

KING WITHOUT A KINGDOM: DEPOSED KING SAUD AND HIS INTRIGUES

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Over the years, the matter of succession has been of the most important challenges to the Saudi monarchy. Although the founder of the kingdom, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Saud, had determined that the throne would be handed down to his firstborn son, his sons had to deviate from their father’s wishes not long after his death and depose the new heir, King Saud. This undermining of the order of succession at such an early stage demanded that Faisal, who took King Saud’s place, restore confidence in the principle of primogeniture and unite the royal family by establishing a system of checks and balances between the various authorities. Despite King Faisal’s efforts to stabilise the government from within, deposed King Saud had no intention of abandoning his former position, and he began a campaign to return to power by means of Saudi domestic operatives and inter-Arab forces.

INTRODUCTION

This article exposes one of the grimmest chapters in the history of the Saudi kingdom. Its research provides a groundbreaking exposé of deposed King Saud’s attempts to oust his brother from power and King Faisal’s reaction to those attempts. The article reveals the internal rivalry in the royal household and its influence on the stability of the Saudi regime. The significance of the article is the rare insight it provides into what occurs behind the scenes in the Saudi royal household, as well as the light it sheds on how various inter-Arab elements take advantage of the domestic rivalry in order to advance their own interests.

The ability to analyse matters pertaining to the Saudi royal family is based on an extensive use of primary sources. The researcher has drawn on information from American, British, and Israeli archives, which include thorough reports on the sensitive subject. Although King Saud’s deposal has been referred to in a number of sources, such as Sarah Yizraeli and Robert Lacey’s books,¹ the archival sources have helped complete the picture of Saudi society’s reaction to it and Saud’s attempts to return to the political scene via subversive means. Therefore, while the secondary

¹ Sarah Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia: The Struggle between King Sa‘ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953–1962* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center (distributed by Syracuse University Press), 1997); Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1981).

sources paint a general picture, the primary sources provide unprecedented insight into the way in which the royal family and Saudi society actually dealt with the matter of the deposed king.

HOW KING FAISAL ESTABLISHED HIS POWER IN THE SAUDI MONARCHY

At the beginning of March 1964, Western analysts assessed that the greatest threat to the Saudi monarchy was posed by none other than the Saudi royal family itself. British intelligence believed that the rivalries between the various branches of the family reflected Saudi society and encouraged subversive elements to take advantage of the crisis within the royal household in order to try to overthrow the government. Indeed, at the beginning of 1964, relations within the royal household had reached an unprecedented nadir. Many, both in government and in the royal court, demanded the deposal of King Saud due to his regime's dismal performance. Even the religious leaders, who were the monarchy's traditional allies, were not happy with King Saud's government. Most of all they were upset with the lavish lifestyle of the man who held the title of "Imam of the Muslims", a position which demanded the leader to abide by a specific code of conduct. As a result, the Ulama and the Saudi princes supported Faisal's appointment as prime minister, while his brother remained king but was stripped of all authority.²

Saud had no intention of relinquishing power, however. He demanded to be reinstated and, according to some sources, he even resorted to violence to oust his brother. As a result of the conflict, Crown Prince Faisal was forced to move from Riyadh to Jeddah for six months. In October 1964, Faisal returned to Riyadh to seize power from his elder brother. The debate between the religious leaders and the senior princes over King Saud's status intensified due to the renewed conflict between the two brothers, and they decided that it was time to put an end to the rivalry and appoint the person who could best lead the kingdom along a new path. They therefore agreed to depose King Saud and appoint his brother Faisal in his stead.³

King Saud's removal from power reveals a number of things about succession in Saudi Arabia. First of all, it demonstrates the influence of the country's religious leaders. Indeed, without the Ulama, Faisal would not have been able to rise to power. Of the thousands of princes in the House of Saud, only 72 (many of whom had little influence) signed the deposal order, while it took only 12 religious leaders to finalise the appointment. Moreover, the fact that administrative staff, army officers, and the business community were not involved in the king's removal from power goes to show that appointments to key government positions rested mainly in the hands of the religious leaders and the princes. Furthermore, Saud's deposition strengthened the principle of agnatic seniority but emphasised the importance that the religious leaders attributed to the character and qualifications of the candidate to the monarchy. Indeed, Mohammed Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, the third son of the founder of the kingdom, was not selected as crown prince despite his seniority, because he did not live according to the tradition and spirit of Islam.⁴

Faisal's coronation on 2 November 1964 exposed the powers behind the throne in Saudi Arabia during Saud's reign. The first to express their indignation were the tribal leaders at the centre of the kingdom. While he was still in power, Saud had consulted with the tribal leaders about matters of state, gone hunting with them, and rewarded them handsomely for their soli-

