

For 70 Years, the New York Times Has Heralded Saudi Leaders as “Reformers”

By [Washington's Blog](#)

Global Research, November 28, 2017

[Washington's Blog](#) 27 November 2017

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Intelligence](#)

Assistant Professor of History at Georgetown University Abdullah Al-Arian has written an epic tweetstorm showing that the “paper of record” has long pretended that the leaders of our [close “friends”](#) (cough ... radical head-choppers) the Saudis are on the verge of becoming “moderate”:

This piece from 1953 describes King Saud as “more progressive and international-minded than his autocratic father” pic.twitter.com/U8ZFLNX0Ko

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

This piece from 1957 doesn’t refer to Saudi Arabia specifically but it’s an epic headline nevertheless. pic.twitter.com/Gj6NB1DRtq

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1960: “King Saud has increasingly assumed the role of liberal champion of constitutional reform.” (The Saudi constitution was adopted by royal decree in 1992). pic.twitter.com/3kwGcgnpDd

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1962: “The Oil Genie and the Sheikh” offers a tour of Gulf palaces that marvels at their “gilded furniture of impressive ugliness.” pic.twitter.com/EcFqhUpayE

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

The rest of the article (not included here) provides descriptions from several other Gulf states. Here is part of the photo spread from Oman and Bahrain with the caption ““heaven on earth”—air conditioned palaces, Cadillacs, girls” pic.twitter.com/j6p7LiMmZt

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 25, 2017](#)

During the so-called “Arab Cold War” Saudi royals were supported as a bulwark against Nasserism. This 1963 piece celebrates Crown Prince Faisal’s “burst of social reform and economic development.” pic.twitter.com/OR6g73Zveh

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

“With his older brother no longer looking over his shoulder...”
pic.twitter.com/8KIT0vPYiP

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1964: “He is a man who has gained nearly absolute power without really wanting it.” pic.twitter.com/QYzWOKyzpE

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Here Faisal is described as “ascetic, with only one wife, who lives on grilled meat and boiled vegetables and makes a fetish of moderation.”
pic.twitter.com/SSQV0s822i

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

This 1975 obituary: “Faisal, Rich and Powerful, Led Saudis Into 20th Century”
pic.twitter.com/2YZm2O3M3A

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Faisal’s successor, King Khalid, was a “moderating force”
pic.twitter.com/MxmpR9vaAe

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

A couple of more headlines from 1975, including one on “planting the seeds of a parliamentary system in the kingdom.” pic.twitter.com/TlwWu1vLYv

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

An epic lede here from 1979: "His black Trans-Am sports car creeps along the Corniche Road on the edge of the Red Sea. To the left, skyscrapers jab into the humid air, a sight made more impressive by the desolation surrounding the ancient city of Jidda." ? pic.twitter.com/0ljqekE2YN

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1982: "King Fahd has been depicted as the leading figure in a progressive, modernizing faction within the tradition-minded monarchy." pic.twitter.com/IPPFWrW0QA

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1991-92: "major political changes," "modernizers," "governmental reform," "and other political reforms" pic.twitter.com/0gRSPLSkjm

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1992: "In making the changes, King Fahd is following previous generations of Saudi rulers who had also moved toward modernization since King Abdelaziz united a vast territory populated by feuding tribal leaders into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 60 years ago." pic.twitter.com/3NXCn6oo54

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

1996: Friedman makes his first appearance, describing King Fahd as a "bulldozer" in tackling political problems on behalf of his US ally. pic.twitter.com/DoYcoyVxrE

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

2000: "Saudi Heir Urges Reform, and Turn From US" pic.twitter.com/9iFEJ963MH

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

2002: Friedman opines about the "2 futures" for Saudi Arabia, concluding "Which school would I bet on? Ask me in five years." pic.twitter.com/msVsLawvKI

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Luckily, we wouldn't have to wait that long. On eve of Iraq invasion Friedman makes the case that war "could drive reform in the Arab/Muslim world" pic.twitter.com/ML6lfkE4uo

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

2005: "For Abdullah, who has fashioned himself as a reformer in a land where conforming to tradition is a virtue, the challenge now is to make good on longstanding promises for change." pic.twitter.com/NlZWDWRphp

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

? pic.twitter.com/6f9Vtz6j5a

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

"Saudi King Tries to Grow Modern Ideas in Desert" ? pic.twitter.com/hEsHoH3jMp

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

2009: A cabinet reshuffle can sometimes be reform. pic.twitter.com/nOO7DCUARY

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

This editorial welcomes the reshuffle. pic.twitter.com/Z6Z0eUYIDx

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

"More generally, the reform agenda has drawn momentum from King Abdullah's personal popularity..." pic.twitter.com/Q0LrjTUPtm

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

"Yet by the Saudi's premodern standards, the 85 year-old King Abdullah, with a harem of wives, is a social revolutionary." pic.twitter.com/zQ2tAj1p9L

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Saudi society is divided, but the monarch's sympathies lie with the reformers. pic.twitter.com/x1siP4RnL6

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

From 2012: "King Faisal, in a rush to modernize his realm, created Saudi state television in the 1960s, and that bold step is widely believed to have led to his assassination" pic.twitter.com/ZZgrTLXi1y

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Twitter gets a shout! pic.twitter.com/lfoH8gkZaS

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Reporting from the front lines of the Arab uprisings in Dubai, Friedman calls Saudi King Abdullah "a real progressive" pic.twitter.com/Qf6bWuJUv6

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

King Abdullah's 2015 obituary describes him as "...a cautious reformer amid great changes in the Middle East." pic.twitter.com/urrdKRvkbk

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

Saudi Arabia's economic revolution offers "tantalizing hints at even broader reforms." ? pic.twitter.com/lJEKbhrHcD

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

From earlier this month, this Friedman piece includes such gems as "he is much more McKinsey than Wahhabi — much more a numbers cruncher than a Quran thumper." pic.twitter.com/g6pkppqmQi

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

And finally, the one that inspired it all, a hagiographic ode to royal reform that represents seven decades of strategic policy objectives barely concealed beneath recycled cultural tropes. pic.twitter.com/DQHeftCxnz

— Abdullah Al-Arian (@anhistorian) [November 24, 2017](#)

The original source of this article is [Washington's Blog](#)
Copyright © [Washington's Blog](#), [Washington's Blog](#), 2017

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Washington's Blog](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca