

**The liberal and radical protests in
mid-90s Saudi Arabia politics**

*A case-study toward the construction of
Quantitative Social Movement*

TR 4

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## I. Structure of opportunity\*\*

Saudi Arabia ruling family allowed US-led troops to use Saudi territory for logistic purposes, related to the performance of military operations arising from Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait (August 1990)<sup>1</sup>. Though it also seems to be evident an interest, on the part of US and other oil-dependent Western countries, in controlling and guaranteeing the security of oil furniture.

Such permission has been made possible by a ruling of senior Saudi religious establishment<sup>2</sup>, which deemed it not to be contrary to Islamic Law.

The ruling has instead been considered unlawful, under an Islamic legal point of view, by other younger scholars, which believed that Saudi Holy territory would then be opened to Western cultural and military influences. This might lead to the corruption of Islamic Law and Muslim people: for this reason some challengers argued that Saudi royal family could have behaved contrary to

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\*\* The methodological set of inquiry refers to *Social Movement Theory (SMT)*, as applied to the case in question by R. Mejer, *The cycle of contention and the limits of terrorism in Saudi Arabia*, in P. Aarts & G. Nonneman (edit.) *Saudi Arabia in the Balance. Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, 2005, Hurst, London, 271-311. For a more general implementation of SMT to Islamic resurgence, see R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islamic Revival: Catalysts, Categories and Consequences*, in S. Hunter (edit.), *The Politics of Islamic Revival*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, 3-19.

<sup>1</sup> In this sense, see J. Titelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia’s Islamic Opposition*, Washington DC, The Institute for Near East Policy, 2000, 31.

<sup>2</sup> The ruling, translated in English version, is reported in *Ulema Council Supports Actions of King Fahd* FBIS-DR-90-157, August 14, 1990, 26; the original Arabic is in ‘*Ukaz*, August 14, 1990.

*shari'a*<sup>3</sup>, and this would entitle any individual to resist against the exercise of power by Saudi public Authorities.

In September 1990 al-Hawali first<sup>4</sup>, and then Al-'Awda spoke against the request from Saudi government to invite non-Muslims troops to defend the country.

On November 6, 1990 there was a women driving-in protest. While women were not allowed to drive cars in Riyadh, despite some of them having car driving licenses received abroad, many of them publicly protested. This was seen by conservative Islamic scholars as the sign of direct influence of the presence of US female soldiers, going to corrupt the rules Islamic law and tradition<sup>5</sup>.

The government cracked down on the women drivers<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, after state repressive reaction against *Letter of Advice*, some scholars put the claim forward, accusing the Saudi establishment not just to behave *immorally*<sup>7</sup>, but even more harshly to be *unbelief*, thus charging the rulers of the most severe among Islamic Law crimes.

## II. Institutionalised organisation to support the claiming movement

It emerges that a proper *organisation* to institutionalise the claim against Saudi royal family has not been put into place at the earliest stages of the cycle. It is instead a common feature of any liberal movement a sort of difficulty in organising its claims<sup>8</sup>, so that it should not surprise that the liberal segment of our contentious cycle was not organisationally well built and shows the mere common willingness of an elite incapable of affecting seriously the policies of their state.

In effect, at the time of liberal *Petition* (1990), there seems to have been just a gathering of some tenths of liberal intellectuals (dominated by a mere *idem sentire de republica*<sup>9</sup>), with no manifest sign of all the distinguishing components which characterise an organised claiming association<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The case is explained in MIRA, *History of Dissent*, chapter 3, *The Gulf Crisis and the Islamic Revival*, online at <http://www.miraserve.com/chap3.html>.

<sup>4</sup> For a description of these statements, see S. bin 'Abd Al-Rahman, *Kissinger's Promise: American Goals in the Gulf*, Dallas, n.d., 158 and M. Fandy, *Safar Al-Hawali: Saudi Islamist or Saudi Nationalist?*, Islam and Christian-Muslims Relations, 9 (March 1998), 5-21.