2 TNA, FO 371/179877, BS 1011/1; NACP, RG59/2642/F.1, A-273; TNA, FCO 8/1204, NBS 18/3.

3 TNA, FO 371/179877, BS 1011/1; NACP, RG59/2642/F.1, A-273; TNA, FCO 8/1204, NBS 18/3; NACP, RG59/2642/F.1, A-273.

4 TNA, FCO 8/1204, NBS 18/3; NACP, RG59/2642/F.1, A-273.

darity. Faisal, on the other hand, was a man of the world. He had made many connections during his trips around the world as foreign minister in his father's administration. He was removed from tribal circles and he felt no need to consult with the elders of the Najd tribes, who had once been the kingdom's elite. He aspired to create good governance composed of educated young intellectuals who had been educated outside Saudi Arabia and had no tribal affiliation, and he did not want to be dependent on the whims of the tribal leaders. Indeed, King Saud's removal from power marked a decline in the status of the traditional Saudi powers and produced a new elite that consisted of intellectuals and senior administrative staff.⁵

Saud's ouster also exposed the historical rivalry between the various regions of Saudi Arabia, based on their different political-cultural backgrounds; those cultural differences influenced the mindset of the local people and caused domestic tension after the consolidation of the Saudi monarchy. The Najd region, for example, is the traditional stronghold of the House of Saud and their allies, the Wahhabi Ulama. Due to the fact that many of the region's inhabitants had taken part in the military campaigns of the founder of the kingdom, they were natural partners in the Saudi government. In exchange for their loyalty, the Najdi people were given key positions in the army, administration, and areas of commerce. On the other hand, the multicultural flavour of the Hejaz region and the political culture that had formed there under the Ottoman Empire were reflected in the character of the local population. Communities of religious leaders from the entire Muslim world flocked to the spiritual centre of Hejaz to settle near cities that are holy to Islam. As a result, as the local population intermarried with various other races such as Turks and Persians, the "pure Arab" element of the Hejazi population almost disappeared. Due to the resulting cross-cultural fertilization, the Muslim world perceived the people of Hejaz to be more educated than their Najdi counterparts. The Hejazis' exposure to the world via pilgrims coming to the holy cities made them more tolerant towards the different streams of Islam, and turned them into the most vocal opponents of the rigid Wahhabi party line.⁶

Therefore, Saud's removal from power and support for Faisal reflected the cultural and political differences of the kingdom's regions. To the Najdi tribal leaders, Saud was first and foremost "King of the Najdi tribes" and only then King of Saudi Arabia. His deposal was thus considered by a part of the Najdi elite to present a threat to their own status. In Hejaz, on the other hand, the reactions to Saud's deposition were mixed, although most hoped that it would mean an end to Najdi dominance in administration and the government. King Saud's ouster not only had an influence on the royal household's inter-family relations, but also shifted the power centres in the kingdom. It created an opportunity for the Hejazis to strengthen their position and improve their influence in the Saudi administration, which indeed happened in the years that ensued.⁷

The feeling that he still had many supporters in Saudi Arabia pushed Saud to try to regain power. After he was deposed, he and his sons retreated to the al-Naşariah Palace in Riyadh, but as long as he was there, the Saudi people continued to be preoccupied about his fate. Faisal was also concerned about what Saud intended to do: the deposed king had not yet decided to pledge allegiance to Faisal and was demanding rich compensation, which included a great deal

5 TNA, FO 371/174676, BS 1051/2; TNA, FO 371/179877, BS 1011/1; TNA, FO 371/174671, BS 1015/45; NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-68.

6 TNA, FO 371/179877, BS 1011/1; TNA, FO 371/174671, BS 1015/42; Sheean 1975: 114–117; NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-124.

7 TNA, FO 371/174676, BS 1051/2.

of property and key government positions for his sons. A few days after removing Saud from power, Faisal suggested that his brother leave Saudi Arabia and go to Switzerland or Austria, together with his four wives and a small entourage. Saud refused, demanding that all of his sons also accompany him, together with an entourage of five hundred persons. Faisal did not accept his demands and the dispute remained unresolved.⁸

In the ensuing weeks, Saudi intelligence received information that Saud was giving his sons and guards weapons in order to prevent his forcible removal. At the same time, his allies at the centre of the kingdom had begun to examine ways of ousting Faisal and reinstating Saud. When Saudi intelligence got wind that a coup was being planned, they stormed al-Naşariah Palace with the National Guard. Faisal demanded a statement of allegiance from Saud's sons. Mohammed Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, the king's brother, who was also known as "the royal mediator", was sent to al-Naşariah Palace to demand their loyalty to the chosen king.⁹ The first to swear allegiance was Mohammed Ibn Saud, who was married to one of Faisal's daughters; he chose to be the first in order not to irk his father-in-law. Three days later, on 28 November 1964, Radio Mecca reported that 11 of the deposed king's sons had declared allegiance to their uncle.¹⁰

Once Saud's sons had sworn their loyalty to Faisal, the deposed king stood alone. Throughout the kingdom, people were coming to terms with the fact that Saud was a "lost cause" and that he no longer presented a threat to Faisal. The king decided to isolate Saud even further by setting him up in the al-Manşouria Palace outside Riyadh.¹¹ On 6 January 1965, Saud agreed to his brother's claim. The poor state of his health and the pressure that many princes were putting upon him had made him change his mind. With the king's uncle 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman acting as mediator, he was summoned to the new King's Palace, where he swore allegiance to Faisal.¹²

