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IMPACT OF A REGIME CHANGE IN SAUDI ARABIA -- AN OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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14. ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia Enjoys great strategic importance on the world stage and a particularly significant role as the centerpiece of the Unite States' operational endeavors in the Persian Gulf. Our understandings with Saudi Arabia are primarily unwritten, lending a special weight to our relationships with Saudi rulers. King Fahd and each foreseeable successor are in their mid- to late seventies, making rapid successions a distinct possibility. The notably vague rules for long-term succession, combined with a government already grappling with domestic power-sharing considerations, make the disposition of future Saudi rulers especially significant. Although an ouster of the Al Saud regime is unlikely, new rulers will face more pressure to remove Western troops and will likely decline to allow some future offensive strikes against such rogue states and Iraq. Our primary Saudi-based functions are security assistance, command and control, and land-based airpower. Such activities as Air Expeditionary Forces, while not detracting from our current status in Saudi Arabia, allow us to foster better operational relationships and with other countries, hone our ability to deploy/employ land-based airpower (the most vulnerable of our functions to Saudi reluctance), and exercise the associated command and control should we face a diminished Saudi presence. A thorough review of professional literature reveals that in every feasible scenario for change in Saudi government, over time the U.S. should expect increasing constraints on operational freedom of action from Saudi soil.

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Preface

There is no shortage of published material on Saudi Arabia, but the preponderance of it is oriented toward offering advice to the United States on how to best deal with the Saudi government at the highest levels. Particular attention is normally paid to such issues as what our regional goals should be, whether to press the Saudi government toward democratic reform, or whether U.S. arms sales to the region are good or bad. Rather than trying to decide how we *should* deal with Saudi Arabia, I've assumed that our goals in the region will stay relatively constant for the next ten years and that we will continue to desire an ongoing military presence in the Kingdom. That has allowed me to narrow the focus of this paper, but it would admittedly render this project less applicable should our interests change.

I'm grateful to two very patient Arabic instructors, Bill Baker and Chuck Robertson, who many years ago taught this Arkansas kid about a fascinating part of the world; the professional and innovative library staff at Air University Library who made my research a breeze; Major William "Woody" Watkins for pushing the envelope of how many student research projects one research advisor can support; and the Institute for National Security Studies for sponsoring my work.

Abstract

Saudi Arabia enjoys great strategic importance on the world stage and a particularly significant role as the centerpiece of the United States' operational endeavors in the Persian Gulf. Our understandings with Saudi Arabia are primarily unwritten, lending a special weight to our relationships with Saudi rulers. King Fahd and each foreseeable successor are in their mid- to late-seventies, making rapid successions a distinct possibility. The notably vague rules for long-term succession, combined with a government already grappling with domestic power-sharing considerations, make the disposition of future Saudi rulers especially significant. Although an ouster of the Al Saud regime is very unlikely, new rulers will face more pressure to remove Western troops and will likely decline to allow some future offensive strikes against such rogue states as Iraq. Our primary Saudi-based functions are security assistance, command and control, and land-based airpower. Such activities as Air Expeditionary Forces, while not detracting from our current status in Saudi Arabia, allow us to foster better operational relationships with other countries, hone our ability to deploy/employ land-based airpower (the most vulnerable of our functions to Saudi reluctance), and exercise the associated command and control should we face a diminished Saudi presence. A thorough review of professional literature reveals that in every feasible scenario for change in Saudi government, over time the U.S. should expect increasing constraints on operational freedom of action from Saudi soil.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> *The momentary juncture of several tribes produces an army: their more lasting union constitutes a nation; and the supreme chief, the emir of emirs, whose banner is displayed at their head, may deserve, in the eyes of strangers, the honors of the kingly name.*
>
> —Edward Gibbon, Esq.
> *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Every nation is unique. From the perspective of the United States, however, Saudi Arabia is extraordinarily unique. Dazzling displays of oil-boom wealth from the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s in this increasingly urban modern-day Kingdom belie a pre-statehood history of meager means and raiding tribes, but the independent spirit born of the desert remains. Saudi Arabia's geo-strategic position in the ever-turbulent Middle East, its custodianship of the two most holy cities of Islam, and its possession of still staggering quantities of oil resources contribute to give it a standing few countries can rival. Adding to that its status as the operational centerpiece of the United States' quest for stability in the Persian Gulf, its role as an important actor on the world stage is irrefutable.