<sup>5</sup> If the Islamic Law in itself does not provide for any specific principle prohibiting female car driving, this ban has been grounded, by some commentators, on policy reasons. Should women be granted such independence and freedom of circulation, the same foundation of Islamic society might be threatened. Freedom of circulation implies social relationships and contacts, which might lead to women choosing on their own their partners, which in turns would implicate the ending of tribal control over the fundamental cells of Islamic society. See M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York, 49 f.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia etc.*, op. cit., loc. Cit.

<sup>7</sup> As it has been in the case of the *Letter of Demands*, as referred by D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom and the Momentum of Reform*, London, Hurst, 219-229, M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York, 47 ff. and the International Crisis Group, *Saudi Arabia Background: Who are the Islamists?*, Amman/Riyadh/Brussels, ICG, *Middle East Report*, n. 31, 21 September 2004.

<sup>8</sup> In the US there has never been a liberal movement such as in Europe, and indeed at present the liberal movement is composed of few authors, mainly economists. In this sense F. A. von Hayek, *Liberalismo*, Enciclopedia Treccani del '900, 1978, paragraph 1.

<sup>9</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, *The Rise of Political Islam in Saudi Arabia*, Middle East Journal 48 (autumn 1994), 635-638, observed a relative homogeneity within the signatories of the platform documents in the radical segment of the claim framing. This could *a fortiori* turn out to be true for the first liberal segment of the cycle in object.

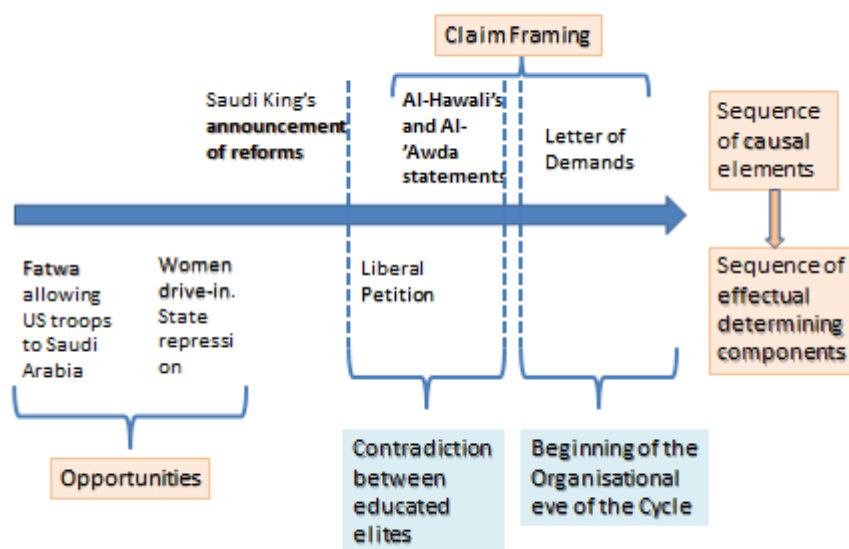
<sup>10</sup> J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 180 considers the *Letter of Demand* as the "*first organized attempt ... to increase the power of religious figures*".

The *Petition* followed<sup>11</sup> the Saudi King's *announcement* about plans of initiating political reforms (early November 1990). It was perhaps such announcement the efficient causal factor lying behind the rise of the Islamic segment of the first phase of our contentious cycle. Instead, the *Petition* and the *Women drive-in* were added as arguments to veil the substantial objective of the radical platform, indeed giving to it a tremendous potential mobilising capacity. It seems that the refusal of social reforms be the causal element of the chain, while contradictions to liberal thesis and to decadent unmoral events were the catalysts of its effectual impact (i.e. the mobilising capacity of the claim).

It might be argued that the shift towards the second segment (radical) of the non-violent phase of the contentious Cycle at stake showed the emergence of forms of organised challenging forms of movement.

