

# **US Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

**From American Missionaries to the  
Islamic State**

**Edited by  
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## 2 How big tobacco used Islam and modernity to conquer Saudi Arabia

*Sean Foley*

In 1986, Walter Thoma, a senior executive at Philip Morris (PM), briefed the company's board of directors about cigarette sales in Saudi Arabia, one of the company's most unlikely but most profitable markets in the world. Over the previous decade, PM had taken advantage of the tripling in size of the Saudi cigarette market during the oil boom, overcoming a government ban on cigarette advertising and the opposition of senior religious leaders, who labeled smoking *haram* (forbidden) under Islamic law. Between 1975 and 1986 alone, the company increased the volume of its sales in Saudi Arabia sevenfold and increased its operating revenues from less than \$1 million to \$65 million (Thoma, 1986). During the same time period, PM nearly doubled its share of the Saudi market from 18 percent to 32.3 percent (Thoma, 1986).

However, Thoma warned that the company's profitable operations in the Kingdom were now in danger. The cigarette industry had lost significant volume in the late 1980s: Saudis' disposable incomes had evaporated and thousands of foreign laborers returned home as the economy contracted following the crash in the global oil market. The Saudi government, which earned much of its income from oil revenues, saw cigarettes as a new source of income. Riyadh had already increased its tariffs on imported cigarettes, forcing PM to raise prices by 18 percent to protect its margins (Thoma, 1986). In addition, Saudi health officials were renewing their drive to place health warnings on cigarettes (Thoma, 1986).

Thoma (1986) assured the board that the company had mounted a ferocious lobbying campaign to oppose these measures, building on contacts in the oil industry and the government of Saudi Arabia. Company executives had also enlisted the help of Vice President George W. Bush, who was then visiting Saudi Arabia, and other senior US officials to personally lobby King Fahd to reduce the new tariffs and not to accept the proposal to put health labels on cigarettes. In addition to these measures, the company was seeking to improve its market share and volume once Saudi Arabia's economy rebounded. Company officials had already dispatched teams of employees to work with distributors to improve efficiency and to refine PM's understanding of the market and its customers. Thoma (1986) concluded with an upbeat message about Saudi Arabia and the company's future: "I remain optimistic that



Philip Morris International will continue to earn a substantial proportion of its operating income in Saudi Arabia” (Thoma, 1986, p. 10).

More than a quarter century after Thoma gave his 1986 report, the Kingdom is one of the largest importers of cigarettes in the world (Kochhar, 2016); Saudis consume billions of cigarettes annually, a market worth \$1.5 billion (Qusti, 2007). Despite higher tariffs and new restrictions on where Saudis can smoke in public, more Saudis are likely to smoke in the future since a third of the population is aged 14 or younger (Glum, 2015) – the age cohort that is most likely to produce new smokers (“Study: Teens most vulnerable to smoking,” 2004). In fact, both the World Health Organization and the Saudi Diabetes and Endocrine Association have warned that the number of smokers will likely double from 5 million in 2015 to 10 million by 2020 (“10 million Saudi smokers by 2020,” 2013).

Drawing on archival and field research conducted in America and in Saudi Arabia from 2013 to 2016, this chapter sheds light on the failure of the Saudi state and religious elites to deter the concerted campaign by multinational tobacco companies to make Saudis smokers. It argues that the rise of the new class of Saudi smokers reflects the nexus of four social factors: (a) a pragmatic tradition of informally permitting smoking in private or regions outside of Riyadh, (b) an oil-driven consumer spending boom in the 1970s, (c) a series of mass marketing campaigns that linked smoking to American freedom and modernity and Islam, and (d) a vision of society that highlights the Qur’an and the *hadith* over all other sources of revelation and Islamic law. These campaigns built on the tobacco industry’s record of conducting detailed exhaustive surveys of smokers, overcoming social or religious impediments to smoking, and opening profitable new markets. Notably, while many Western social scientists highlighted the role of oil, autocracy, or religion in Saudi life (Haykel, Hegghammer, & Lacroix, 2015), researchers working for PM and other companies stressed a different set of factors as shaping politics and society; namely, dualism and the coexistence of what Westerners would perceive as oppositional or mutually exclusive forces.

Ultimately, this chapter sheds new light on the history and politics of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, an era widely seen as dominated in Saudi Arabia by the Kingdom’s religious leaders, especially after the seizure of the Ka’aba in 1979. It also highlights the importance of smoking, a rarely discussed but critical aspect of contemporary Saudi society, and the history of America’s special relationship with Saudi Arabia (Cooperman & Shechter, 2008). These issues are important today as Saudi political and religious leaders again seek to curb smoking in order to both improve public health and blunt the appeal of the Islamic State (ISIS), which has destroyed cigarettes and imposes draconian penalties on smokers (Hall, 2015).