Saudi Arabia, a monarchy ruled by a King with sworn allegiance from his most prominent princes, takes on a special significance when one realizes that one man (currently King Fahd, also prime minister) determines policy virtually unencumbered by any Western-style "checks and balances." The King of Saudi Arabia may be said to be

the "master" of the House of Saud. Nevertheless, like any house, even the House of Saud relies on the foundation upon which it rests. Both literally and figuratively, this foundation lies atop a desert, which when viewed from a distance may appear constant, but upon closer inspection reveals shifting with the passage of wind and time. The "winds" that influence the foundation of the House of Saud are many and varied. The "time" considered in this paper is the next ten years. The inevitable change of "masters," the likely change in governmental form, or the unlikely fall of the "House" itself—each has operational significance to the United States, as we have our own "castles" in the Kingdom.

Our notable lack of formal, written agreements with the Kingdom makes our relationship with Saudi Arabia's rulers especially weighty. Concern arises, then, when one considers what will transpire when the current King is no longer able to reign. Given the premise that Saudi Arabia is of singular operational importance to the United States, and keeping in mind that denial of military access to Saudi Arabia is never more than a King's pen-stroke away, then the disposition of Fahd's successor(s) is of more than just passing concern. Based on our knowledge of likely successors and the Kingdom's overall trend toward a more participative form of government, the United States should expect increasing difficulty in maintaining our current operational access and freedom of action in (and from) Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 2

The "Masters"

> *...[S]uperstition, or gratitude, or fortune has exalted a particular family above the heads of their equals. The dignities of sheick (sic), or emir, invariably descend in this chosen race; but the order of succession is loose, or precarious...*
>
> —Edward Gibbon, Esq.
> *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the "last absolute monarchies"[1] and nearly unique among nations in displaying a family name in its formal state title.[2] There are no political parties, no elections, and no written constitution.[3] The monarchy nevertheless does incorporate some measure of consensus, albeit mostly of the *royal* kind, into its most important affairs, as even "the king's power is...limited by religion, custom, and the need for consensus."[4] While considerations are made to accommodate public concerns, including a recently established "consultative council," any citizen recommendations, whether by individual or group, are only advisory in nature and will be considered at the King's pleasure rather than obligatorily. "[T]he king of Saudi Arabia makes virtually all the important decisions in the country, either personally or as prime minister and chairman of the council of ministers, which functions as the kingdom's cabinet."[5]

Saudi Arabia became an independent state in 1932 under the rule of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud (also known as ibn Saud), leader of the Al Saud clan which had exercised power in the area, although occasionally interrupted, for about two hundred years. The

father of each of the four Kings who have ruled Saudi Arabia since his death in 1953, Abdul Aziz also sired at least forty other sons, several of whom will doubtlessly survive the current ruler, King Fahd.[6] This group is a "dwindling constituency,"[7] however, and there are literally hundreds of future potential successors (male descendents of Abdul Aziz) "watch[ing] tantalized, wondering what stroke of fate will eventually give them (or a cousin) power."[8]

Predicting long-term succession lines in Saudi Arabia is problematic in a number of ways. From its origins in the eighteenth century, the House of Saud has been closely tied with the Wahhabi sect of the Islamic faith, for which early Islamic history is still very real; however, "Islam offers no unchallenged rules for legitimate succession."[9] Even the prophet Muhammad left himself no designated successor, a reality with which each new Muslim political community has had to come to terms.[10] Additionally, practices from such influences as the Ottoman empire and indigenous tribes on the Arabian peninsula have offered their own variations of succession determination.[11]

Although historical precedent is available from the study of succession since Abdul Aziz, there is still no clearly codified process. The closest one can get to definitive written guidance comes from an edict issued by King Fahd in 1992, which essentially states that allegiance will be sworn to the most upright of Abdul Aziz's sons (or grandsons) "in accordance with [the principles] of the Holy Koran and the tradition of the Venerable Prophet."[12] In practice, the throne is bestowed rather than inherited and is subjected to rigorous consultation amongst both the royal family and the religious elite.[13]

