details the development of Dhahran as well as the social life of ARAMCO workers during the 1960s. These sources help me explore questions such as: how often did these two groups work together, if this relationship did change, at what point did Saudi workers and foreign workers begin to work more closely together and why, and how did publications talk about and treat Saudi workers. Furthermore, while these documents have been used before to document the American imperialism in the region, I will be examining these documents with the new lens of Saudi Arabian state capability and development. These questions will help me answer how the Saudi government and ARAMCO used immigration and segregation to exercise control in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

My major contribution to the Saudi Arabian historiography comes from my analysis of the O’Keefe report. The O’Keefe Report is a diplomatic correspondence between the diplomatic mission to Saudi Arabia and the D.C. branch of the State Department regarding the protection of Saudi Arabia. While this report has been used before, it is primarily the purview of military historians examining the evolution of the military in Saudi Arabia or looking at Saudi militarization in the context of the Cold War. My paper examines the O’Keefe report through the lens of domestic control and subjugation rather than from an international geo-political understanding.

Finally, I will look at the contracts signed between Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO. The shifts in the material benefits of the contract between Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO will help illustrate the changing power dynamic between the two groups. A textual analysis may reveal changes in language and rhetoric that may also subtly highlight this same power dynamic.
Textual analysis also reveals certain clauses that help demonstrate how King Abdulaziz used ARAMCO to further support his control of the Eastern Province. These contracts are available online and will become a key part of my project moving forward.

Using these aforementioned primary sources, I will examine Saudi consolidation of power in the Eastern Province. In the first section, I will examine how Saudi Arabia used transportation links to sedentarize the local bedouin population. The following section examines how Saudi Arabia’s creation of home ownership and suburbia led to the destabilization of tribal power structures. The final section demonstrates how Saudi Arabia’s military modernization was primarily designed to deal with internal threats and prevent coups rather than defend against external invasion.
4) Rebels and Railways: Transportation and Sedentarization in the Eastern Province

4.1 Introduction

Infrastructure projects from the 1930s through the 1950s played essential roles in the consolidation of Saudi Arabian government’s power in the Eastern Province. King Abdulaziz’s authority over the Eastern Province suffered from dissent and disunity following its unification in the 1920s. In addition to the presence of the rival Rashidi dynasty, the Saudi royal family also faced challenges from bedouin tribes in the Eastern Province who did not obey Saudi rule.

Without patronage from the government, bedouin tribes in the Eastern Province would raid Saudi supply lines and disrupt Saudi commercial activities in the region. In the 1930s, the government distributed money from the oil concession among tribal leaders in the Eastern Province in exchange for their compliance. This system of direct patronage allowed for the temporary pacification of tribes across Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia in the late 1930s needed a way to strip the local leaders of their followings and create Saudi loyalists.

It is clear from the evidence that King Abdulaziz, however, did not believe that direct patronage to leaders would be a long-term solution to establishing power in the Eastern Province. Instead, King Abdulaziz’s push for large-scale infrastructure projects led to greater immigration to the area from Saudi-loyal areas, leading to greater Saudi control of the Eastern Province. As demonstrated in the following sections, King Abdulaziz purposefully created infrastructural projects that led to an increased number of Riyadh-based Saudis living in the Eastern Province,


39 Madawi Al Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 40
thus shifting the balance of power from the Eastern Province/Baharna people to the Nejdi/Saudi supporters. Besides the benefit of immigration, I argue the large-scale projects created jobs which sedentarized the bedouin population, making them more dependent on Saudi services and governance. ARAMCO’s experience in both design and construction combined with King Abdulaziz (and the rest of the royal family’s) desire to control the Eastern Province fundamentally changed the development of Saudi Arabia.

In the late 1940s, even after the discovery of oil, Saudi Arabia still faced challenges to their authority from the Eastern Province. With the commercial production of oil in 1947 and the profit-sharing agreement of 1950, the Saudi monarchy began making enough money to shift their strategy from a system of direct patronage to an indirect system more akin to the rentier state. During this time period, Saudi Arabia invested in and used ARAMCO institutions to pacify the Eastern Province, shifting power from local leaders to themselves.

Saudi and ARAMCO’s initiatives-- such as increasing education of Saudi Arabian citizens, improving infrastructure and, most importantly, creating transportation links-- helped sedentarize the Eastern province and consolidated Saudi power in the Eastern Province. ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia’s investment into the Eastern Province effectively pacified the region by shifting local reliance from bedouin leaders to Saudi governmental jobs and institutions.

Some scholars, like Robert Vitalis also argue the rail line provided little economic or political value to Saudi Arabia and showed King Abdulaziz’s ineptitude in ruling Saudi Arabia.\footnote{Vitalis, America’s Kingdom, 21} Vitalis contends that railways in Saudi Arabia were a vanity project; an antiquated idea for the king where instead the funds should have been used to improve the highway infrastructure to
transport goods between Riyadh and Dhahran. In theory, highways could achieve the same effects as a railway: migration, and sedentarization. As demonstrated below, railways proved to be a more effective tool to maintain state authority because it allowed for the control of Saudi subjects.

Robert Vitalis arguesthat ARAMCO primarily built institutions as a means to more effectively exert control and extract wealth without Saudi elite approval. Many of these projects, however, extended Saudi Arabian control of the region and disrupted traditional and tribal sources of power in the province. Looking at programs like the construction of transportation links between Riyadh and Dammam shows how effective the Saudi government was at destabilizing their opposition.

In the original oil concession between ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia, it was “[…] distinctly understood that the Company (ARAMCO) or anyone connected with it shall have no right to interfere with the administrative, political, or religious affairs within Saudi Arabia.” Despite this claim, one can see that ARAMCO as demonstrated in the following section, especially between the 1930s and late 1950s, largely became intertwined with the urban development of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. As ARAMCO became increasingly invested in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi ruling family used ARAMCO as a tool to sedentarize problematic bedouin groups who opposed Saudi rule.