The following Slides n. 1 illustrates a possible orderly sequence of the major events determining the rise of the contentious cycle in mid-90s Saudi Arabia politics.

## Linkages behind the 1st phase of the Cycle



## II.1 First segment: Liberal Platform (1990)

More than forty intellectuals and businessmen of *liberal* inspiration wrote a peaceful *Petition* calling for greater democratic openness. Under an organisational point of view, these liberals seem to have formed no more than a *group*<sup>12</sup>, rather than a proper *association*.

The liberal platform basically consisted of ten intended points of reform<sup>13</sup>:

- Openness in the religious ruling procedures;
- Basic law of government;

<sup>11</sup> J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 176, talks of "*immediate impetus*" for the *Petition*.

<sup>12</sup> The word "*group*" is used by J. Titelbaum, op. cit., loc. Cit.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Titelbaum, op. cit., loc. Cit. and M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia etc.*, cit., 50.

- Electoral system for municipal authorities;
- Setting up of a non-elected consultative council;
- Modernization of the judiciary;
- Equality of rights;
- Free media;
- Reform of religious police;
- Greater public role for women in society;
- Educational reform.

## II.2 Second segment: radical Islamic platform

The issue of the above liberal platform alarmed some of the exponents of radical Islamic religious establishment<sup>14</sup>. It has been argued in this paper that the major *impetus* for the beginning of the radical segment of this cycle phase might possibly be identified with the King's announcement for reforms: such announcement gained credibility and potential threatening capacity to the opponents, being combined with the opportunity structure (US troops in the Saudi territory) and the germs of an internal elitarian conglomeration of consensus (*Petition*).

### II.2.a Letter of Demands (May 1991)

The main points of this document consisted of<sup>15</sup>:

- Institution of consultative council independent of any governmental influence;
- Abrogation of laws contrasting against *shari'a*;
- Morality on the part of public functionaries;
- More economic distributive justice;
- Ban on banking usury;
- A strong national army devoted to the defence of Muslims' causes;

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<sup>14</sup> The causal link between the petition and the women drive-in, on the one hand, and the *Letter of Advice*, on the other, is expressed in J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 180. This would imply that the two platforms were not only separate and distinguished, but even in apparent contradiction and causally linked. One might argue that the second religious platform overwhelmed the first one because the structure of opportunity at that moment gave more *incentives* for its expansion than those arising from the liberal platform. Or even that the *information* flows deriving from the *Petition* were not adequate to the objective, while the *Letter* and the following documents could trigger more informational *impetus* within the stakeholders' circle. In such a context, one might even think that the radical segment was causally determined more by the reaction to reform plans issued by the ruling family, than by other (facilitating) factors.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Titelbaum, op. cit., loc. Cit.

- News media orientated towards the conservation of customs complying with religious precepts;
- Foreign policy framed to champion national interest and Islamic causes;
- Strengthening of Islamic institutions;
- Independent and unified judiciary;
- Rights of individuals to be protected, conditionally upon their conformity with religious imperatives.

### II.2.b Letter of Clarification

It was written by the signatories of the *Letter of Demands* in order to clarify some procedural aspects, which seemed to be relevant as to reinstate the conformity in relation with Islamic rules about the advising-making power of qualified individuals<sup>16</sup>. The main point was that the first *Letter* was not deliberately published, and that it had merely unintentionally leaked to the press; it was in its authors' willingness that of having it privately sent to the King, through previous amendment and eventual endorsement by the Saudi religious leader<sup>17</sup>. The point is legally important, as the repressive state reaction<sup>18</sup> was based on the argument that the *Letter* should not have been made public, because Islamic law does not allow such kind of public protest against the authorities, but only private confidential counsel to the political rulers<sup>19</sup>.