The mathematical possibilities for the Saudi line of succession, even in the next ten years on which this paper will focus, border on the infinite. Fortunately for purposes of

prediction, the *likely* successor has already been designated by King Fahd; namely, Crown Prince Abdullah, Fahd's half-brother. Although not identified unequivocally, Fahd's brother Sultan is considered third in line to the throne. It's at this point where the line of succession becomes *especially* difficult to forecast, primarily due to two factors. The first reason is historical, as the ascension to Crown Prince from this somewhat nebulous third position has sometimes been subject to heated family debate, and who would fill the then-vacant third position is anybody's guess.[14] The second reason is a relatively new development, which may compound the succession complexity in the foreseeable future: King Fahd's 1992 edict provides for the possibility of Abdul Aziz's grandsons assuming the throne.[15] However, the decree stops short of specifying when and how the leap to this new generation of rulers would happen.

There are numerous additional complexities that complicate any attempt to predict the long-term line of succession in Saudi Arabia. The heir designate (now called Crown Prince) has been crowned King in every instance since Saudi statehood, but the process is nonetheless subject to family consensus and is by no means a surety. Abdullah, although projected by most authorities to garner this consensus, is only a half-brother to the "Sudeiri Seven" (seven of Abdul Aziz's sons whose mother was of a particularly influential family). This group of seven includes not only King Fahd but also Sultan, presumably third in line. This certainly makes Abdullah no less eligible for the throne, but the relationship could lead to some interesting maneuvering with regard to Abdullah's crowning and subsequent naming of his heir apparent. Abdullah's accession to the throne and Sultan's eventual rise to the Crown Prince position are likely, but not guaranteed, especially when considered in light of a traditional rivalry between Abdullah (First

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Saudi Arabian National Guard) and Sultan (Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Aviation). An uncertain situation also arises should Abdullah predecease King Fahd, as some family members might oppose Fahd's selection to Crown Prince of any of the other Sudeiri Seven (his full brothers, *including* Sultan).[16]

Further complicating any endeavor to predict succession beyond the short-term is the potential for "a series of rapid successions [occurring] over a 5- to 10- year period,"[17] given the advanced ages of Fahd, Abdullah, and Sultan (all in their mid- to late-seventies).[18] The Kingdom's previous four sovereigns have died at ages 73, 67, 71, and 69.[19] The foreseeable rapidity of succession is untested in modern day Saudi Arabia, as the average tenure of outgoing monarchs has been over 14 years, the shortest reign belonging to King Khalid from 1975 until 1982.

Numerous volumes have been written about events relating to the line of succession from Abdul Aziz through Saud, Faisal, and Khalid (King Fahd's predecessor, whose death in 1982 gave rise to Fahd's reign). Still, the "rules" of succession are notoriously vague, particularly as one tries to envision how the monarchy would eventually make the jump from the sons of Abdul Aziz to his grandsons. "...[O]f all Saudi decisions that interest U.S. policymakers, perhaps the least is known about the process of succession."[20]

To their credit, in the relatively short time span since Saudi Arabia's independence was established, the Al Saud family has overcome several potential difficulties in succession determination. These trials and triumphs are highlighted by the premature removal of King Saud (Faisal assumed the throne due to the family's perception of

Saud's inability to discharge his duties properly) and Khalid's accession (following the assassination of King Faisal by a nephew).

While the transfer of the crown has historically been characterized by an outwardly smooth transition to the heir apparent, future heirs face some new challenges in terms of adjusting to potentially quick successions and eventually making the "leap of faith" to Abdul Aziz's grandsons. Plus, the previous "smoothness" of power transferal is likely a façade that masks inter-family rivalries, some of which are fierce and enduring.[21] These rivalries will surely surface, behind the scenes, as future successions are arbitrated.

Notes

[1] James Bruce, "Struggling with the Reins of the Reign," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2 (10 July 1996): 23.