Once the problems inside the family were solved, King Faisal was able to pass a budget that reflected his views and had been a source of contention between him and Saud. The budget for 1964–1965 amounted to 3,122 billion Riyals – about \$691 million – compared to the budget of the previous year, which had been only \$596 million. One third of the budget went to infrastructure, mainly reflecting an investment in the improvement of roads and landline communications. That was 40% more than the previous year, even though the entire budget had only grown by 16%. The crowning glory of the budget was the cutback in the expense account of the king and his family, which had heretofore been an incessant point of contention for the Saudi reformists. Moreover, it was decided that the monthly royalties to the tribal leaders would be reduced, the number of civil servants cut back, and that a person working in public administration could no longer be promoted to more than one rank at a time. The latter limitation was enacted in order to put an end to the widespread phenomenon of public administrators who had a rapport with the king being promoted, despite not having appropriate experience or qualifications. This was contrary to the policy implemented during Saud's rule, when more than a third of the budget was used to pay salaries and benefits to civil servants and tribal leaders who were closely associated with the monarchy. Although the reformists praised the changes in the budget, the conservative princes – particularly Prince 'Abdullah Ibn al-Rahman – opposed the reforms,

8 NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-83; TNA, FO 371/174671, BS 1015/52.

9 NACP, RG59/2643/F.1, A-146; NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-138.

10 NACP, RG59/2643/F.1, A-146; NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-138; TNA, FO 371/174671, BS 1015/53.

11 NACP, RG59/2643/F.1, A-146.

12 NACP, RG59/2643/F.5, A-94.

which promised to cut the expense accounts of the princes who were first-degree relatives of deceased King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz from 30,000 Riyals to 20,000 Riyals. The change also symbolised the Saudi government’s new domestic policy: henceforth the emphasis would be on creating good, effective governance, rather than keeping power only in the hands of the royal family.¹³

EXTERNAL THREATS AND INTERNAL SUBVERSION: KING SAUD CONNECTIONS WITH SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS IN THE ARAB REGION

The aspiration for progress and change raised concerns that the anti-reformists would join forces with deposed King Saud and try to oust Faisal from power. Indeed, while the reformists wished to reduce the budgetary influence of the tribes, the religious establishment and the older princes, the conservative forces sought to preserve the status of the royal family, the tribal leaders, and the religious leaders. As a result of increasing tension between the two factions, King Faisal met with his uncle ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman, the spokesman of the conservative faction in the House of Saud, in January 1965. ‘Abdullah expressed concern at the decline in the fortunes of the House of Saud’s allies and at the fact that the king had surrendered to pressure to lead the kingdom down a path of dangerous reforms, which would change the nature of the monarchy. The Ulama and the conservatives became even angrier when they heard that Queen Iffat was pressing for reform in girls’ education. Indeed, at the end of 1964, the queen led a group of women from Jeddah who were demanding that primary and secondary schools for girls be opened in the Province of Qasim, in the al-Bisha region, and in the Riyadh suburbs, all renowned conservative strongholds. ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-Rahman shared that the Najdi tribal leaders had expressed concern that the opening of schools throughout the kingdom would form a new generation that would replace the traditional leadership to the detriment of the Saudi elites.¹⁴

The solution to the disagreement between the conservatives and those who supported reform was to create a balance of power within the royal household. On 29 March 1965, 53-year-old Khalid bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was appointed crown prince. Despite his lack of political experience, he was known to be conservative, unpretentious, and level-headed. Although the appointment was politically insignificant, it created a balance between the hawkish factions and trust between the king and the conservatives.¹⁵

Despite attempts to resolve the disagreements within the House of Saud by means of political appointments, the conflict in the royal household took on an inter-Arab character at the beginning of 1966, when frustrated members of the family joined forces with revolutionary agents seeking to oust Faisal. In January 1966, for example, pro-Egyptian forces in Saudi Arabia began to distribute leaflets among the Najdis, calling for the overthrow of the king and promising that the return of the deposed king was imminent. Their timing was not an accident. In the preceding months, some of the Najdi tribal leaders had not received their monthly payment. Some of the senior National Guard officers’ salaries had also been held up, causing outrage in their units. Furthermore, the growing power of Prince ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, commander

13 NACP, RG /59/2645/ F.1/15, A-467; TNA, FO 371/179886, NO.3920; TNA, FO 371/179886, BS1111/1; Sparrow 1970: 110–111; Assah 1969: 194.

14 NACP, RG59/2645/F.4, A-18; Long 1976: 28–29; Lacey 1981: 364–365; al-Munajjed 1997: 62; NACP, RG59/2643/F.2, A-171.

15 Bligh 1984: 84–88; Safran 1988: 117; Khadduri 1981: 43–44; NACP, RG59/2645/F.15, A-46.

of the National Guard and a member of one of the northern tribes, resulted in the exclusion of officers from central Najd in favour of officers from the Shammar tribes. This caused a great deal of tension in the Special Forces, as well as arousing criticism from a number of princes who considered that the king had taken power away from the central Najdis in favour of the northern tribes.¹⁶