The creation of the Riyadh-Dammam line in 1947 acted as both a tool and active symbol of King Abdulaziz’s modernization and sedentarization policies for the Eastern Province. The rail line allowed for greater Saudi consolidation of power because it empowered greater

41 Ibid., 22.
42 Vitalis, America’s Kingdom, 16
43 Saudi Arabia Concession, Article 36, signed July 7, 1933, Text of Oil Concession Agreement of 7 July 1933 (Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources).
migration between Riyadh and the Eastern Province, created jobs that sedentarized the Eastern Province population and enhanced the movement of military and paramilitary forces between the capital and Dhahran.

4.2 Railways Bring Shifting Loyalties: Migrants Destabilize Tribal Structures

The most significant impact of the Dhahran rail line was its migrational pull. Originally designed to transport goods from Riyadh to Dhahran, the rail line eventually began transporting passengers between the two regions as well. In addition to the ability to migrate more easily, however, the jobs created by both the oil extraction and the railway began to produce jobs and provide training. The new jobs motivated people to leave their homes and move to the Eastern Province. Increased migration into the previously untamed Eastern Province would create a power base for King Abdulaziz to begin integrating the region into his control. Without the railway, however, Riyadh subjects would be forced to cross the Empty Quarter, a stretch of desert renowned for its inhospitable, slowing down both the speed and willingness of people wanting to migrate. In creating a railway, King Abdulaziz overcame the barrier of the Empty Quarter and extended his authority outside of the confines of Riyadh and the surrounding Nejd lands. Eastern Saudi Arabians who were not pacified by the new jobs and elites would face the threat of rapidly transportable paramilitary soldiers.

King Abdulaziz was not the first, however, to employ railways as a means to control. Isma’il Pasha, the khedive of Egypt, also attempted to use technology and infrastructure as a means of control. Encouraged by French plantation owners, Khedive Isma’il built railroads in the Qina Province. Much like the Saudi railway, built over half a century later, the railway served

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45 Ibid., 188

a dual purpose. Isma’il Pasha not only appeased the French plantation owners, major players in his modernizing economy, but he also was able to effectively extend his control from Cairo, the capital, to a more southern region of Egypt. In particular, Khedive Pasha transported thousands of conscripts to help him complete his infrastructural projects as well as import garrisons to watch over workers. Rather than relying on semi-autonomous governors, Khedive Pasha could directly manage the southern region and quell any resistance to his modernization and liberalization of both economic and social policy. While Khedive Pasha’s policies ultimately failed due to British interference and an overextension of Egyptian capital, the historical parallel establishes the usage of railways as more than just a system of transportation and commerce, but as an effective system of control.

Rather than relying solely on military occupation, King Abdulaziz attempted to garner support in the Eastern Province by creating economic uplift. As figure one (see below) shows, the number of Saudi employees at ARAMCO increased by fifty percent after the start of construction of the railroad in 1947 from about 8,000 to 12,000. The immediate increase in the workforce (in the absence of reliable population data) shows that not only were there more Saudi subjects moving to the Eastern Province, but there was an increase in educational and economic opportunities. While data doesn't exist before 1962, the 1962 census estimates that the population of nomadic and semi-nomadic people had shifted from roughly 70% in 1950 to about 50% in 1962. It is therefore safe to assume that the implementation of urbanization in the Eastern Province and the rest of Saudi Arabia was largely a success. Rather than being stuck as a farmer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of Saudi Arabians Employees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>12000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>12800</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>7300</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

or a herder, Dammam and the Eastern Province provided an opportunity for some degree of economic and social uplift.

Looking at ARAMCO employment reports, opportunities increased in the Eastern Province. ARAMCO established several training centers for Saudi citizens to not only become laborers, but skilled workers in the refinery.\(^{52}\) Job training and a steady job lured Eastern Province residents from their formal tribal allegiances to King Abdulaziz’s control. ARAMCO’s lure of wealth and opportunity led to the continuing trend of increased Saudi migration and settlement all the way into the 1980s when ARAMCO became nationalized by the Saudi government.

The Saudi Arabian monarchy, however, did not grant economic opportunity to all its subjects equally. King Abdulaziz directed ARAMCO to only employ the oppositional Shi’i population to menial jobs, whereas the migratory Nejdi-Saudis would have the opportunity to go to training facilities and access to better jobs.\(^{53}\) At a superficial level, Abdulaziz’s segregation makes sense as a tale of revenge. A closer examination, however, reveals how Abdulaziz’s policies served to not only cement his political power in the region, but also appease ARAMCO interests.

4.3 Segregation in the Eastern Province: Creating a New Urban Elite

King Abdulaziz’s pacification of the Eastern Province goes far beyond simply building a railway. His policies of unequal opportunities for Saudi loyalists played an essential role in the extension of Saudi Power in Dhahran and the surrounding province. Specifically, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s concession of menial jobs would begin indebted the Shi’i population to the monarchy and begin removing them from the influence of their tribal leaders. After all, the Shi’i

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\(^{52}\) Lucia Wren Rawls, *The Role of ARAMCO*, 189.

\(^{53}\) Madawi Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 93
population could not simultaneously keep the job in the city and stay with their tribe roaming. Thus, the menial jobs given to Shi’is allowed King Abdulaziz to focus his policing in a contained urban environment rather than spread his paramilitary forces across an expansive desert and countryside.

Second, the King’s segregation prevented the Shi’i population from gaining too much power. By granting elite positions only to Saud dynasty supporters, King Abdulaziz ensured only his supporters would have access to increased resources and power in the Eastern Province. Furthermore, their new wealth and position would help destabilize former tribal power structures that favored Shi’i leaders in the Eastern Province.