[2] Simon Henderson, *After King Fahd: Succession in Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994), xiii.

[3] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 21.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Henderson, xiv.

[6] Ibid., 1.

[7] Ibid., 25.

[8] Ibid., xiii.

[9] Alexander Bligh, *From Prince to King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1984), 6.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Henderson, 55.

[13] Sandra Mackey, *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom* (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 201.

[14] David Silverberg, "New Winds from the Desert," *Armed Forces Journal International,* March 1996, 15.

[15] Henderson, xiv.

[16] Ibid., 27.

[17] Judith S. Yaphe, "Saudi Arabia: Uncertain Stability," *National Defense University Strategic Forum,* no. 125, July 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 January 1998, available from http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/strforum/forum125.html.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Henderson, 25.

[20] Ibid., xi.

[21] Ibid., xiv.

Chapter 3

The "House" and the "Winds"

> *If the Arabian princes abuse their power, they are quickly punished by the desertion of their subjects, who had been accustomed to a mild and parental jurisdiction. Their spirit is free, their steps are unconfined, the desert is open, and the tribes and families are held together by a mutual and voluntary compact.*
>
> —Edward Gibbon, Esq.
> *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Various authors have predicted the demise of the House of Saud over the years,[1] yet the House remains. Ancestors of the Al Saud family have ruled in the region that is now Saudi Arabia for over 250 years, with only brief interruptions (interestingly, due largely to family rivalries).[2] To say that the royal family has been prolific would be a colossal understatement, as the clan entails at least 20,000 members by most estimates.[3] It was no accident that the nation was named *Saudi* Arabia (translated "Arabia of the Sauds")[4] – to be ruled by another family or a different form of government would be a fundamental change for the Kingdom's inhabitants.

Nevertheless, there are pockets of dissent that would welcome such a change. Although *unlikely* to occur during the next ten years, *the possibility exists*. Moreover, the factors which could lead to such a situation are accumulating at a rate that begs serious attention from the Saudi royals if they wish to obstruct such a contingency.

The ruling establishment, as it exists today in Saudi Arabia, is opposed by numerous factions within its borders. Though too numerous to name individually, there are two general schools of thought that are representative of the main sources of opposition: "the liberals of the young, largely Western-educated generation who seek democratic reform; and the religious Muslim establishment that is demanding stricter adherence to Islamic religious law, and turning away from Western influence..."[5] There are some commonalities between the two–each would like to see the royal family relinquish some or all of its power (while promoting its *own* influence), each would continue to embrace Islamic teachings, and each would likely insist on less, if any, U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia.

The Modernists

The first source of opposition to the Saudi ruling family is the one most easily understood by the Western audience; that is, those who wish for a more participative form of government. Those who have lived under Saudi rule have traditionally been accustomed to a surprisingly personal relationship with the royal family. However, with steadily growing population and more complicated problems, the government is now handling grievances in a more impersonal and bureaucratic fashion.[6]

Although perceptions of royal greed and corruption are nothing new to the kingdom, the family could previously afford to co-opt the support of the populace via numerous benefits from the government. In recent years, the Saudis have faced deficits caused by the erosion of oil revenues, forcing some tough decisions between cutting some "freebies" such as health care and education (this would not be a popular decision) or allowing deficits to continue.[7] While the royal family continues to absorb a

disproportionately large percentage of the nation's income, other members of society are experiencing unemployment and lower incomes.[8] With population growth expected to continue to outpace any feasible revenue increase, the Saudis will continue to face difficult fiscal choices.[9] Such economic difficulties, combined with the perception of a governing body which still enjoys fabulous wealth, have a way of making a populace want more representation in its governance.