### **“I never smoke in public and rarely do so in the presence of visitors”**

For much of the 20th century, Western tobacco executives had little reason to view Saudi Arabia as a viable market. They knew that the 18th-century

founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, had denounced smoking as *haram* and that King Abdulaziz ibn Saud denounced the “smoking of tobacco – *haram*, he said, a deadly sin which he deplored and strictly outlawed” (Lacey, 1981, p. 159). For decades, numerous Western academics had reinforced this worldview by linking Wahhabism to all forms of extremism in the Arab and Muslim worlds (Koskowski, 1955). As Princeton’s John Willis once observed, the contemporary Saudi royal family in the 21st century is the logical successor to the Wahhabi worldview, including its “strict ban on the smoking of tobacco” (Willis, 2003, pp. 14–15). Indeed, Willis stated that a famous 1964 photo of King Hussein of Jordan, President Gamal Nasser, and other leading Arab leaders smoking “must have raised consternation within the house of Saud” (Willis, 2003, p. 15).

The founding King of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz, reinforced this worldview. In meetings with foreign visitors, the Saudi king requested that those visitors present respect his religious views – a request that Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill flaunted but that US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a legendary chain-smoker, accepted as part of his legendary meeting aboard the USS *Quincy* in 1945 (O’Sullivan, 2012). It was also widely known that the *muṭawwiʿin* (singular *muṭawīʿ*), what Westerners call the “religious police,” rigorously enforced a ban on smoking in public in Jeddah, Riyadh, and other large settlements (Mouline, 2014, p. 208).

Visitors to the country and Saudis, however, understood that the rules (and practices) linked to smoking were more nuanced in the Kingdom. Cigarettes were produced in large quantities in Egypt (Schechter, 2006), a neighboring country whose ties with Saudi Arabia cannot be overstated, and tobacco was produced in commercial quantities in the neighboring Trucial Coast states (later the United Arab Emirates) (Zacharias, 2010). While foreign statesmen were asked not to smoke in their meetings with the king, it was not unusual for them to be provided cigarettes but with instructions to enjoy the gift in the privacy of their homes (Lacey, 1981). “In private,” the Arab-American traveler Amin Al-Rihani noted, in the 1920s “one could smoke in Riyadh” (Rihani, 2002, p. 35). Even in the most sacrosanct neighborhoods of the Saudi capital, one was “likely to find some tobacco, hidden in the bottom of a chest” (Rihani, 2002, p. 35). In Qassim in the Najd, anyone could easily buy tobacco in private and smoke in public (Rihani, 2002). Tobacco sales were integral to the merchants of Mecca and to the taxes the Saudi state collected there – so integral that religious leaders did not object in 1925 when the king lifted a ban on tobacco in the city, which they had insisted he impose just a year earlier (Mackey, 2002). Even some of King Abdulaziz’s personal bodyguards, the *Zhirt*, smoked when they were in the desert. As Rihani wrote, there was little that a pious Saudi could do in such settings except call on an individual to stop and repent:

Once a *Zhirt* is in the open desert, he will light his pipe and raise his voice in song; and singing and smoking is banned in Najd, especially in



the new settlements, from one of which comes Nawwar. But our *Zhirt* would sing, and all that Nawwar could do was to repeat the CXII Sura of the Koran – *I fly for refuge unto God from the evil things he has created*, etc. But we saw him light a pipe as he leaped to the ground, exclaiming, “Deliver us, O God, from the devil! Deliver us, O God, from hell-fire!” Everyone laughed, but he continued to repeat the invocation.

(Rihani, 2002, pp. 210–211)

Critically, members of the *Zhirt* were not the only ones close to the Saudi king who smoked in the presence of strangers. No less a figure than Prince (and later King) Feisal – a man whose piety and aversion to alcohol and tobacco were a pillar of his public reputation – smoked (Hiro, 2013). When Edwin Plitt, an advisor to the American delegation to the United Nations, visited Feisal at the Hotel Waldorf in New York City in December 1952, the Saudi royal asked him to sit next to him and produced a package of cigarettes. Feisal then stunned the diplomat by saying, “I never smoke in public and rarely do so in the presence of visitors” (Plitt, 1952, para. 1). But Feisal, who Plitt observed was unusually agitated, went on to say that “he should like to consider him this morning as a member of my family circle and to join him in smoking for which I feel the need” (Plitt, 1952, para. 1). As the two men smoked, they had a frank but nonetheless warm discussion about regional politics (Plitt, 1952).