The actions of the deposed king raised fears that the tension within the House of Saud would only increase. A few months after he went into exile in Austria, Saud moved to Greece. He soon became fed up with his new residence, however, where he spent most of his time receiving expert medical care at local clinics for the chronic intestinal and lung ailments he had been suffering from in recent years. He told his associates how much he missed meeting with tribal leaders, hunting competitions, and praying at the Ka'aba mosque. He began to correspond with Arab leaders, asking them to help him return to his homeland or at least settle in one of their countries. In this venture he enlisted the help of his son Mohammed, who had remained in Saudi Arabia, asking him for even the most nominal job.¹⁷

On 12 October 1965, the Lebanese newspaper *al-Ruwad* published a plan that would allow Saud to live in Beirut. This plan, devised by Lebanese Prime Minister Rashid Karami (Egyptian ambassador to Lebanon), 'Abd al-Ḥamid Ghaleb, and Um Manṣour (one of the deposed king's wives) would enable Saud to purchase a piece of land in one of the Lebanese suburbs for a sum of 3 million Lebanese Pounds from Charles Ḥelou, the Lebanese President's nephew. In exchange for Lebanese citizenship, Saud would have to pay an additional 50 million Lebanese Pounds over a period of twenty years. Furthermore, he would have to pay one and a half million Lebanese Pounds towards a propaganda campaign organised by Lebanon and Egypt against King Faisal in the local media.¹⁸

Due to the exorbitant sums that he would be required to pay, Saud rejected the suggestion to settle in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the deposed king did not give up. One week later, rumours spread across Saudi Arabia that King Faisal had agreed to let Saud return home – and would even allow him to live in a palace near Riyadh. But that was not enough for Saud. He demanded that Faisal grant him the title “Prince Saud, Imam of the Muslims” and that all the assets that had been confiscated from him and placed in the royal treasury when he was sent into exile be restored to him. Faisal did not agree to the demand to this eminent title, claiming that if he waived the title “Imam of the Muslims” for himself, he would lose his special status in the Muslim world and give Saud more influence over the religious masses.¹⁹

Saud's demands effectively put an end to the possibility of his returning to Saudi Arabia. That year, Saud attempted to persuade several other Arab leaders to allow him to settle in their countries. On 15 October 1966, the Iraqi newspaper *al-'Arab* published a report that the deposed king was about to obtain Iraqi citizenship and that he would soon be buying a villa in the Baghdad area. The news that Saud intended to settle in Iraq infuriated the Saudi king. Not only was Faisal incensed that the Iraqi government had not informed him of the latest developments, many in Iraq were also displeased with the decision. Several Iraqi government officials believed that Saud's arrival would be detrimental to relations between the two countries, and

16 NACP, RG59/2645/F.15, A-46; NACP, RG59/2642/F.10, A-452.

17 NACP, RG59/2472/F.10, A-88; TNA, FO 371/179878, BS 1015; Samore 1984: 35–57.

18 Samore 1984: 35–57; NACP, RG59/2646/F.9, A-275.

19 NA, RG59/2646/F.9, A-138.

the Iraqi government therefore hastened to publish a denial of the report in the media, stating that for the time being Saud would not be allowed to settle in Iraq.²⁰

By the beginning of November 1966, Saud could no longer bear being cut off from his Arab compeers. On 5 November 1966, he sent the Egyptian president a letter from Cyprus, asking him to allow him to live in Egypt. The Egyptians did not know how to react: relations between Egyptian President Naşer and King Saud had been very tense for years. When he was king, Saud had accused Naşer of sending pro-Nasserite sympathisers to overthrow him, and even after he was overthrown, relations between the Egyptians and the Saudis continued to be tense due to the war that erupted in Yemen in 1962, when the monarchists were ousted by anti-monarchy pro-Nasserites. The Egyptians found it hard to let bygones be bygones just for the sake of Saud's battle with his brother, and some in the Egyptian regime even suspected that this was a trick to divert Egypt from its struggle against the monarchists in the Arab world.²¹

However, despite his fears, Naşer decided to accede to Saud's request. On 18 December 1966, Saud arrived in Egypt and was greeted by senior officials and ministers. As far as Naşer and Saud were concerned, the alliance was absolutely natural. The two new allies were determined to oust the reigning Saudi king. Saud wanted Naşer to help him to regain the throne, and Naşer believed that the deposed king was the best tool against the House of Saud in his attempt to turn Saudi Arabia into a republic. As a result of Saud's actions, Faisal hastened to remove the deposed king's sons, daughters, and associates from the list of those receiving monthly royalties. He also decided that some of the assets in the hands of Saud's sons were to be confiscated and that their passports were to be taken from them.²²

Two days after he arrived in Egypt, Saud met with Naşer. The meeting was described as open and cordial. There was an exchange of greetings in front of dozens of cameras seeking to capture the historic, surrealistic moment. It was the finest hour for Egyptian propaganda: each and every move of the man who had not so long ago been Egypt's enemy was immortalised. Later, in a private conversation, the two men discussed ways to oust Faisal and reinstate Saud with the support of Egypt. While Naşer did not think for one instant that Saud was the right man to rule Saudi Arabia, he did believe that the deposed king was the best means he had to disrupt Faisal's grip on power and create a rift within the House of Saud.²³