### II.2.c Tapes and Cassettes circulation

The two same *Awakening Sheiks*, quoted in previous paragraph I, step forward their action<sup>20</sup>. They were contrasted by religious top establishment in Saudi, influenced by government request in this direction. It then might be possibly argued that the birth of an organisational element within our contentious cycle was the result of a complex series of dialectical interactions among several *species* of challengers and stakeholders, contrasting state reformist policies. One could think that the increase of tension was put into effect as soon as the convergence between the top religious establishments moved from state authorities towards the challenging radicals *Awakening Sheiks'* action. This moment could have led to the institutionalisation of the conflict, as the potential mobilising ca-

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<sup>16</sup> For further details and references about such advice-making power, see J. Titelbaum, op. cit., loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup> I.e. Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, as indicated by M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia* cit., 51.

<sup>18</sup> For more details about such reaction, look at M. al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, 175.

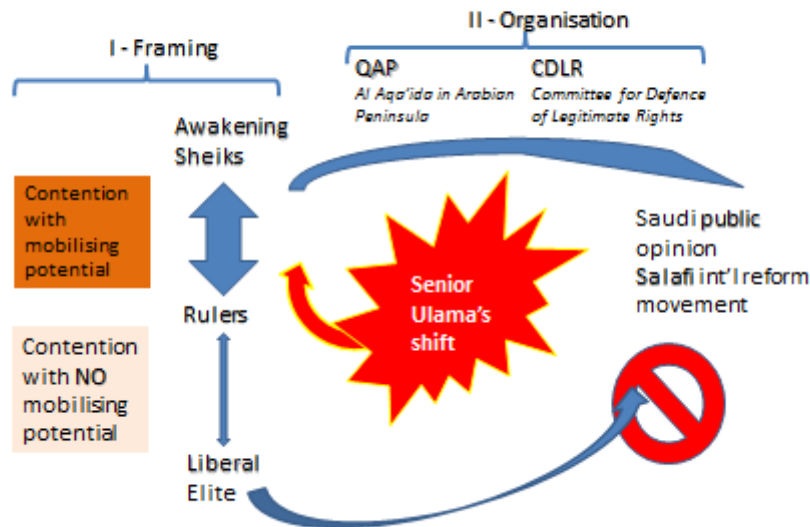
<sup>19</sup> This is the tradition of *nasihah*, described in J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 180 and grounded upon the doctrine of the jurist Ibn Taymiyya, as analysed by M. J. Crawford, *Civil war, Foreign Intervention, and the Question of Legitimacy: A Nineteenth Century Sa'udi Qadi's Dilemma*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982), 227-248.

<sup>20</sup> For further references on the issue, see J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 182 ff.

capacity of the radical religious claim became able to be fully conveyed towards its stakeholder's basis<sup>21</sup>.

This is what is meant to be depicted in next Slide n. 2.

## Interactions behind platform shaping



### II.2.d Memorandum of Exhortation (Summer 1992)

It strengthened previous statements with harsher tones, explicitly in contrast with government position<sup>22</sup>.

### II.2.e Council of Senior 'Ulama's condemnation (September 1992) and new appointments of several components

It seems that the religious senior authorities were no more determined and unanimous in contrasting the radical platform<sup>23</sup>. Many of them were substituted by the state after having not condemned the *Memorandum*.

This moment might prove to be the determining instant for the detonation of the *cycle* into a framed and organised *contention*. It was only when top religious authorities interrupted endorsing state repressive reaction that the claim has become able to move from *frame* to *organisation*.

<sup>21</sup> It might be argued that the characterisation of Hawali's thought as *Nationalism* rather than *Islamism* (see M. Fandy, *Safar Al-Hawali* etc., cit., loc. cit.), could be converted, within the logics of this paper, linking *nationalistic* appeal to *mobilising capacity* directed at Saudi public audience.

<sup>22</sup> See J. Titelbaum, op. cit., loc. cit. and M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia* etc., cit., loc. Cit.

<sup>23</sup> Look at J. Titelbaum, op. cit., 184 f.

# III. Conclusions: towards *Quantitative Social Movement Theory*?

The *Social Movement Theory (SMT)*<sup>24</sup> has been applied to Saudi Arabia contentious political cycle, in some recent articles<sup>25</sup>. It seems to be possible to depict the basics of such methods with the following five *slides*.