Feisal was hardly alone. His wife, Iffat, chain-smoked Turkish cigarettes and told the American physician Seymour Gray that she smoked “three packs a day, more or less” (Lippman, 2004, p. 261). As Gray later recalled, it would have been “useless to ask her to stop smoking” (Lippman, 2004, p. 261). Other highly educated Saudis, both royals and non-royals, also smoked. Even doctors smoked, while they advised their patients not to do so. Saudi men and women who did not smoke American or British cigarettes, which were relatively cheap at just \$0.25, smoked the water pipe (*shisha*) at home or in cafés (Pace, 1971). As Rajaa al-Sanea observed in her novel, *The Girls of Riyadh*, “many Hijazi men and women” were addicted to *shisha* (Al-Sanea, 2007, p. 17). In the late 1960s, a café offering its customers water pipes opened in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, drawing fierce opposition from Saudi religious elites (Pace, 1971). It was one thing to smoke in Jeddah or a provincial city; it was something very different to smoke openly in public in the country’s capital.

As religious elites sought to combat society’s embrace of smoking cigarettes and *shisha*, they turned to Islamic law and *fatwā* (plural *fatāwā*) – a ruling on a given issue of Islamic law authored by a prominent cleric. These rulings, which are often presented in response to questions posed by society, are the same tools that their predecessors used to limit smoking when it was introduced to Muslims in the 16th century by European merchants operating in North Africa and West Africa (Batan, 2003). Throughout this era, leading Saudi jurists wrote a series of legal opinions that classified smoking as both *haram* and *bid‘a*, or a heretical practice unknown at the dawn of Islam.

Among the most important landmark opinions condemning smoking from this era is that of Abdur Rahman bin Nassir as-Sa'di against smoking. In the *fatwā*, this highly respected Wahhabi jurist from Qassim expressed his astonishment that doctors and other educated Saudis "who are intent on preserving their health" nonetheless "persist in smoking" (As-Sa'di, 2000, p. 33). In his eyes, these men, who had surrendered to their personal addictions, were far more committed to upholding "their lifestyle" (i.e., Western lifestyle) than their faith (As-Sa'di, 2000, p. 33). The Saudi jurist was especially bewildered by the Saudi doctors who smoked but also admitted that smoking was a "detriment to their health" (As-Sa'di, 2000, p. 33). While he never uses the word hypocritical in the *fatwā*, it is clear that As-Sa'di viewed any Saudi who smoked as insincere in his faith and a fraud as a Muslim.

As-Sa'di was not the only leading Saudi religious figure to condemn smoking as un-Islamic and to link it to a decadent Western lifestyle. Other religious scholars in Saudi Arabia invoked an even stronger taboo against smoking (Henderson to Bailey, 2004), especially in large public spaces, and the Saudi government imposed some of the earliest and most stringent restrictions in the world on public tobacco advertising – some imposed as early as 1971 (US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1971). The punishments for breaking the laws on cigarette advertising were relatively severe; namely, "confiscation of ad material as well as possible jail sentences of two to six months" (Tobacco Institute, 1971, p. 3).

Although then Prince Fahd, the powerful interior minister and future king, backed these measures in 1971, they had little impact on Saudis. As income from oil sales rose in the 1960s and 1970s, cigarette use increased – sometimes by as much as 70 percent annually (World Health Organization, 1979). Between 1973 and 1977 alone, the number of American cigarettes consumed grew nearly threefold. While in 1962 Saudi Arabia was the fifty-second-largest market for US tobacco exports in the world by (P. Lorillard Company, 1963), the Kingdom had become the fourth-largest by 1978 (Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service, 1979). A little over two decades later, Saudi Arabia was the third-largest export market for American cigarettes – behind Japan and Israel (Capehart, 2004). Among the many Saudis who became smokers during this era were some leading members of the royal family: Fahd (ironically given his long life) ("Fahd ibn Abdulaziz al-Saud died on August 1st, probably aged 81," 2005);<sup>1</sup> Prince Bandar, who was Saudi Ambassador to the United States from 1982 to 2005 (Lander, 2016); and Prince Abdullah, who was crown prince from 1982 until he succeeded Fahd as king in 2005 ("Saudi Arabia's crown prince: A man with a plan: A chain-smoking champion of the Arab world," 2002).