The effects of replacing the elite can be seen in 1953 when protests against ARAMCO were effectively led by Saudi supporters. In replacing the elite, King Abdulaziz turned a potential anti-monarchist protest into simply a labor protest. By reframing protests from an issue of loyalty into an issue of welfare, these protests show the efficacy of the Saudi Arabian migrational policy.

This destabilization was critically important because King Abdulaziz (and the larger Saudi government) was able to get ahead of any revolution or secession in the Eastern Province before it happened. Rather than worrying about issues of authority stemming from bedouin tribes and elites rising against him, the monarchy only had to deal with issues of patronage and resource distribution from their supporters. Railways played an essential role in replacing the existing power structures around Dhahran and Dammam.

I also posit a tertiary benefit of urbanizing the Shi’i population in Dhahran was the creation of a reason for enhanced Saudi military forces in the Eastern Province. By settling the Shi’i population close to the ARAMCO workers, King Abdulaziz would be able to increase the

54 Al-Rasheed, A History of Saudi Arabia, 97.
number of police officers in the Eastern Province with lesser backlash. The pretext would be to keep the non-Muslim American employees away from the faithful Saudi subjects, but in reality it was simply to increase surveillance and dominance of the Shi’i population in the Eastern Province.

Again looking at labor protests in the 1950s and 1960s, one can see that the Saudi government heavily relied on the National Guard, their paramilitary police force, to break up strikes and deal with dissidents. What is particularly striking about the use of the National Guard is that they were almost entirely composed of Najdi tribesmen and Saudi loyalists. In addition to importing Najdi workers into the Eastern Province to disrupt the power of the Baharna people, King Abdulaziz made sure his strike-breakers responded to him and him alone. The Guard played a crucial role in not only containing the aforementioned labor strikes, but also disrupting military plots by officers (from other branches) in the Eastern Province. Without the use of the railway, the king would have had much greater difficulty extending his control beyond the Najd region.

Finally, King Abdulaziz petitioned for segregation because he knew that it was already part of ARAMCO policy. In the early part of the 1940s, ARAMCO purposefully built a perimeter around the American part of the base using barbed wire and fences. ARAMCO management did not want its employees to intermingle with the local population nor did they want to give Saudi subjects access to the amenities of the American camp. Instead, they wanted to maintain a continuous source of labor with as little overhead as they could manage. King

56 Ibid., 40
57 Ibid., 41.
58 Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold*, 140
Abdulaziz was more than willing to oblige, so long as they particularly targeted Eastern Province locals.

In practice, ARAMCO’s discrimination resulted in the preferential jobs, homes, and services being given to Najdi workers and Palestinians (who King Abdulaziz sheltered after the 1949 Armistice Agreements) over the local Baharna people. Najdis could participate in a home-loan program from ARAMCO that would allow them to build new homes in the Eastern Province creating another layer of permanency to their migration. Furthermore, Najdi would receive better training and would be allowed to travel outside of the country for study and job training.\(^5^9\)

In practice, however, a railway proved to be a better option early on for Saudi Arabia because of the degree of control railways have over highways. Individuals can only ride on the railway and cannot control it. The government could effectively control where and when people and goods were transported. If there was ever a period of insurrection in the Eastern Province, only the government would have access to a railway which could bypass terrain, carry larger loads, and travel faster than other traditional transportation. Access to cars would effectively democratize transportation and migration at a time when the Saudi Arabian ruling family was not prepared to grant the privilege of movement. Railroads during the 1950s acted as a form of cultural and political dominance.

Not all scholars agree that railways acted as a tool of socially homogeneous unifier. On Barak, a Middle Eastern historian, argues against the idea of railways as a homogenizing force in the Middle East.\(^6^0\) Barak’s main focus in *On Time*, examines how modern technologies shifted Egyptian’s perception of time and created “counter-tempos” or alternative forms of timekeeping.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 42.
as a means to protest British colonialism. Barak also goes on to posit, specifically, how railroads actually acted as a means to create anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-authoritarian sentiments in Egypt.

While Barak’s book does an excellent job proving his thesis in Egypt, I would argue for a different interpretation in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian conflict did not represent a struggle between Europeans and Arabs, but rather between two separate groups of Saudi Arabians, the Baharna people of the East and the Nejdi people in Riyadh. As such, the Railways acted as a weapon and vehicle for King Abdulaziz’s strategy of subjugating ethnic and tribal identities to a singular national identity. ARAMCO may have represented an alien and distorting presence to Baharna culture, but it seems the Baharna people were much more wary of the monarchy.

While there were eventual demonstrations against ARAMCO, the protestors were primarily seeking an improvement in labor rights. Concessions were only made when Nejdi workers also began agitating for improved working conditions. The lack of anti-colonial protests and suppression of Baharna rights show the effectiveness of the railways in both suppressing and replacing extra-Saudi loyalties. Either through the threat of violence, the increased number of Saudi loyalists, or the replacement of the oppositional elite, King Abdulaziz and his railway managed to increase his authority in the Eastern Province. Without the railways the sedentarization and extension of authority in Dhahran would not have been nearly as successful. Railways and infrastructure, while important, were not the only other agent of sedentarization in Saudi Arabia. In addition to the creation of transportation links, King Abdulaziz began creating homes in order to further encourage a demographic shift in the Eastern Province.

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5) New Neighbors in the Eastern Province: Using Suburbia to Shift Demographics

5.1. Introduction

The creation of single family homes and the introduction of the suburb in Saudi Arabia fundamentally shifted the proportions of the nomadic and urban populations in the country. While infrastructure projects, transportation, and military control all helped create various avenues for control for the Saudi Arabian government over its subjects, home ownership also created a greater dependency on the kingdom. In essence, Saudi Arabia wanted to shift how they gained their subject’s loyalty. Rather than relying on direct patronage (i.e. providing tribal leaders with cash and gifts), the Saudi royalty wanted to provide their subjects with services and utility in order to more directly influence the population of the country.