The historical event made headlines in Egyptian news broadcasts and Arab newspapers. *Al-ray al-'aam* chose to report on the meeting between Naşer and the deposed king in a humoristic manner, presenting a humiliated Saud. *Şawt al-Khalij*, which was known to be pro-Egyptian, showed Saud in a similar way and claimed that "the man who was once one of the pillars of the imperialist powers is now getting the attention he deserves". The Egyptian-sponsored newspaper *Akhbar al-Kuwait*, on the other hand, claimed in Saud's defence that he had been defrauded by his brother and forced into exile.²⁴

The Saudi press "opted" to ignore the event, believing that addressing the matter of the deposed king would be embarrassing for the House of Saud. Despite such censorship, the news of Saud's meeting with the Egyptian president filtered into Saudi Arabia via the Egyptian media.

20 NACP, RG59/2644/F.6, A-219; NACP, RG59/2644/F.6, A-285; TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8.

21 NACP, RG/59/2470/, F.2, A-235; TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8; TNA, FO 371/185479, BS 103110/20; NACP, RG/59/2645/F.2, A-514.

22 NACP, RG59/2470/F.2, A-235; TNA, FCO 8/755, BS 1/8.

23 NACP, RG/59/2470/, F.2, A-235.

24 TNA, FCO 8/755, 1061/67.

The Saudi people, however, reacted to the news with contempt. Most people claimed that “Saud is a sick man who is disgracing Saudi Arabia”. Several people in the Saudi administration frowned upon Saud’s “grovelling” to Naşer and wondered at his decision to seek aid from the man who had, until recently, engaged in poisonous propaganda against him. In conversations with the American ambassador, Saudi businessmen from the Eastern Province expressed their belief that Saud would try to establish a government-in-exile in Egypt that would constitute an opposition to the existing monarchy.²⁵

Saud spent his first days in Egypt meeting with local leaders and seeking a new residence, but he soon realised that life under the regime of his former enemy would not be as he had expected. The deposed king’s retinue complained that Egyptian intelligence agents were following their every step, making their lives unbearable.²⁶ Moreover, a few days after his arrival in Egypt, when Saud was due to take part in an Egyptian propaganda campaign against Saudi Arabia, he and the propaganda producers could not agree on the content. Saud wanted to emphasise the injustice his brother had done him, while the Egyptians wanted him to praise Egyptian revolutionism. The disagreement caused a delay in the propaganda broadcasts.²⁷

On 26 December 1966, Saud’s first interview after his arrival in Egypt was published in *al-Ahram*. After several briefings and consultations over the nature of the interview, the two sides reached an agreement as to the questions that would be asked and the answers Saud would provide. The journalist who interviewed Saud asked what had made him come to Egypt and Saud replied: “I was seeking a country where there was a combination of Islam and Arabism, a country committed to the Arab distress in the face of the imperialist powers.” When asked which countries were not participating in the Arab cause against the imperialists, he claimed: “Those that have removed themselves from the unity that prevails in the Arab world, and you can guess which countries I mean.” When asked about his feelings since he had been ousted, he replied: “I will never leave the Saudi kingdom. I feel an affinity to the people of the kingdom and will never forget them.”²⁸

Because Saud was now back at the top of the Saudi agenda, the debate over the deposed king’s stature was renewed. Faisal refused to discuss his brother’s return to Saudi Arabia due to fears of further family disputes. However, his close aides, Sheikh Ḥafiz Wahaba and ‘Umar Saqaf, claimed that the embarrassing incident in Egypt could have been avoided had Saud been allowed to come home. In their opinion, Faisal should have met Saud halfway in certain matters, such as giving him back his assets in exchange for an end to Saud’s pretensions to the throne. They also believed that Faisal had been mistaken in his refusal to grant Saud the symbolic title “Imam of the Muslims”. Indeed, already during the reign of King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz the title had been granted to his father, ‘Abd al-Raḥman, and this had not hindered the kingdom’s founder. By doing this, they claimed, Faisal would have been able to personally supervise the deposed king’s actions, and more importantly, Saud would not have become Egyptian President Naşer’s pawn.²⁹

Saudi intelligence chiefs, on the other hand, agreed with Faisal. They argued that a potentially subversive agent should not be allowed to operate within Saudi Arabia during times of instability. In a conversation with a representative of the US State Department, the head of

25 NACP, RG59/2644/F.6, A-47; TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8.

26 TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8.

27 TNA, FCO 8/755, BS 1215/3.

28 NACP, RG59/2644/F.6, A-46; Samore 1984: 238.

29 NACP, RG59/2472/F.23, A-45.

Saudi intelligence, Kamal Adham, gave an account of all the actions King Saud had taken in his attempt to undermine the stability of the Saudi regime. He explained that since his removal from power, Saud had established a network of spies inside Saudi Arabia, who gave him a running account of all the goings-on and were making preparations for his possible return. In the middle of November 1966, for example, the Saudi security forces informed the American ambassador to Saudi Arabia that one of the people working in the US Consulate in Jeddah was under suspicion of affiliation to an organization that was being funded by the deposed king.³⁰ Adham also claimed that Saud had managed to smuggle spies into Saudi Arabia via Iraq and Yemen that year. Their mission was to incite the population against King Faisal and to prepare the ground for Saud's eventual return. According to information received by Adham, Saud's son Khalid was planning to go to Yemen in the near future in order to persuade the tribes on Saudi Arabia's southern border to join a coup against King Faisal. In order to prevent Saud from inciting the Saudi tribes, he claimed, the Saudi government had paid millions of Riyals to the tribal leaders over the past few weeks. The head of Saudi intelligence reported that at least a third of the money had gone to the Ḥarb tribes near Medina and to the Shammar, with whom the deposed king had made contact with the help of an official in the Iraqi Defence Ministry.³¹