Naturally, Western tobacco corporations eagerly sought to understand a growing market that they had once written off as peripheral. As early as 1971, British American Tobacco petitioned, unsuccessfully, for the right to produce cigarettes in the Kingdom ("Minutes of the Committee of Directors, Benson & Hedges, held at Westminster House, London," 1971, p. 3). Certainly, rising



numbers of expatriates from societies where smoking was common contributed to the increase in sales. But the rising population of young people (most smokers pick up the habit in their teens) and lack of taxation contributed even more to that rise (Hertog, 2011).<sup>2</sup> The US Department of Health reported in 1972 that Saudi children as young as eight to ten were often seen smoking and that cigarettes were prominently displayed at the front of groceries and supermarkets (US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1972). Detailed Western tobacco company studies of the Saudi market also suggested that there were correlations between smoking among Saudis of both genders and rising incomes and between smoking and education (Rodnight, 1978). In particular, Saudi smokers preferred American brands, which they saw as symbols of both Western modernity and openness to the world beyond the Kingdom (Pace, 1971; Rodnight, 1978). Indeed, anyone who smoked was implicitly challenging the authority of religious beliefs.

The same studies found that Saudis preferred to smoke at work or on the street – two settings where the use of tobacco had been strictly forbidden in the past – and that the most pious individuals could be reached through innovative advertising. For instance, in 1979, the British tobacco company Benson & Hedges introduced a limited edition of 50 gold pendants decorated with diamonds, valued at £750 each, to commemorate the first day of the 15th century of the Hijra Muslim calendar. This was a clearly manipulative ploy, admitted in the company's own internal documents, intended to circumvent bans on cigarette marketing by choosing an event that is central to the Muslim faith. Marketed in both large hotel foyers and in leading pan-Arab newspapers with the assistance of a "leading government dignitary," over 100 applicants bid on the pendants, including the governor of Mecca, Prince Fawwaz bin Abdulaziz (Emmerson, 1979, p. 12). A company report concluded that the offer allowed Benson & Hedges to "reach parts of the [tobacco] market ... which are closed to it by any other means" (Emmerson, 1979, p. 12).

### **"There is no ... Islamic text from the Qur'an or the Sunnah ... in this regard"**

It would be tempting to characterize members of the Saudi royal family and pious Saudis who smoked as hypocrites, a word often used to describe Saudis and their relationship to the contemporary world. After all, while railing against the spread of Western culture in Saudi Arabia, the group of young men who briefly seized the Ka'aba in 1979 condemned Prince Fawwaz by name for his personal corruption. Echoing the words of As-Sa'di's *fatwā* and those of other Saudi jurists, the spokesman for the men, Sayid Abdullah al-Qahtani, called for a reformation of Saudi society. In particular, he argued that smoking, soccer, and other practices that had spread in the Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s should have no place in a Muslim country governed by an interpretation of Sunni Islam overwhelmingly defined by the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Trofimov, 2007).



Notably, after the Saudi military dislodged Al-Qahtani and his followers from the Ka'aba by force, Saudi officials dismissed Prince Fawwaz as governor of Mecca and provided religious figures who agreed with Al-Qahtani's strict vision of Islam with substantial resources and power to shape Saudi social norms. Not only had the religious elites backed the government's campaign to retake the Ka'aba in 1979, but government officials and the royal family also believed that the stricter vision of Islam would define Saudi Arabia's future. As an unnamed senior Saudi prince told the British journalist Robert Lacey in 1980, Saudi society was likely to resist the seemingly "inevitable" push of modernization and secularization (Lacey, 1981, p. 519). "If anything," he said, "I think that our children will be stricter Muslims than we are" (Lacey, 1981, p. 519).

Despite this cultural change, the number of cigarettes imported to Saudi Arabia continued to grow, increasing from 27 million kilograms in 1977 to 42 million kilograms in 1984 (Albar, 1994). This growth in smoking in part reflected innovative advertising, including PM partnering with videocassette distributors, a booming industry in a country without movie theaters, and an influx of foreign workers who smoked. But it also reflected the view of a new young generation of stricter Saudi Muslims who saw smoking cigarettes as fully *consistent* with a vision of Islam that privileged the Sunnah and the Qur'an over other sources of religious law. We have a rich source of their views and the central role of smoking in their daily lives in the *fatāwā* collected by Saudi Arabia's General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Fatawwa (sic). Because the organization was created by a Royal decree in 1971, its jurists have answered hundreds of inquiries related to *fiqh*, *hadith*, and other issues posed by senior officials and citizens alike (Al-Atawneh, 2010). One of the most common themes in the inquiries revolved around smoking or smokers.