Much like the usage of the railway in Saudi Arabia, the creation of suburbs in company towns in the Middle East served a dual purpose. First, it benefitted ARAMCO because company towns helped sedentarism Eastern Province workers around job sites, creating a pool of cheap labor near the oil fields.

Second, the creation of new homes and increasing homeownership helped further the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s control over its subjects because it partially succeeded in breaking down tribal structures and replacing it with a nuclear family.63 Previously before the ascension of the Saudi family, most people's loyalties remained with their extended families in nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes.64 By replacing tribal structures with western family structures, Saudi

Arabia moved closer to creating a national identity where loyalty to the crown came first and tribal loyalties were destroyed. The push to shift tribal loyalties to Saudi loyalties can also be seen through religious discourse during the early 1950s and beyond.

Finally, the United States also had a vested interest in establishing homeownership in Saudi Arabia. Not only did they want to see ARAMCO succeed and help secure America’s energy future, but the United States also wanted to create a capitalist ally in the Middle East. In the context of the Cold War, America wanted to secure allies in the Middle East who would provide a buffer against Egypt, who angered American policymakers after a 1955 arms deal with the Soviet Union. The United States believed the “conservative” monarchies that relied heavily on religious and historical traditions would be less likely to support communism and instead align themselves with the United State. By providing them with loans and material support, the American government hoped to create a sphere of influence in the Middle East.

5.2. Literature Review of American Urban Historiography

Immigration and resettlement played a crucial part in establishing the monarchy’s control over the Eastern Province. One useful lens originating from outside of the Middle Eastern urban historiography comes from William Cronon’s Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West. In Cronon’s book, he argues for the symbiotic relationship between city and hinterland, the “natural” world and resources that the city exploits. Cronon argues that as one of these two locations grow and develop, the other grows with it. The concept of the codirectional relationship of wealth and development between hinterland and city, provides a useful lens to examine the relationship between Dhahran and the surrounding oil fields and native population.

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65 Ibid., 101.
66 Al-Rasheed, Contesting the Saudi State., 53
Using Cronon’s framework, I argue the hinterland-city paradigm is critical to understanding ARAMCO-Saudi development policy. As ARAMCO becomes richer and expands their presence in Dhahran, they become more invested in the Eastern Province. This leads to greater development of not just the city, but the surrounding areas in order to facilitate greater extraction of wealth as well as greater population control to prevent resistance and ensure a steady supply of unskilled labor. Without examining the “hinterlands” of Dhahran, scholars miss a complete understanding of developmental policy in Saudi Arabia.

Cronon’s framework also helps illuminate the intertwining of Saudi and ARAMCO goals. I contend that as ARAMCO and Saudi Arabia begin seeing real gains in state revenue, their goal to extract wealth unifies the two groups and results in a collaborative relationship. This can most clearly be seen in their treatment of the local Bedouin tribes. The Bedouin of Eastern Province, historically owned parts of these oil fields and were known to raid caravans. To continue extracting oil as efficiently as possible and avoid disruptions to the flow of oil, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO decided to resettle, by force if necessary, as much of the Bedouin population as they could to avoid unnecessary future conflict.

Building off Cronon’s framework, Andrew Needham shows in *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* that despite the symbiotic relationship of development between hinterlands and city, the resulting benefits of consequences were unevenly distributed among the various demographics. While the Americans of ARAMCO and the Arabians in Riyadh garnered much of the wealth from the oil, the Bedouins benefitted little and suffered greatly. Much like the Navajo nation in *Power Lines* after the construction of the Boulder Dam, the Bedouin tribes of the Eastern Province, who were historically enemies, were forced to

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amalgamate into a singular group due to the construction of oil wells and forced resettlement.70 Furthermore, the jobs being offered in the region were given to migrants from central Arabia rather than to the natives71. Bedouins, like the Navajo people, were displaced and exploited without any economic or political returns. Needham’s framework helps illustrate how different groups living within the same geographic region can experience development differently and provides a framework to help answer my subquestion of resistance to development.

5.3. Literature Review of American Housing Abroad

In addition to Needham and Cronon’s work on hinterlands and cities, other American authors offer key insights into ideas of homeownership and the exportation of American ideals. Nancy Kwak, a transnational urban historian, argues the United States began exporting the idea of home ownership as citizenship as a way to fight communism.72 Home ownership was seen as anticommunist because it created a “global middle class” and encouraged the prioritization of private property for the masses.73 Kwak, however, also argues projects funding public housing and rental assistance often resulted in better outcomes for poor citizens, even if not ideologically consistent with American foreign policy.74 American foreign policy, however, did not seem particularly interested in serving the underprivileged. Instead, these programs aimed to build American soft power across the world.

Nathan Citino, a Middle Eastern history, concurs with Kwak and believes the creation of suburbs in Saudi Arabia through the Tapline Home Ownership Program reflects an exportation

71 Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*,
73 Ibid., 6
74 Ibid., 2-3
of American values. The Tapline Homeownership Program is essentially the Saudi version of the exportation of American home ownership. ARAMCO would provide loans to its employees and other Saudi Arabians to either construct or purchase homes throughout the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

Critically, Citino suggests company towns or “oil enclaves” as unique sites where the promotion of American ideals became most crystallized due to the wealth created from the extraction of oil. Citino argues homes could be built in a greater quantity much faster thus leading to a more dramatic shift from the homeownership in tribal villages to homeownership in suburban settings. The quicker rate of change, Citino goes on to argue, also leads to more confrontation.

Finally, Citino, criticizes the American creation of a Saudi Arabian suburb for a variety of reasons: policies of racial segregation between Arabs and Americans, results of increasing economic inequality, and a general inflexibility to the needs and cultures of the local populace. Due to these shortcomings Citino seems to frame ARAMCO’s loan program as a failure of American policy. Saudi Arabians, particularly the local Eastern Province population, did not seem interested in American-style homes or homeownership.

Citino and Kwak’s claims are correct in that these programs profited corporations and failed to create equitable outcomes for Saudi Arabians in the Eastern Province. In Saudi Arabia, however, questions arise whether or not these were always the intended outcomes for the Saudi Arabian government and ARAMCO. I argue, in the following section, that housing in the

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75 Nathan Citino, “Suburbia and Modernization: Community Building and America’s Post-World War II Encounter with the Arab Middle East,” The Arab Studies Journal 13, no. 2, (Arab Studies Institute, Washington DC, 2005) 42.
76 Ibid., 41.
77 Ibid., 42.
78 Ibid., 45.
Eastern Province was primarily to sedentarize the population, create a viable labor force, and establish an imported Sunni elite over the local Shi’i population.

Nevertheless, some of Kwak’s and Citino’s ideas can be applied to Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO’s Tapline Home Ownership Program. In particular, I agree with Citino that oil enclaves are an understudied aspect of the exportation of American suburbia. The rapid changes that occur in company towns helps crystallize some of the cultural clashes that would otherwise be buried in areas that developed more slowly. In the following section, I display why the exportation of American middle-class ideals was an outcome that both the Saudi Arabian government and ARAMCO sought to achieve.

5.4. Background of Home Ownership in the Eastern Province

The Tapline Home Ownership Loan Program was a private initiative created by ARAMCO in 1951 to combat the increasing number of homeless citizens and poor-quality homes in Dhahran and Dammam. These shanty towns were problematic to ARAMCO because the lack of homes did not incentivize Saudi Arabians to create lasting ties to the community and, by extension, their jobs at ARAMCO. Modelling itself after American initiatives, ARAMCO began offering low or no interest loans to Saudi Arabians in order to build permanent dwellings outside of the American Compound in Dhahran. Construction began on homes in Buqayq (an oil reserve roughly 40 miles southeast of Dhahran) and Ra’s Tanura (another oil reserve roughly 50 miles north of Dhahran).

By the 1960s, however, the Tapline Home Ownership Loan Program was failing. Saudi Arabians were not only rejected buying homes, they were declining to even apply for loans.

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79 Citino, "Suburbia and Modernization", 46.  
80 Ibid., 47.  
81 Ibid., 45.  
82 Ibid., 46.
Despite the supposed “superiority” of western homes with running power and appliances, Saudi Arabians largely refused them. Saudi nonacceptance of American homeownership and loans seem to largely stem from the proposed location of the homes. While there were elements of a rejection of American cultural values and modernity, it was more a repudiation of relocation. In particular, the strongest denial of ARAMCO suburbs came from the Baharna people. Shi’i Arabs refused to move into the suburbs of Buqayq and Ra’s Tanura, citing tribal obligations in their home villages and a disconnect from their neighbors who came from other parts of Saudi Arabia. After a series of surveys and reports by scholars working for ARAMCO, the company altered their program by allowing Saudi Arabians to utilize the loan program to build homes in their

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83 Google Maps, 2021, “Map of Dammam”, 10 Mile Scale, https://www.google.com/maps/place/Eastern+Province+Saudi+Arabia/@26.3283379,49.9397948,9.5z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x3e4019b3e33d8685:0x6db173e402bb58a6!8m2!3d23.1669688!4d49.3653149
original villages. After this alteration to their loan agreement, the subsequent decade saw an increase of homes built from around 400 in the 1950s to nearly 7,000 in the 1960s.

**Changes in Saudi Architecture**

Image of Hofuf in 1933, Traditional Structures made of mud, used by Saudi Arabians

Image of Dhahran, Italian-built stone building in 1940s, intended for Western workers

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84 Ibid., 48.
85 Ibid., 48.
86 Scott McMurray, *Energy to the World, Volume 1*, 10-11
87 Ibid., 119
Examples of Homes built before the Tapline Homeownership Program, but with some more modern materials (i.e. cement) used\textsuperscript{88}

Examples of Homes built through the Tapline Homeownership Program by both Saudi and Western Workers\textsuperscript{89}


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 138
5.5 Analysis

ARAMCO deemed Shi‘i’s unwillingness to move into their suburbs a failure of the program. For the Saudi Arabian monarchy, however, it was a success. King Abdulaziz favored and fostered this outcome. By encouraging the migration of Saudi Arabsians from the rest of the nation via railway and job opportunities, King Abdulaziz would establish a system which would create jobs first and foremost for Sunni Arabs. In doing so, Sunni Saudi Arabsians would be more likely to receive home loans and thus “ascend” to homeowners. By creating a Sunni middle class, he was able to effectively segregate the various ethnicities into classes. Western subjects and royalty were the richest and most privileged, the Sunni Nejdis came next, and the Baharna people were the bottom rung of the social and economic ladder.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Sunni Nejdi workers still did not enjoy the same wealth as American workers in Dhahran, they still enjoyed far more luxuries than the local Baharna people. The division of class by ethnicity and purported loyalty reinforced the message implemented by Saudi Arabian government in the 1930s and before. Those who served the kingdom would be rewarded with material wealth and those who did not would suffer poverty and be denied services.

By creating ethnic enclaves, King Abdulaziz and his successors could better monitor Shi‘i Arabs. Rather than trying to distinguish between various types of Saudi Arabsians in Dhahran, the Saudi Arabian government would primarily have to monitor the home villages where the Shi'a ultimately built their homes. This would allow for a reduction in security forces in the Eastern Province as there would be fewer areas of concern and potential zones for clashes.