Adham even claimed that a few weeks before Saud joined forces with Naṣer, some propagandists posing as philanthropists had gone to the Jeddah area in order to garner support for the deposed king. They promised the tribal leaders that they would receive larger monthly royalties, should they support a coup against Faisal. Faisal's advisors believed that his position could be imperilled were some of the tribal leaders to support the deposed king, and they therefore refused to allow Saud to return to Saudi Arabia.³²

On 5 January 1967, Saud granted an interview to *The Christian Science Monitor*, in which he was in a particularly good mood and praised his hosts' hospitality. He claimed that Faisal had only been able to oust him from the throne by forcing the Ulama to sign the deposition decree.³³ In an interview with an American reporter one month later, he further claimed that he had received dozens of letters from Saudi tribal leaders, who expressed their support and called upon him to act against his brother. He also said that he was in constant contact with army officers and functionaries, who had set up a network of underground cells throughout Saudi Arabia to prepare for his impending return.³⁴

Relations between Saud and his brother Faisal reached an all-time low on 24 April 1967 when Saud – accompanied by Egyptian Chief-of-Staff 'Abd al-Ḥakim 'Amer, Minister of War Shams al-Din, Naṣer's personal advisor Ḥasan Sabri al-Khuli, and Egyptian Commissioner of the Department of Information in Yemen Dr. 'Abd al-Kader Ḥatem – travelled to Sana'a to express his support for the revolutionary forces in Yemen.³⁵ Two days later, Saud returned to his home in Cairo and, for the first time since he had left Saudi Arabia, made use of the media to openly call for an end to Faisal's reign. In the address he delivered on *The Voice of Cairo*, the deposed king called upon the military chiefs "to put an end to the grave situation in Saudi Arabia and to stop the bloodshed in the Yemen".³⁶

30 NACP, RG59/3/F.1, A-48; NA, RG59/3/F.1, A-52; NACP, RG59/2646/F.7, A-42.

31 NACP, RG59/2646/F.7, A-42.

32 NACP, RG59/2646/F.7, A-42; NACP, RG59/2642/F.10, A-452.

33 NACP, RG59/2472/F.15, A-610.

34 NACP, RG59/2471/F.6, A-55.

35 NACP, RG59/2471/F.6, A-52; Lacey 1981: 376–378; Holden & Johns 1981: 251.

36 NACP, RG59/2473/F.6, A-643; TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8.

Again the Saudi press “chose” to ignore Saud’s speech, but for those Saudis who listened to *The Voice of Cairo*, it became the talk of the town. In conversations with diplomats in the British Embassy, government officials claimed that Saud had become “Nāṣer’s court jester”, but many princes in the House of Saud were nonetheless concerned by the interest that Saud’s speech was arousing among the general public. Some princes believed that there should be a change of attitude towards the deposed king, but Faisal chose, yet again, not to deviate from the path he had taken, insofar as his brother was concerned.³⁷

THE EFFECT OF THE SIX DAYS WAR ON THE STATUS OF KING SAUD

The 1967 war created a new reality in the Middle East. In August 1967, Egypt’s policy towards Syria changed abruptly. The Soviets, who had been observing the rising tension between the two sides with great interest, began to encourage the Arab leaders to convene a summit conference to discuss the outcome and conclusion of the war, and also to make peace between the Arab governments that were at odds. Most of the Arab states, except for the fanatical Neo-Ba’ath Syrians, agreed to the Soviet initiative and confirmed their participation in the Arab summit conference. After a preparatory meeting, which lasted a few days, the Arab foreign ministers unanimously agreed with the Soviets and the Americans that the summit conference would take place in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum.³⁸

At the end of August 1967, the Arab summit conference opened in Khartoum. During the conference, Nāṣer announced that he intended to go on a visit to Saudi Arabia in the near future. The Egyptian president’s call for appeasement was not just an irresponsible remark. Nāṣer’s Egypt, battered and beaten by the destructive war with Israel, could no longer support the economic situation that had befallen it as a result of its defeat. Other than the disastrous outcome of the war, Egypt also had an accelerating birth rate, rising unemployment, a failing production sector, and increasing dependence on the Soviet Union. The Egyptian president urgently needed Saudi money to salvage his country – the leader of the Arab world – from its difficult economic situation. In exchange for Saudi money, Nāṣer was willing to give his word that Egypt would no longer try to undermine Saudi Arabia’s monarchy or continue its vitriolic propaganda campaign against the country’s rulers.³⁹

In spite of the potential reconciliation between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Saud continued to take advantage of the forum that Egypt had granted him to criticise the Saudi monarchy and undermine his brother. On 19 September 1967, the Saudi ambassador to Egypt, Sheikh Mohammed ‘Ali Riḍha, met with the deposed king in order to persuade him to return to Saudi Arabia. The sheikh, who was renowned for his good relations with Saud before his exile, told the deposed king that with the current developments in the Middle East, Saud would finally be able to return to his homeland and be given a symbolic position in the government. To his surprise, however, the Egyptian ambassador discovered that Saud had a plan for him to join in a conspiracy against Faisal. Saud offered the sheikh one million British Pounds for his cooperation and promised to appoint him as Prime Minister if he managed to regain the Saudi throne.

