

Is MBS's Westernization Drive a Catalyst for Modernity or Vassal State?

News:

The recent appointment of a minister for culture comes hot on the heels of MBS's determination to modernize the Saudi state. This raises the awkward question as to what Saudi Arabia will look like at the end of this modernization process.

Comment:

As part of the new modernization drive to realise the country's 2030 Vision, the Saudi government is eager to promote fashion shows, concerts, wrestling matches, and to encourage free mixing between men and women. Nevertheless, does the government really think that by providing different forms entertainment and opening up the country to greater tourism, Saudi Arabia will resemble a modern state?

According the modernization theorists, the key differentiating factor between a traditional society and a modern one is industrializations and advanced technology. On both accounts, Saudi Arabia is woefully behind the industrialized world despite possessing one of the world's largest oil reserves. After 86 years of independence from Britain, Saudi Arabia remains a backwater state—a largesse bequeath by the Saudi monarchy.

No matter how hard Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and his acolytes try to Westernize Saudis, the country is very far from modernization. However, one may argue that Neon City—the \$500 billion project to build the next Dubai in Saudi Arabia—is an effort to obtain advanced technologies. This is true, but it is only an effort, which is largely dependent upon the goodwill of Western multinationals. There is no indication that these companies will sell their technology secrets to spur Saudi Arabia's modernization. After all, Dubai tried a similar venture with Dubai Silicon Oasis (DSO) and ended up with yet another unwanted real estate project.

The West is the major reason why such endeavors fail to transform traditional societies into an oasis of modernity. The West jealously guards its industrial practices, advanced technologies and intellectual patents, and this enables it to colonize the rest of the world and spread its hegemony. Hence, the simpleton MBS is wrong to think that modernization can be bought.

Dependency theorists have long pointed out the shortcomings of the modernization process and demonstrated how industrialization and advanced technologies are exploited by the West countries to make traditional societies forever dependent on the West. In this respect, what is unfolding in Saudi Arabia is not modernization but subjugation of the entire country to Americanization—another vassal state in Pax Americana's treasury.

Had the rulers of Saudi Arabia embraced Islam as an ideology, they could have easily avoided this trap. Islam mandates self-sufficiency in all its forms i.e. in economics, politics, social, educational and technical spheres. At the heart of self-sufficiency drive is to use the Islamic ideology as a platform for revival and expansion. This means indigenous industrialization practices supplementing a war economy will inevitably produce breakthrough technologies that will cement the Muslim world's pre-eminence over the world. For several centuries, the Islamic state used the above formula to maintain the ascendancy of Islam in world affairs.

The present path traversed by MBS and his courtiers of advisors will only lead to humiliation, loss of wealth, and bankruptcy. Allah (swt) says: **﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى﴾** **“And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind.”** [TMQ: Taha: 123]

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