90 Faisal A Mubarak, “Cultural Adapation To Housing Needs: A Case Study, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia” (Riyadh, King Saud University Press, 1999) 7
In doing so, the Saudi Arabian government was able to expand its power in the region with fewer costs.

Another benefit of the creation of suburbs in Saudi Arabia was the general sedentarization of the population. Even if the loan program benefitted fewer people than public housing and rent assistance, as Kwak argues, this program still massively contributed to new settlements popping up in the Eastern Province. Towns like Ar’ar and similar smaller villages began crowing and provided settling places for nomadic Saudi Arabians. As more and more subjects sedentarized, the crown could focus on shifting their focus from military control to increasing dependence on the government. This shift which began occurring in the late 1960s blossomed in the 1970s with the nationalization of ARAMCO and the increased number of Saudis in the oil industry. Education, healthcare, welfare, and other government services became more important focuses than the threat of a military crackdown.

6) Policing and Militarization as Control in the Eastern Province

6.1. Introduction

King Abdulaziz’s housing and railway projects increased his power base in the Eastern Province, the king also used force and military technologies to tighten his control of Dammam. The Saudi Arabian government essentially had two options for those in the Eastern Province. They could either make their peace with the Saudi regime and work for ARAMCO or those who opposed them would face the wrath of Saudi paramilitary forces.

In particular, King Abdulaziz leveraged support from ARAMCO to gain access to aircraft and armored vehicles. Airplanes and armored vehicles granted King Abdulaziz’s forces an advantage over their bedouin opposition. Bedouin leaders lost the edge of local knowledge because Saudi airplanes could easily outmaneuver, assault, and surveil tribal forces. Ultimately, the presence of air control and other military vehicles crippled external resistance to the Saudi regime and played a critical role in the forced sedentarization of bedouin groups in the Eastern Province.

6.2. Origins of Air Power

The origins of Saudi air power largely spring from mutual Saudi and ARAMCO expansionism. While the Saudi government ultimately desired all of the Arabian peninsula, ARAMCO specifically wanted the Buraimi Oasis because they believed it contained oil. In 1949, ARAMCO crossed out of Saudi Arabian territory and into Oman and Abu Dhabi, violating British sovereignty. Despite not confirming the presence of oil, Saudi Arabia began making

claims on the oasis in 1949, believing they would have the support of not just ARAMCO against the British, but also the United States government. The emergence of the Cold War in 1947, ensured that the Saudi Arabian government could leverage their oil supplies and strategic value in exchange for military arms, security agreements, and international support for their war efforts.

The Buraimi Dispute emerged from the 1949 territorial claims as British and Saudi Arabian officials attempted to negotiate borders (see map below) that had never formally been established due to a Saudi refusal to withdraw claims on what would become the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Despite the London Agreement in 1950 to refrain from sending troops, Saudi Arabia violated the agreement and occupied the oasis illegally in 1952. After a few skirmishes between Omani-backed soldiers and Saudi troops, the Saudi Arabians were removed. In 1954, Britain and Saudi Arabia agreed to an arbitration agreement where they would make their territorial claims to an international tribunal. In 1955, Britain withdrew from these negotiations, as Saudi Arabia tried to bribe the judges on the tribunal. Finally, the British resolved the conflict by expelling the Saudi Arabian forces through a mixture of overwhelming numbers, tactical superiority, and air power.

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93 Ibid., 7
95 Morton, Buraimi, 14
97 Ibid., 108
98 Ibid., 109
99 Ibid., 109.
Map of Saudi Claims and Area of Conflict

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101 Morton, *Buraimi* 114
American support for the Buraimi Dispute never came in either conflict or arbitration, the American government (at the behest of ARAMCO) did grant Saudi Arabia a significant amount of military arms. These arms included around a dozen planes, enough rifles to equip the 40,000 tribal levies of Saudi Arabia, artillery, and armored vehicles. Before the Crisis began, the United States had Starting with the inclusion of Saudi Arabia in the Lend-Lease Act in 1945, American small arms, armored vehicles, and other military equipment was either sold or given to the Saudi Arabian government. Most importantly, following the Lend-Lease Act and the Mutual Defense Act of 1951, the Saudi Arabian government gained immediate access to air power, solidifying its power across the country.

6.3 O’Keefe Report

In addition to supplies, the United States government also agreed to prepare a recommendation for the Saudi military and to share the Dhahran airfield with Saudi Arabia for the training of pilots and other members of their military in 1951. Immediately, the United States Government surveyed the whole of Saudi Arabia for the purpose of developing a defensive network centered around Dhahran. From this initial survey, the United States advisors devised a strategy for the Saudi Arabian military. The 1951 military planning document, known as the O’Keefe Report, would not only shape Saudi Arabia’s offensive and defensive military doctrine, but more importantly Saudi policing doctrine as well.

The O’Keefe Report, while ostensibly about creating a defensive force for Saudi Arabia, reflects the anxieties of the American and Saudi government. Both the United States and Saudi Arabian government feared dissent from within due to regional and tribal loyalties more so than

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103 Metz, Saudi Arabia, 238.
105 Ibid., 1117
an external invasion. In the O’Keefe Report, the United States advisors explicitly recommends a force that provides for the internal security of Saudi Arabia.106

“In obligating Saudi Arabian defense funds to support the recommended defense organization, the Saudi Arabian Government should consider that these costs accomplish a great deal in addition to providing a strong defensive force. Implementation of the defense organization will not only provide a strong internal security for the Kingdom, but will contribute to the progress of the people and the government in improved communications, improved airfields, construction of many types of facilities such as roads, maintenance shops, etc., and above all else, will institute a technical and educational program which will be available to a large bulk of the Arabian population.”107

Much like the aforementioned building projects and transportation links, the Saudi Arabian government saw this as an opportunity to further consolidate their power by offering both an incentive and a threat to sedentarize in the Eastern Province. This can be seen in the deployment of the military in the early 1950s against the Shi’i of the Eastern Province108 While it was the United States military advisors that recommended this course of action, Saudi Arabia did follow their recommendations and began implementing changes to the Dhahran Airfield and the surrounding area. The emphasis on internal security demonstrates that the biggest threat to Saudi authority came from within rather than from a geopolitical rival like Iran or Egypt.