## Outline

- **Method:** Social Movement Theory (SMT)
- **Subject:** Al Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula (QPA)
- **Key concepts:**
  - Collective Action
  - Cycle of Contention
  - Repertoire: spec. Violence
  - Structure of opportunities

Conclusions

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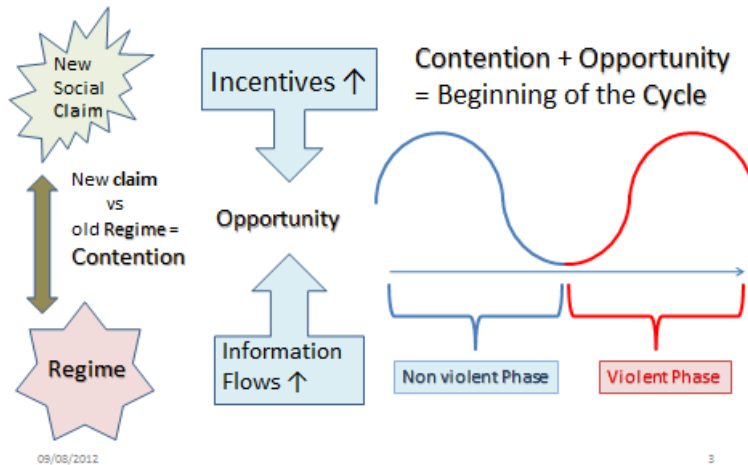
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<sup>24</sup> S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2° edn. ; D. Della Porta and M. Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 188-90.

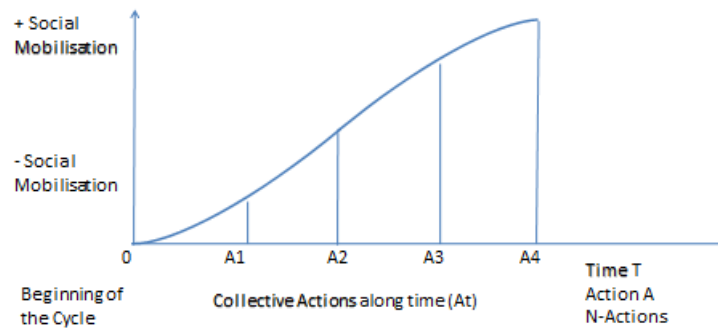
<sup>25</sup> R. Meijer, *The "Cycle of Contention" and the Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia*, in P. Aarts & G. Nonneman (edit.) *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, 271-311, 2005, Hurst & Company, London.



## SMT: representation of basic concepts



## The Cycle [1]: collective action

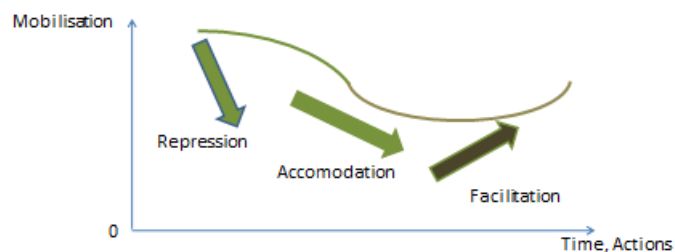


The first Action is Framing: building Identity and Meaning. It defines the scope of the claim on the basis of the social problem at stake

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## The Cycle: state reaction [2]