37 TNA, FCO 8/755 BS 1/8; TNA, FCO 8/755, BS 1/8.

38 TNA, FCO 8/756, BQ 2/1.

39 TNA, FCO 8/756, BQ 2/1.

The ambassador, whose appointment in Egypt was nearing its end, refused point blank and insisted on immediately ending the conversation.⁴⁰

At the king's court, there were furious reactions at Saud's conniving. Some princes believed that Faisal should expel Saud's family from Saudi Arabia and confiscate their assets. Minister of the Interior Fahd, who was renowned for his political influence, demanded that Faisal initiate a propaganda campaign to sully Saud's name. This was a continuation of the policy that the monarchy had already adopted against Saud's family: a few weeks before the conversation between Saud and the Saudi ambassador, the deposed king's son Thamir died and his body was flown to Jeddah; when the plane arrived in Saudi Arabia, however, Crown Prince Khalid ordered the coffin to be "sent back to his father" in order to express the royal family's disgust at Saud's actions. Faisal was initially opposed to this plan, but under the pressure of the princes agreed.⁴¹

Faisal rejected his brothers' demands to take a tough stance against Saud, however. He believed that Saud's days were numbered and that any negative press on the deposed king would also tarnish the image of the royal family. Indeed, the Saudi-Egyptian agreement that came out of the Khartoum conference included the matter of the deposed king. One of the members of the negotiations team, Faisal's advisor Dr. Rashad Phar'uon, made it clear to the Egyptian delegation that the Saudi government would not allow Saud to take advantage of the status Naşer had granted him to launch attacks against King Faisal. The Egyptians, who were not happy with Saud's presence in Egypt, immediately agreed to banish him when requested to do so: as far as they were concerned, King Saud and his large entourage were a burden on Egypt. Thus, at the end of September 1967, a special envoy gave Saud a message from Naşer that his "accommodation fees" would heretofore increase to several million dollars a month. Saud understood the meaning of this message and began to prepare for his family and entourage to move elsewhere. At the beginning of October, the Egyptians announced to their Saudi counterparts that Saud's plane had left the country for the Austrian capital of Vienna.⁴²

A few months after arriving in Vienna, Saud left for Greece. As far as he was concerned, this would be his last stop before returning to Saudi Arabia. Indeed, since he had left Egypt, his health had further deteriorated and he wished to spend his final days in the country of his ancestors. When he arrived in Greece, he began to correspond with King Faisal in the hope of reaching an agreement whereby he could go back to Saudi Arabia. In 1968, Faisal offered him the title "Head of the al-Saud Family" when he returned, but Saud considered such a meaningless title to be insulting and demanded a different arrangement.⁴³

THE END OF THE ROAD: SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY REACTION TO THE DEATH OF KING SAUD

In the end, Saud and his brother did not manage to agree on an arrangement that would enable him to return to Saudi Arabia. On 23 February 1969, Faisal's special advisor Umar Saqaf reported that the deposed king had died of a heart attack. He was 67. Faisal ordered for the royal plane to fly to Greece to bring back the body for burial in Saudi Arabia. A delegation that

40 NACP, RG59/2474/F.15, A-21.

41 NACP, RG59/2474/F.15, A-21.

42 NACP, RG59/2474/F.15, A-21.

43 NACP, RG59/2472/F.15, A-88.

included religious leaders, princes, and a doctor went on this journey, returning the following day with Saud's sons, daughters, wives, and mistresses; Saud's entire entourage, with the exception of Prince Khalid Ibn Saud, returned to Saudi Arabia. The body was transferred to the Great Mosque in Mecca. Faisal and a small number of princes and officials, who had come to say a prayer for the deceased, awaited the arrival of the body near the mosque. The body was then transferred from Mecca to the royal cemetery in Riyadh, where it was awaited by many Najdis and tribal leaders from the region who wished to present their final respects to "the King of the Najdi Tribes". In accordance with Wahhabi tradition, Saud was buried without eulogies and a stone weighing two and a half tons was laid on his grave.⁴⁴

After the burial ceremony, there were three days of mourning. The royal family received condolence messages from all over the world. The Saudi press, for its part, only issued a brief, laconic report on the death of the man who had ruled Saudi Arabia for more than a decade. The Saudi TV broadcaster covering the event read out the names of the countries and officials who had sent condolence messages to the House of Saud and thanked the Gulf state leaders who had come to Saudi Arabia to take part in the royal family's mourning ceremonies. Aside from those who had expressed condolences, the Saudi press did not address the matter, nor did it even publish a picture of the man who had been king for 11 years.⁴⁵

