

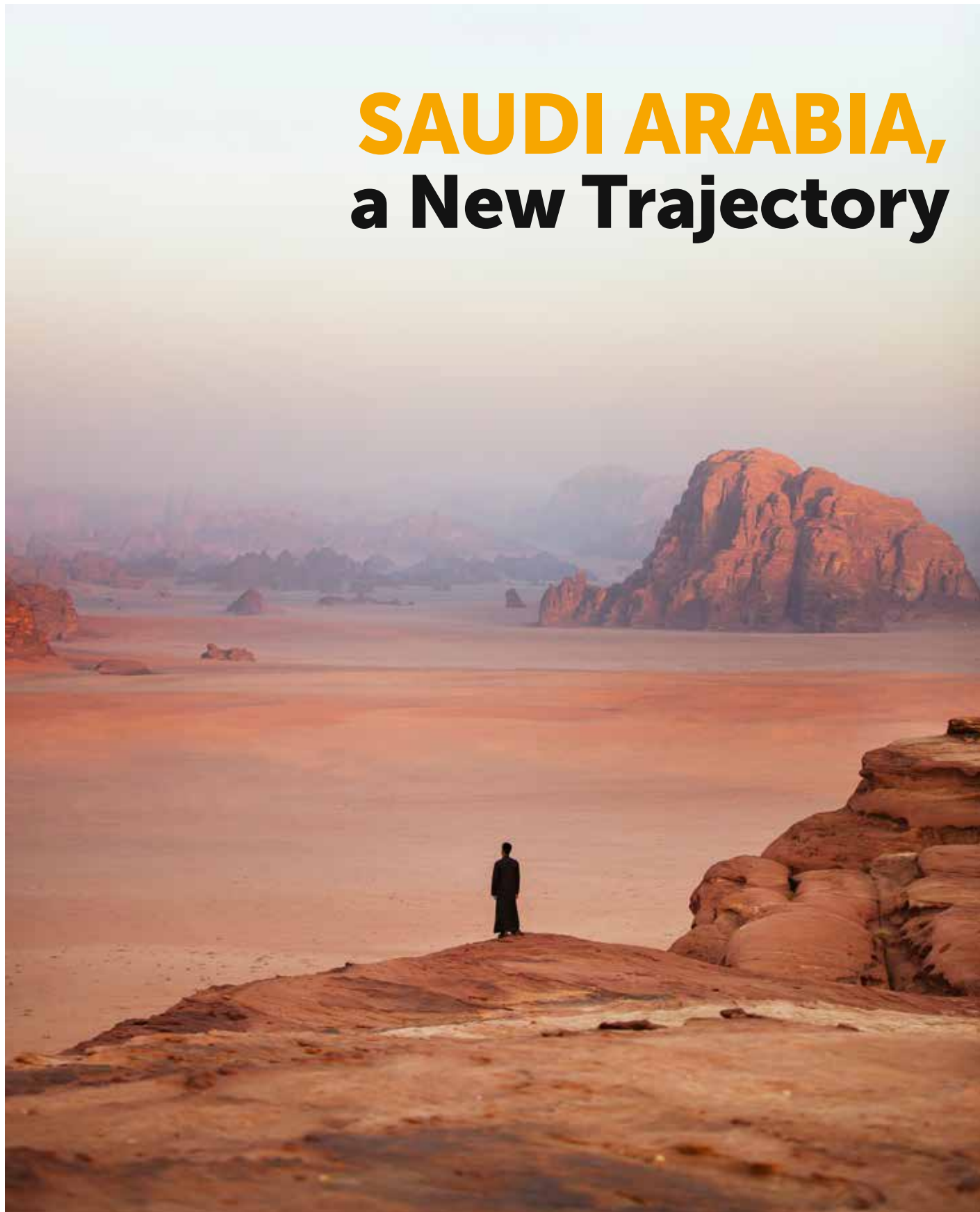
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SAUDI ARABIA, a New Trajectory



RIYADH
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
EXPO 2030

THE ERA OF CHANGE :
TOGETHER FOR A FORESIGHTED TOMORROW



Saudi Arabia, a New Trajectory

Saudi Arabia is in a paradoxical position on the international stage, as it is both an attractive country in terms of its economic and cultural wealth, albeit little-known, and a country that arouses revulsion because of its shady and opaque areas. In the 18th century, a partnership between two great families, Abd al-Wahhab and al Saud, enabled the population to be subjected to the puritanical Islam claimed by the preacher in exchange for recognition of the Emir al Saud as the political leader of the Muslim world.⁽¹⁾ This alliance led Saudi Arabia to spread Wahhabism (a rigorous version of Sunni Islam) throughout the Muslim world. Today, the rigors of Wahhabism have been tempered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), who advocates a moderate Islam that is more tolerant of religious diversity. He has softened the constraints imposed by the religious police by granting greater freedom to women in the workplace.

The young prince's ambition is to make Saudi Arabia «a sporting power», hosting international events. He is taking inspiration from Dubai, his neighboring rival, which has successfully prepared for the post-oil era. In other words, sport is being used as the main tool in the Kingdom's soft power

strategy, as it seeks to project a positive image by mobilizing its young people (over 65% of the population) to be at the avant-garde of this transformation. To reach this goal, MBS has drawn up a «Vision 2030» strategy that targets the key sectors for the country's modernization. Sport is a priority, as it is expected to supplant «black gold» in the years to come. The country has invested billions of dollars in all types of sport - football, horse-riding, boxing, Formula 1 - and recruited the best teams in the world. In 2034, the country will host the Football World Cup, which will give it greater visibility on the international stage, while its leaders hope that this will help to mitigate criticism. In other words, Saudi Arabia is playing on a number of factors: its economic emergence and its desire to make its presence felt on the international sporting scene, to make itself a force to be reckoned with in this sector.

In addition to sport, the new Arabia is focusing on leisure and tourism to diversify its economy and prepare for the post-oil era. It is looking to reconnect with its history by developing historic sites on the Red Sea. Gigantic projects are under construction, such as Neom, a futuristic megalopolis in the north-west of the country. This region, a mixture of coastline and mountains, is due to host the Asian Winter Games in 2029.⁽²⁾ This site retraces the history of pre-Islamic Arabia and aims to attract tourists interested in discovering the past and exploring. MBS hopes to get the country back on track by

mobilizing its young people and offering them jobs. For a long time, the Saudis were used to living off oil revenues because the welfare state distributed them to its population, which reduced their ability to take the lead in moving the country forward. If MBS succeeds in mobilizing the youth and putting them to work, then he will have succeeded in creating a new course.

This demonstration shows that a new wind is blowing across Saudi Arabia. While no one knows where it will lead, there is no doubt that Saudi Arabia has set itself a new trajectory that will lead to its emergence as a regional leader. The awarding of the 2030 World Expo to Saudi Arabia marks a consecration of MBS's efforts - which gives him greater credibility to carry out his «2030 vision».

Ibn Khaldoun observed: «*If a dynasty does not reform itself after three generations, it risks withering away*».⁽³⁾ Mohammed ben Salman has heeded the philosopher's warning and is committed to leading the country towards its renaissance. ☉

Douraya ASGARALY

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¹ Saudi Arabia in 100 questions - FatihDazi-Héni - éditions Tallandier - 2017

² World Economic Review - 2023

³ Ibn Khaldoun (1332 - 1466) Philosopher and historian - Prolegomena.

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