While many Saudis sought guidance on how to interact with smokers (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.g)<sup>3</sup> or businesses that sell tobacco products, (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.e), many others seeking guidance did not accept that smoking was necessarily *haram*. Is it permissible, for instance, for Muslims to pray behind an imam who smokes (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.c) or to smoke a cigarette while reading the Qur'an (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.a)? Could a child disobey a parent's request to buy them cigarettes (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.b)? There are also repeated requests for clarification on Islam's position on smoking (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.j), with some stating that they have heard that it is permissible to smoke in Islam or that smoking exists in a legal gray area (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.f). The answer in all of these cases is the same from Saudi jurists: Smoking and anything linked to it is *haram*.

Nonetheless, Saudis continued to present questions about smoking that assumed that it was permitted to smoke at least in certain situations – just as

the *Zhirt* had done during Rihani's visits to the Kingdom decades earlier. One Saudi asked if it was permissible to smoke if one "found it hard to quit" or had learned it was *haram* only after he had become addicted to smoking (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.h, para. 1). Some questioners boldly stated that there was no record of the Prophet Muhammad banning smoking and asked whether there were verses in the Qur'an or *hadith* that addressed smoking (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.d). Among the statements made in this *fatwā* and other *fatāwā* were: "Although Islam permits smoking, what is your advice to those who smoke *Diamba* (marijuana) and consume intoxicants?" and "There is no evident Ayah (Qur'anic verse) or *hadith* in the Qur'an and Sunnah" that smoking is illegal. To their credit, religious scholars did not evade the issue and freely admitted that "there is no ... Islamic text from the Qur'an or the Sunnah" prohibiting Muslims from smoking (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.i, para. 2). Instead, they called on Muslims to look to statements on human health in the Qur'an and the *hadith* to understand why smoking was *haram*. They also cited other sources of Islamic law, including judicial decisions and the consensus of the Muslim community (The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', n.d.i).

In a society that values the literal word of the Qur'an and the *hadith* above other forms of religious revelation, this was a relatively weak argument, especially when compared to the Saudi bans on alcohol and pork, both of which are clearly prohibited in the Qur'an and by the Prophet himself. Saudis could also readily access *fatāwā* produced by leading Muslim jurists in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East since the 17th century which viewed smoking as consistent with Islamic laws and norms (Grehan, 2006). This was the type of legal gray space that Western tobacco executives understood and sought to use to their advantage. For instance, in a memo written after a 1984 trip to Saudi Arabia, A. Courtier, who worked for the European division of Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company, informed his colleagues of new and "serious" developments in the Kingdom; namely, public pressure against smoking and "Friday sermons being delivered in the mosques stating that smoking is 'Harem' [sic]" (Courtier, 1984, p. 5). Still, the sermons were, in Courtier's eyes, "only rhetoric," for it is obvious that smoking "is not as clearly 'Harem' [sic] as alcohol, pork, etc. and will not therefore be banned" (Courtier, 1984, p. 5).

While Courtier (1984) was correct that smoking was not banned, that did not mean that Friday sermons had no impact on the demand for cigarettes, especially when they worked in tandem with a variety of direct (and indirect) anti-smoking measures undertaken by the Saudi government. In 1982, then Crown Prince Abdullah hosted the Islamic Conference to Combat Intoxicants and Drugs (Batra, 2003). The conference, which brought together leading Islamic scholars from around the globe, "declared the cultivation of tobacco, its sale, and consumption strictly *haram*" (Batra, 2003, p. 34). Although no government implemented the conference's recommendations, the Saudi government continued to increase its cooperation with neighboring Arab



oil-producing states to combat tobacco sales, raised its own tariffs on imported tobacco products, and incorporated secular and religious anti-smoking messages into the country's national school curriculum (ERC Statistics International Limited, 1993; Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1985).

These messages were reinforced by the rise of anti-smoking measures in the United States and Western European societies in the 1980s and 1990s, in countries where Saudis vacationed and studied. By 1989, these policies had the intended impact; tobacco sales declined by 20 percent from 1986 throughout the Kingdom and the Gulf. In one year alone, consumption of cigarettes dropped from 17 million units (1988) to 15 million units (1989) (ERC Statistics International Limited, 1993). Abdul Aziz al-Baban, a cigarette agent, told *The Arab Times* in Kuwait that young people were a key factor in the decline: "The new generation is more aware of the hazards to health posed by smoking as compared to the earlier generation" ("Cigarette sales down twenty percent," 1989, para. 7). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's economy slowed considerably after the oil market collapsed in 1986 and again in 1988.