Saud's death helped to prevent many problems, both within the family and from opposition forces. Arab tradition grants much power to the eldest brother. Although Saud was ousted in 1964, his subversive activities against his younger brother were nonetheless considered admissible since he was Ibn Saud's oldest son. Moreover, Saud's death ended his subversive propaganda campaign against Faisal. That propaganda, which had been spread throughout the Arab press, had caused Faisal considerable embarrassment, both domestically and in the Arab world. Faisal truly believed that his brother had been mentally unstable and tended to forgive him for "washing the royal family's dirty laundry in public", even though Saud had often embarrassed Faisal (for whom honour was very important) and caused him much sorrow. Now that Saud was dead, the Saudi King no longer feared offence to his honour: Saud's son, Khalid, remained alone in the campaign against Faisal, but since he was renowned throughout the Arab world as a womaniser, drinker, and spendthrift, he received no official recognition.⁴⁶

The Saudi security forces were also relieved at Saud's death. Ever since Faisal had come to power, there had been reports of Saud's intention to try to harm his brother and regain the throne. Even though Saud had lost much of his support throughout the years, there were still people in the kingdom awaiting his return. They recalled his generosity and hoped that his return would work in their favour. Faisal's attempt to draw the Najdi tribes closer to him by building roads, drilling wells, and establishing schools was of no avail. Many of the tribal leaders continued to call him "the stingy king", while Saud was renowned as "the generous king". Moreover, since there were no opposition parties, Saud was considered to be the leader of those who criticised the regime. Saudi intellectuals – such as 'Abd al-'Aziz Sulaiman, Ibrahim Zaid, and the president of Riyadh University, Sheikh Ahmed Jamjom, who openly criticised King Faisal – were arrested on several occasions under the suspicion of having ties with Saud.⁴⁷

44 TNA, FCO 8/1164, NBS 1/1.

45 TNA, FCO 8/1164, NBS 1/1.

46 NACP, RG59/2472/F.15, A-88.

47 NACP, RG59/2472/F.15, A-88; TNA, FCO 8/1164, NBS 1/1.

On the domestic front, Saud's death raised renewed hopes for reforms that Faisal had promised at the beginning of his reign. While Saud was alive, the Saudis had learned to appreciate Faisal's modesty and restraint. Most of them remembered the corruption that had spread throughout the kingdom under Saud's rule, and they learned that Faisal was better than his brother was. Now that the deposed king was dead and there was no more need to fear his return to power, the Saudis expected Faisal to speed up the reforms he had promised. Moreover, many Saudis hoped that Faisal would return to the folds of the reformists. Many claimed that Faisal had been cautious in turning his back on the conservatives when Saud was alive because of their support for the deposed king. Now that Saud was dead, there were renewed demands to reduce the power of the Ulama in the royal court.⁴⁸

In the international sphere, Saud's death was an embarrassment. While in exile, he and his sons had been honoured by prime ministers and presidents – such as the leaders of Austria, Spain, and Greece – who had hosted them in their countries. Faisal feared that such homage would strengthen the feeling of the deposed king's sons that they were worthy contenders to the Saudi throne. In the inter-Arab sphere, on the other hand, Faisal had feared that Saud's declared intent to settle in Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and so forth were mere stepping stones to a return to Saudi Arabia. Saud's death did not put an end to the intrigues and plots in the Saudi royal household, but because of the problems he caused, Faisal had been forced to create a balance between the factions in the House of Saud. Due to the strength of the Sudairi Seven and the obvious weakness of Crown Prince Khalid, Faisal had to foster a leader who would be acceptable to the conservatives in the House of Saud. He found this in the charismatic Prince 'Abdullah. To a great extent, the powers that most influenced the Saudi monarchy – and continue to do so today – emerged upon Saud's death.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

The matter of succession to the Saudi throne was always a source of tension in Saudi Arabia. Saud's deposal and the steps that he took to regain power show the intensity of the rivalry within the Saudi royal family. This article suggests that internal family tension has had a considerable influence on important elements of Saudi society. For example, Saud's removal from power is known to have influenced the status of the tribal leaders and the princes who belonged to the conservative stream, some of whom were even willing to resort to violence to bring their patron back to power. More than anything else, however, it shows how others in the Arab world made use of the conflict in the House of Saud to promote their own political interests. For example, the Egyptians took advantage of the weakness within the Saudi monarchy to promote their interests in Saudi Arabia, thereby causing King Faisal great embarrassment. The phrase coined in the British embassy in the 1960s, "the greatest threat to the House of Saud is the House of Saud itself", holds true until today; it was the main reason for the lack of stability within Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, King Abdullah can be credited with the stability in Saudi Arabia in recent years: he has managed to minimise disagreement in order to stabilise the government and to implement significant social and economic reforms.

48 TNA, FCO 8/1164, NBS 1/1; NACP, RG59/2470/F.2, A-75.

49 TNA, FCO 8/1209/1, NBS 1/6.

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