106 Ibid., 1117
107 Ibid., 1117. Bold emphasis added
108 Mordechai Abir, Saudi Arabia In The Oil Era: Regime And Elites; Conflict And Collaboration, (New York, Routledge, 1988)
In addition, the reports call for the officers to only report to the King and his Ministry of Defense out of fear of subversion and treason.109

“If the recommended defense organization is to serve its purpose, it must have full support of its government, financial and otherwise. The defense organization and its General Staff must be organized in such a manner that it will only be under the authority of the Minister of Defense and not be subject to the will or the desires of local Amirs. To accomplish this, the defense organization must be entirely independent of local Amirs in garrisons, billeting, messing and all supporting facilities. In other words it must be an instrument of His Majesty and Minister of Defense and no one else.”

Again, the concern for betrayal and internal strife indicates that the United States military advisors shared the concerns of the Saudi Arabian government. The Saudi dynasty believed that the most likely way they would lose power would be from tribal elites rebelling against the government and either fragmenting or destroying Saudi control of the country entirely. An external attack, especially from the rest of the British-controlled Gulf was extremely unlikely. This is largely due to the relationship between the British Empire and the United States. Besides Saudi Arabia’s natural defense due to its expansive deserts and lack of non-oil resources, the monarchy had signed a defensive pact with the United States in 1951, effectively blocking any potential British aggression. The only way, in the eyes of the United States government, to lose Saudi Arabia was an internal coup or revolution.

In their assessment, the Department of Defense staff recommends Saudi Arabia build a modern defensive force combining air, naval, and ground forces to protect against potential

109 Ibid., 1115
communist invasion. With few belligerent neighbors\textsuperscript{110}, however, the O’Keefe Report and subsequent State Department documents were primarily worried about internal threats and coups.\textsuperscript{111} At the time, Saudi Arabia was surrounded by British-controlled mandates. The British were more concerned with maintaining the status quo rather than altering the Saudi borders or clashing for oil. Britain’s informal control of Saudi Arabia began to collapse around 1932 because the British were unable to keep out the United States. The hegemony of Britain over the Gulf broke when ARAMCO signed their contract and began surveying and prospecting for oil. At this point, British declension began in the Gulf and ARAMCO, but not necessarily American, ascendancy began.

Internally, however, the United States perceived Pan-Arabism, nationalism, and communism as potential security threats. In 1951, the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Petroleum Company (AIPOC) in Iran would further stoke the American fears. The Iranian nationalisation would later lead to the Mossadiq Crisis, where the CIA performed a coup against a perceived communist takeover of the Iranian government. Concerns about instability in Saudi Arabia were reflected in the report as the advisors focus on the air force’s ability to transport troops around the country quickly, rather than focusing on Saudi Arabia’s military’s international offensive capabilities\textsuperscript{112}.

The O’Keefe Report marked a shift in Saudi military and policing doctrine. Rather than focusing on mobile camel-based cavalry, the United States recommended an air-focused approach to deal with the difficult terrain of Saudi Arabia. The United States advisors recommended the Saudi Arabians recruit and maintain 43,000 Saudi Arabian soldiers for their military. Over a third of the advisors’ recommendation (15,000) were dedicated to the air

\textsuperscript{110} Iran and Egypt were both under American and British control in 1951, respectively
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 1118.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 1117.
force. The United States, and by extension Saudi Arabia, understood to defend and control such a massive desert country that a significant amount of their armed forces would need to be part of the air force.

Based on the O’Keefe Report, the American assessment of Saudi threats reflects the Saudi’s own concerns. Otherwise, why would the Saudi government be so willing to invest massive amounts of money into training, equipment, and education that would just be sitting doing nothing? King Abdulaziz recognized the need for quick and overwhelming force anywhere in the country.

Furthermore, Saudi military forces, particularly air power, were more so a tool of regime authority rather than an offensive or defensive tool against rival countries. Rather than looking at Saudi modernization and militarization from a grand geo-political perspective, as other authors have done in the past, I contend Saudi military doctrine more effectively responds to domestic governmental and policing needs.

6.4 ARAMCO And Commercial Flight

With the United States military leading the build up of the Saudi Arabian air force, starting in 1951, ARAMCO also began participating in the creation of Saudi air superiority. On the surface it may seem like everyday citizens would not be affected or perhaps even aware of Saudi Arabia’s push for air dominance. After all, how many times would the Saudi Arabian government do military fly-bys over their own people? Instead, the Saudi Arabian government needed a way to remind their subjects of Saudi dominance over them.