In response, PM and other Western tobacco companies commissioned a series of reports in the early 1990s to better understand the Saudi market. The most comprehensive were written in 1993 by a European research team based in Vienna: Denyse Drummond-Dunn and Claude-Alain Proz. They concluded that the overriding characteristic of Saudi ideals and society was dualism and the need to balance oppositional forces:

The first, and perhaps most important finding, is that within individuals there exists a polarity of attitudes. There are therefore ideals that are contradictory – behaviour that seems to cut across ideals, and apparent conflicts which, if found in a study of Western populations, would be difficult to reconcile. This is best interpreted as a dualism, and in this particular case, as a dualism between the secular and spiritual values in the culture.

(Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993, p. 9)

This seemingly "schizophrenic" vision of Saudi Arabia shaped everything in the Kingdom, including the young men who were a core market for Western tobacco companies. For them, the ideal of masculinity – a key theme for most tobacco advertising – had little in common with an American ideal of a rugged, self-sufficient individual living in the arid American West. Instead, Saudi men operated in an environment in which (a) their peers defined their personal worth and identity and (b) they had to uphold contradictory masculine personas: they were expected to be always ready for action while simultaneously being seen as both calm and spiritual (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993). Furthermore, in the eyes of Saudi men, smoking was not an activity that an individual did but was something that had to be done with family and friends – much like drinking coffee and tea, eating a meal, traveling to the

desert, or going to the beach (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993). Indeed, there was considerable social pressure for groups of ordinary Saudis "to smoke the same brand, so that if one person runs out, he can take from the others" (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993, p. 11).

Within this framework, Drummond-Dunn and Proz (1993) argued, the Marlboro Man, who embodied American masculinity, was an uneasy fit in the Kingdom and should be modified to appeal to local audiences. While many Saudis admired the image of a master horseman and saw the horse as a symbol of his power, they could not relate to many other defining aspects of the Marlboro Man, beginning with the persona of a cowboy living as a rugged individual in a desert setting. According to Saudis, this was a type of person who should be feared since he lacked social connections, and as desert dwellers they were unlikely to see dry climates as part of an escapist fantasy (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993). Nor did they understand why the cowboys in ads appeared poor, wore tattered clothing, and used second-rate lighters (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993). Consequently, the researchers recommended, future ads in Saudi Arabia should feature carefully chosen beautiful Arabian stallions and, above all, accentuate the relationships between them and their horsemen (Drummond-Dunn & Proz, 1993). By using this approach, Drummond-Dunn and Proz concluded, "some of the negatives concerning the lack of elegance can be overcome without turning the horseman into a 'Gucci cowboy'" (1993, p. 38).

Significantly, the argument of Drummond-Dunn and Proz (1993) bore no resemblance to Rentier theory – the academic model that dominated Western scholarship on the Kingdom in the 1990s. That theory stresses political economy and that oil is the defining factor in shaping Saudi society (Gray, 2011). By contrast, Drummond-Dunn and Proz (1993) drew on a source which no other scholar had ever used; namely, exhaustive interviews with hundreds of Saudis from all walks of life. For their part, PM executives recognized the value of this novel study and developed new strategies based on its recommendations. In 1993, the company's new creative guidelines for its ads in Saudi Arabia recognized a new broader (and softer) definition of masculinity (Marlboro Worldwide Creative Review Committee, 1993) and stipulated that all ads should feature more lush and green landscapes (Burnett, 1993) as well as "the power and beauty of horses" (Marlboro Worldwide Creative Review Committee, 1993, p. 4). In addition, senior PM executives decided that print ads in Saudi Arabia would stress "companionship," including companionship around food and coffee (Marlboro Worldwide Creative Review Committee, 1993, p. 3), and downplay the traditional "tough guy" Marlboro cowboy image (Philip Morris Tobacco, 1993).

It was a very wise decision as more than 40 percent of the Saudi population at the time was under the age of 15, a key target group for tobacco companies (Dymond, 1991). Many took up smoking, and consumption of cigarettes rose steadily in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and the 21st century. Between the early 1990s and 2010, the overall numbers of smokers increased and the percentage



of the male population that smoked rose from 21 percent to 35 percent (Al-Turki, 2014). In the first decade of the 21st century, Saudi Arabia ranked as the fifth-fastest-growing tobacco market in the world and the fourth-largest importer of tobacco in the world (Euromonitor, 2006). Further aiding the rise in cigarette consumption was the cheap price of cigarettes: \$2.70 for a pack of Marlboro in 2015 (Moradi-Lakeh et al., 2015) despite rising tariffs on imported cigarettes (Euromonitor, 2006). For instance, in 2005, Saudi Arabia and its neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council raised the tariff on tobacco by 150 percent (Euromonitor, 2006). Throughout the era, PM's share of the Saudi market continued to rise, from 48 percent in the middle of the 1990s to 63 percent by 1999 (Philip Morris Tobacco, 2000). The company continued to dominate the market into the 21st century, exporting 9.8 billion cigarettes to Saudi Arabia in 2004 alone (Philip Morris Tobacco, 2004).