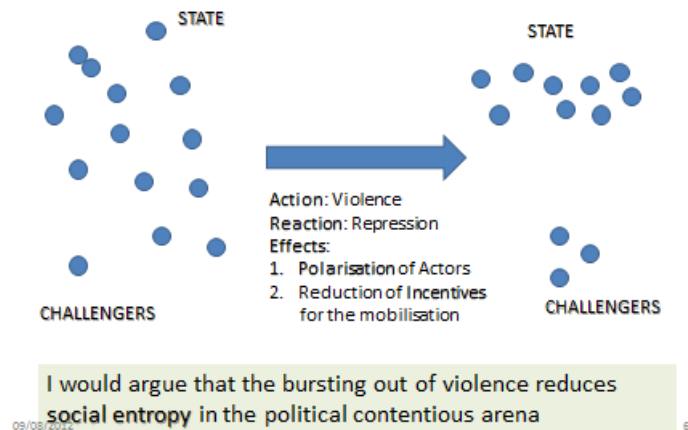


I will represent the pattern of actions and reactions as **vectors**, determining the **slope /trend** of the Cycle

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## Repertoire: Violence



What might appear to be a further step in order to develop this method could be the deployment of quantitative factors to determine the exact mathematical function for the curves describing contentious political cycles. The numbers upon which to build those curves in quantitative terms might be derived from the number of attacks, of arrests, of injured people, of material damages etc. This mathematical tool, once implemented, might prove to be crucial in order to allow a comparative analysis of the different contentious cycles in the most various historical contexts, giving rise to comparative objective analysis of different challenges and reactions. This, in the end, might be useful in practical terms for the rulers and for those involved in the governance of a political system, or even to try and predict the course of events in a certain phase/segment of the cyclical contentious conjuncture.

In qualitative terms, some hints are illustrated below in the next five slides, taking into account a recent analysis of SMT, applied to Saudi Arabia mid '90s political arena<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> See R. Meijer, op. ult. cit., passim.

## Factors determining QAP cycle

- **General:** violence mostly favorise the regimes.
  - **Exceptions:** collapsed state; ethnical, national contentions.
- **Specific:**
  - QAP's members:
    - Pros: various localisation; various kind and level of education; various careers.
    - Cons: young age; early recruitment; jihad's experiences.
  - QAP's **organisation** (see next slide)
  - QAP's **tactics:** operational errors in some of QPA's attacks

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## QAP's "fellows"

**Matlubins** (tr.: *Wanted persons*): hardcore members

- Shari'a Committes **Theoreticians:** highly educated
- **Intellectuals** integrated in society (new local radical Salafi intellectuals)
- Foot soldiers (Arab Afghans)

**Sympathisers** (organ: Sawt al-Jihad)

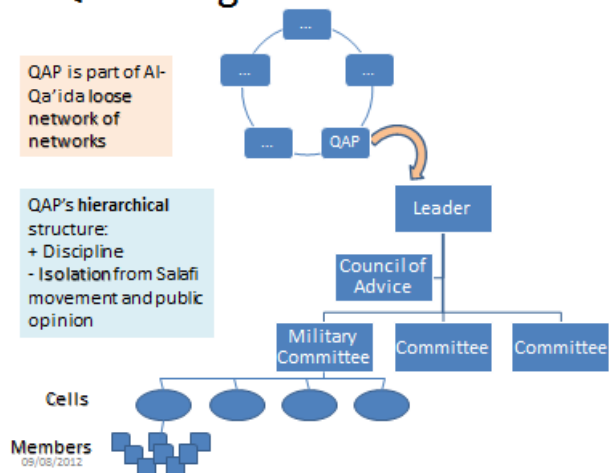
Potential supporters: reformists (non-violent phase)

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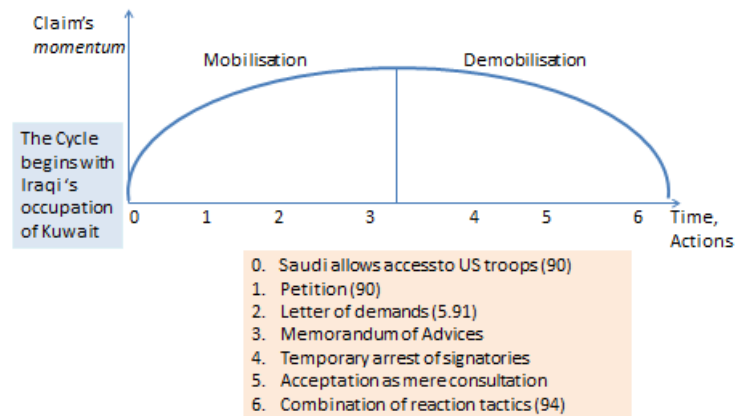
## QAP's Organisational Framework