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113 Ibid., 1117
By the 1960s, however, planes were a part of many Saudi Arabian’s daily lives. A 1967 article about aviation in ARAMCO World, a company-published magazine written for employees, shows the ubiquity of aircraft in Saudi Arabia.\(^{114}\)

“But[...}]for the most part, the passengers and cargo are prosaic, the flights in the main, routine. They carry high school students to Beirut and Rome, executives to an oil congress in Baghdad, Government Relations spokesmen to Riyadh or Jiddah, inspectors along pipelines, exploration men to distant concession areas.”\(^{115}\)

By 1967, Saudi Arabia had arranged for daily commuter flights for Saudi Arabian oil workers.\(^{116}\) These flights transported workers from the Eastern Province (mainly Hofuf and Abqaiq) to the oil fields bordering Jordan and Iraq in the north. By increasing the presence of both commercial and military aircraft, the Saudi Arabian government displayed their policing capabilities to their subjects. The planes not only served as a means to transport people and supplies cross country, but also as a reminder of the Saudi Arabian government’s watchful eye over their subjects. Rebellious Saudi subjects, particularly Bedouin tribes that rose up, were easily dispatched through Saudi air power, such as the Ikwan in the 1930s.\(^{117}\) In the 1970s, this network of civilian flights would be expanded even further as profits from oil nearly quadrupled with the oil boom.

Saudi subject’s reliance on transportation by air created further dependency on the crown. Much like trains, Saudi Arabia could stop or continue flights as they pleased. Saudi subjects

\(^{115}\) Ibid.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
were effectively beholden to the whims of the monarchy. If the workers of Abqaiq and Hofuf began demonstrating, the Saudi Arabian government could effectively isolate them by ordering ARAMCO to stop flights in and out of the cities. In the 1950s and 1960s, Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO created a transportation infrastructure which enabled the Saudi Arabian government to control the movements of a large portion of their population. While cars became popularized in Saudi Arabia in the 1950s, they did not become truly dominant until the 1970s after the monarchy had guaranteed its place at the head of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi’s insistence and continued usage of government-run transportation paid dividends in their authoritarian system. By investing heavily into air travel (and trains), the Saudi Arabian government became able to dictate the freedom of movement in their country during the 1950s through 1970s.

6.5 Buraimi Crisis

If the O’Keefe report put forth suggestions on Saudi domestic security policy, the Buraimi Dispute proved their efficacy. The Buraimi Dispute, while not important on an international scale, was crucial to the development of Saudi Arabian strength because it

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demonstrated how effective airplanes were in defeating tribal opposition. Eventually, the lessons learned from the Buraimi Crisis became a crucial part of Saudi Arabian internal security and policing strategy.

During the Buraimi Crisis, British-backed Oman deployed over fifteen military aircraft against the Saudi Arabian forces, effectively blocking them from accessing much of the area or denying supplies to Saudi supporters already in the area. British air superiority showed the Saudi government air power was essential to controlling the desert in the 20th century. Camels and ground forces would no longer be able to compete because of the logistical advantages provided by aircrafts. Saudi Arabia was actually able to take advantage of the logistical advantages for part of the war as the only way they supplied the occupying force in the oasis was via ARAMCO-provided aircraft. With the knowledge gained from the Buraimi Dispute, Saudi Arabia confirmed the initial findings of the O’Keefe Report. Any dissident bedouin leaders would be easily suppressed by air dominance.

Troops could move faster, supplies could be delivered quicker, and the air force could prevent the enemy from doing the same. Much like the railways, airplanes could act either as a form of transportation or as a means to deny movement to certain groups. The ability to restrict movement made air power in Saudi Arabia the most important part of their policing strategy. In the Eastern Province it enabled the Saudi Arabian government to control their population in a way no other branch could because they could traverse the inhospitable terrain of the Empty Quarter in a way no other vehicle or animal could.

Eventually, the threat of aircraft and the promise of jobs became too much for people to resist and in the 1960s, demographics show that Saudi Arabians were becoming increasingly

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120 Morton, *Buraimi*, 147.
urban and sedentarized. The opportunities of the desert could not compete with even the lower-end jobs in the cities and the possibility of military resistance seemed futile. While Saudi Arabia is largely sedentarized today, the process really became part of official policy during the 1940s and 1950s. Sedentarization in Saudi Arabia was partially-driven by the Saudi Arabian government as a means to reign in opposition and expand their own power.

Meanwhile, ARAMCO also encouraged sedentarization because they wanted to shift the labor pool from rural to urban. ARAMCO needed a cheap and replaceable workforce that could provide them cheap labor while they extracted as much oil as possible. While eventually, Saudi workers would completely take control of the facilities in the 1970s, this process was by no means complete in the 1950s and 1960s, but significant changes to the proportion of bedouins and urbanites occurred.

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7) Conclusion

Robert Vitalis, regard the 1950s through the 1970s as a period of wasteful spending and government inefficiency, I show many of Saudi’s so-called “vanity projects” were absolutely essential in the expansion of Saudi authority and the development of Saudi urban life.\textsuperscript{122} Rather than passing over this period of Saudi history as a “lost decade” for development, scholars, like Anthony Cave Brown, should privilege the period as an important period for establishing policing, infrastructural, and housing policies that continue to this day.

As my paper demonstrates the creation of railways, suburbs, and a modern military, were critical to sedentarization oppositional forces to the crown in a way that helped prevent uprisings and coups against the crown. By refocusing the lens from a global geopolitical viewpoint to a regional level, the changes made by King Abdulaziz, the Saudi Arabian government, and ARAMCO all led to greater monarchical authority in the Eastern Province.

Privileging this era’s development and impact allows us to examine modern events with a different lens, revealing how the Saudi government reuse some of their strategies of the 1950s and 60s. One example of newly proposed urban developments along the Omani border follows similar housing and development strategies established in the Eastern Province in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{123} This new project, called “the Line” project looks to establish control over southern oil fields by settling cheap labor near the wells. This labor serves the dual purpose of disrupting local loyalties to Omani politics as well as maintaining a cost-efficient oil field. These settlers will also

\textsuperscript{122} Vitalis, America’s Kingdom, 10
provide a deterrent to attacks on the newly-claimed oil wells. While the new urban developments are more aggressive than the 1950s settlement, the parallels in extending Saudi authority are evident.
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