Many members of Saudi society continued to smoke, including prominent members of the royal family. In 1996, Prince Feisal bin Bandar, then the governor of Qassim, surprised a group of visiting American university professors by smoking at a formal dinner at his palace (Anderson, 2015). He apologized for exposing his guests to the secondhand smoke but noted that he had tried to quit multiple times from a habit his people had picked up from the West as a sign of "civilization" (Anderson, 2015, p. 187). As everyone in the room laughed at his joke, the prince added, "But now no one in the West is smoking. ... I suppose by the time I quit smoking, the West will decide that nothing is wrong with it, so I think I'll continue smoking" (Anderson, 2015, p. 187).

Of course, the academics should not have been surprised that the prince (or anyone else) smoked in Saudi Arabia. The growth in smoking in Saudi Arabia represented the intersection of factors that had led to upsurges in smoking in the past. Between the late 1990s and early 2015, not only was there an increase in young people in the population (Murphy, 2012),<sup>4</sup> but there was also a sustained boom in oil prices and a concomitant era of prosperity similar to the one that had launched cigarettes in the Kingdom in the 1970s. Even health professionals smoked in large numbers (Al-Turki, 2006). In a study conducted in 2005, 13 percent of male students at the College of Medicine at King Saud University in Riyadh reported they were regular smokers and 38 percent reported they were passive smokers (Al-Turki, 2006). Equally important, King Abdullah, who, as noted earlier, was a chain-smoker, ascended to the throne in 2005. He oversaw a process of social liberalization and a reduction in the power that the religious elites had amassed since 1979. Both policies had broad popular support, in part because there was a consensus that religious elites had exceeded their authority. Ironically, one of the events that shaped that view – an infamous deadly fire at a girls' school in Mecca administered by clerics – was inadvertently started by a student who threw her still-lit cigarette into a pile of trash after she unexpectedly encountered a teacher in a school hallway (Weston, 2008).

As the peers of that young woman gravitated towards a new online culture in the second decade of the 21st century, PM adjusted its advertising to reach



its core audiences – just as it had done in the past. In the large malls of Riyadh and the other cities where Saudi young people regularly hung out on afternoons and weekends, one could find young salesmen offering Saudi teenagers cards with free credits and ways to win points on PM-sponsored video games designed to be played on the new generation of smartphones.

## **Conclusion**

But the innovative approaches and use of technology that PM pioneered could be used by others and could not protect the company and Western tobacco generally from the winds of change sweeping over the Kingdom and the Middle East. For instance, in January 2008, just as PM was in the process of launching a new brand in Saudi Arabia, Marlboro Filter Plus, an SMS text message campaign emerged against the brand and the company. The text message campaign alleged that the product was not safe, that someone had died from smoking the product, and that it was linked to Israel. After the launch of Marlboro Filter Plus failed and it did not meet its sales targets, PM conducted an investigation, with the aid of the US Embassy in Riyadh, to determine who was responsible for the text campaign. Remarkably, investigators concluded that the culprit was not a cleric or Islamic activist opposed to smoking, but one of PM's Western competitors, which had hoped to scuttle the launch of the new product and to gain a share of the Saudi market (personal communication, former official, US Embassy Riyadh, March 24, 2016).

Even more dangerous to PM's business model has been the shifting sands of the politics of the Middle East, especially the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. That new organization had considerable sympathy among Saudis on a host of levels – humanitarian, sectarian, and tribal. At least 2,500 Saudi citizens have reportedly gone to fight in Syria against the Syrian government (Williams, 2017). Following a deadly suicide bombing at a Shi'a mosque in Qatif in May 2015, it was clear that some Saudis were willing to kill their fellow citizens on their home soil for ISIS (Al-Shihri, 2015).

Critically, ISIS offers Saudis an opportunity to be part of a state community that has a substantial presence online, has proven itself on the battlefield repeatedly in Syria and Iraq, and upholds strict Islamic values without compromise. One should not discount the impact of the Islamic State's enforcement of public morality. While the Hai'a (religious police) can shape behavior in some public settings, and while Saudi religious leaders issue statements expressing their anger that "wrong matters" are allowed to exist in the Kingdom, the activists of ISIS have destroyed thousands of cigarettes and persecuted individuals found smoking (Mahmood, 2015; Malm, 2015). This type of state harkens back to the vision of the men who seized the Ka'aba in Mecca in 1979: an Arab-Muslim society that is not governed by the many factors that limit Salafi power in Saudi Arabia.