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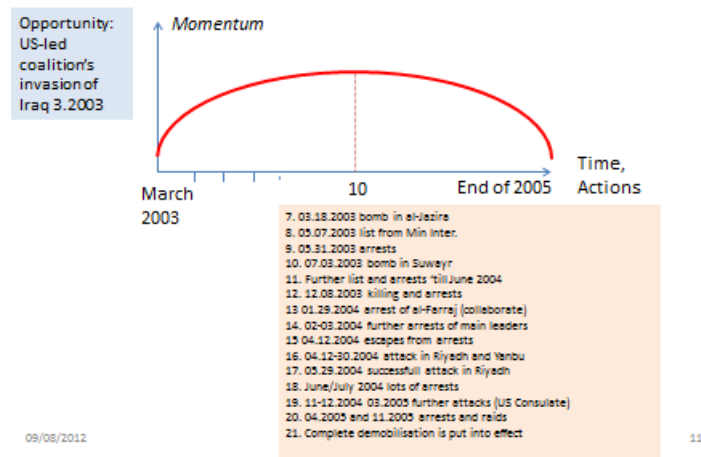
## Saudi QAP's Cycle: non-violent Phase



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## Saudi QAP's Cycle. **Violent** Phase



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The eventual prejudicial fears against the implementation of mathematical tools for applied social sciences might be overcome once considering that mathematics does already dominate the economic analysis (indeed Economics is a social science), and quite recently a new approach<sup>27</sup> (yet,

<sup>27</sup> M. Ferrara e A.R. Gaglioti, *Law as a System of Proportions and Symmetries* (paper accepted on 27.04.2012 for the Proceedings of 13th International Conference on Mathematics and Computers in Business and Economics (MCBE '12), World Scientific Engineering Academy and Society ([www.wseas.org](http://www.wseas.org)), 24-25 June, 2012 Enescu Academy in Iasi, Romania— ID paper 67906-010; M. Ferrara e A.R. Gaglioti, *Legal Rules and Principles as informational Vectors in legal Time and Space*, (article accepted on 28.03.2012 – ID paper JCC-E20120305-1) Journal of Communication and Computer, David Publishing; M. Ferrara e A.R. Gaglioti, *Legal Values and legal Entropy: a suggested mathematical Model*, (article accepted on 20.03.2012 ID: 16\_110 ; <http://www.naun.org/wseas/cms.action?id=2821> ) International Journal of Mathematical Models and Methods in Applied Sciences; M. Ferrara e A.R. Gaglioti, *A Mathematical Model for the Quantitative Analysis of Law. Putting Legal Values into Numbers*, Proceedings of the American Conference on Applied Mathematics (American-Math '12), WSEAS, Harvard, Cambridge, USA, 25-27.01.2012, pp. 201-206 (ISBN: 978-1-61804-064-0); A.R. Gaglioti, *Un modello matematico per l'analisi quantitativa del diritto* (pp. 73), Città del Sole, Collana

indeed, to be validated by scientific community) has been proposing a mathematical model for the quantitative analysis of law.

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Matematica e Diritto, Reggio Calabria, 2011 – ISBN 978-88-7351-432-9; A.R. Gaglioti, *La Lesione della Privacy mediante E-commerce. Per un Modello Assiologico in Chiave Economica dell'Ingiustizia del Danno* (pp. 256), Aracne, Roma, 2004 – ISBN 88-7999-784-X; A.R. Gaglioti, *Spunti in Tema di Analisi Economica della Responsabilità Precontrattuale* (pp. 123), Aracne, Roma, 2004 – ISBN 88-7999-785-8.