The policies of ISIS have impacted Iraq and Syria as well as other nations and organizations of the world. ISIS videos inspire fear of Arab Muslims in

America and Europe. In May 2015, Great Britain's Imperial Tobacco Corporation, the fourth-largest tobacco producer in the world, blamed ISIS for dramatic declines in tobacco consumption in ISIS-controlled territories in Syria and Iraq (Lewis, 2015). In the eyes of many conservative Saudis, the contrast between the regional and global roles of ISIS and Saudi Arabia – one of the world's largest importers of tobacco products – could not be clearer. Indeed, ISIS has been creating the very type of society that is assumed by much of the outside world to exist in Saudi Arabia.

For its part, the Saudi government has responded to this threat by participating in US-led military strikes on ISIS and by seeking to curb smoking within the Kingdom. Not only was smoking banned from most government offices and public places ("Saudi Arabia stubs out smoking," 2012), but government officials also sought to raise the price of cigarettes through new taxes and import fees ("Prices of cigarettes may go up by 30%," 2015). In March 2016, the government announced a doubling of the price of cigarettes throughout the Kingdom, and the price of a Marlboro cigarette pack immediately rose from 10 riyals to 15 riyals in some stores ("Tobacco off shelves amid price rise speculation," 2016).

Public reaction to anti-smoking measures in Saudi Arabia was mixed. Some Saudi health advocates even supported raising the price to 35 riyals, arguing it was essential to deal with the high costs of treating illnesses associated with smoking ("Price of a cigarette packet could go up to SR35," 2016). Others, however, reacted with anger at the new prices. The Twitter hashtag *"rafa'a\_si'r\_al-dukān\_b\_20\_riyāl"* (raising the price of smoking to 20 riyals) trended in the Kingdom for weeks during spring 2016. Among those venting their anger on social media were young professionals and women, who make up an increasing share of the smokers in the Kingdom: nearly 22 percent of the total. Reportedly 1.2 million Saudi women smoked in 2012 ("Cigarettes off shelves as tobacco prices double," 2016).

As the Kingdom seeks to end its dependence on oil exports and realize the social and economic goals outlined by Muhammad bin Salman in April 2016 in Vision 2030 (Al-Dakhil, 2016), it is likely that cigarettes will remain part of the social landscape for many decades to come. Not only have Saudis been smoking since before the discovery of oil in the Kingdom, but also thousands of Saudi citizens of both genders and all ages, political opinions, and classes continue to smoke. In January 2015, Prince Feisal bin Bandar, a chain-smoker, was even appointed governor of Riyadh, one of the country's most important government posts ("Saudi monarch issues royal orders," 2015). Ultimately, few issues better illustrate the dualism of Saudi society and the need for Saudis to balance oppositional forces than smoking.

ISIS links "purity" to incredible cruelty and to violence. It promises people heaven if they will blow themselves up in its cause. Its response to oppositional forces is not to accommodate or balance them but to annihilate them. As Prince Feisal bin Bandar suggested, albeit with a trace of irony, Saudi Arabia retains its respect for "civilization" and for the complexities that



civilization brings with it. In the actions of ISIS one can hear the infamous but fraudulent quotation from Hitler: "Yes, we are barbarians! It is an honourable title. We shall rejuvenate the world. This world is near its end" (Redles, 2005, p. 48).

## Notes

- 1 Fahd reportedly smoked two cigarettes at a time – one for each hand – and had a separate ashtray for each hand.
- 2 In *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Steffen Hertog cited a 1970 report by Ramon Knauerhase that stated that a tobacco tax "was impossible to enforce" in Saudi Arabia; today, Saudi Arabia is one of the few nations in the world that does not impose an excise tax on cigarettes imported to the country (Hertog, 2011, p. 77).
- 3 This is one of dozens of *fatāwā* that deal with this subject. For more, see The General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', Fatwas of the Permanent Committee, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at [http://alifta.com/default.aspx?langua\\_gename=en#1](http://alifta.com/default.aspx?langua_gename=en#1).
- 4 Between 1990 and 2012, Saudi Arabia's population grew from 16 million to 28 million. By 2012, approximately 37 percent of the Saudi population was under the age of 14. Those under age 25 accounted for around 51 percent of the population, and when those under 29 were included, young people amounted to two-thirds of the Kingdom's population (Murphy, 2012, p. 3).

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