The most visible form of royal recognition of the problem was exhibited in 1992 by King Fahd's establishing the *Majlis Al-Shura,* or consultative council. Although not unprecedented (King Abdul Aziz had a smaller version of the same concept), the formation of the council is a clear indicator of the Kingdom's desire to accommodate the ever-increasing public desire for more participation in government. The council is appointed by the royal family and is an "advisory" rather than a law-making body and is not considered to be representative of the public at large (e.g. the "radical Islamic element" is rather conspicuously under-represented).[10]

One may view these developments more than one way. On one hand, it shows a King simply responding to the desires of his subjects. On the other hand, it may demonstrate the monarchy's serious concern over the potential implications of public dissatisfaction with the royal family. Viewed in a broader sense, it might also be seen as an overall trend toward even more public participation in government.[11] The consultative council is seen by many Saudis as the beginning of a long but gradual "process of broadening participation," which could very well expand to lower levels of government, such as provinces and cities.[12] "The *Majlis Al-Shura* may not mark a shift towards a Western-style representative democracy, but it does mark significant change towards

broadening the base of power in Saudi Arabia."[13] It would likely take the form of an insidious "changing of the guard," whereas the Saudi middle-class and relatively junior princes (those not in line for the throne) would gradually exert more influence over policy.

The Islamists

The second form of opposition, and the more difficult to understand for the average Westerner, is Islamist. Dissent springs forth from a multitude of sources and surfaces in many forms with regard to the Islamist position. In general, they point to the perceived decadence of the absurdly wealthy royal family and those individual family members reported to habitually stray from the mandates of Islam. Additionally, many Muslims feel that the monarchical establishment is not consistent with the teachings of Islam. Any country in the region with hegemonic desires might be inclined to stir up trouble for the House of Saud through the indigenous Saudi extremists. Iran is probably the most significant of the external fundamentalist catalysts, but the degree to which its influence threatens the Al Saud regime is unknown.

The Al Saud family has always maintained that all devices employed in the governing of Saudi Arabia are in keeping with the teachings of Islam. Moreover, the Saudi royal family has consistently kept a very close relationship with the *ulema,* the highest of the Islamic clergy in the Kingdom (note: the *ulema* are *not Islamist*). Any Islamist group wishing to forcibly wrestle power from the hands of the Al Saud regime would have to enlist the support of the military.[14] Few consider this likely, but few forecasted the shah's demise in Iran in 1979. "Today, Saudi Arabia is increasingly resembling the shah's Iran. The parallels are many: the ruling family is perceived as

being corrupt and tied to the United States, foreign policy is pegged to a strong American presence in the Gulf, with indirect ties to Israel; and oil policies are not based on national considerations."[15]

However, Saudi Arabia has an advantage that Iran did not – it has the example of the Shah's demise from which to learn and avoid. The likelihood of an actual regime change in Saudi Arabia within the next ten years is extremely remote: "Saudi Arabia's big test of stability will only come after decades of gradual social transformation. Meanwhile, government institutions and legitimacy remains (sic) strong and knows (sic) how to distribute assets to maintain the population's loyalty. Opposition is weak, divided, underground, and mostly exiled."[16] It is still important to consider the forces at play which could eventually lead to such a change, because the Saudi royalty is aware of them and is likely to continue making incremental concessions to forestall becoming another Iran. "Far more probable than a change of regime, or even a change of basic foreign and domestic politics, is a change of style as a new generation of Al Sauds replaces the older generation."[17]

Notes

[1] David E. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1997), 130.

[2] Simon Henderson, *After King Fahd: Succession in Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994), 2.

[3] David Silverberg, "New Winds from the Desert," *Armed Forces Journal*, March 1996, 15.

[4] Sandra Mackey, *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 196.

[5] James Bruce, "Struggling with the Reins of the Reign," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2 (10 July 1996): 26.

[6] Long, 130.

[7] Eliyahu Kanovsky, "The Middle East Economies: The Impact of Domestic and International Politics," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2 (July 1997), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 4 March 1998, available from

Notes

https://wwwc.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797_kanovsky.html.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Kenneth Katzman, "Persian Gulf: Political Reform and U.S. Policy in Four Key States," *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Report Service, 25 February 1994), 7.

[11] Ibid., 4.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 29.

[14] Long, 130.

[15] Douglas F. Graham and Peter W. Wilson, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994), 268.

[16] Barry Rubin, "The Politics of the New Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3 (September 1997), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 4 March 1998, available from https://wwwc.cc.columbia.deu/sec/dlc/ciao/alj/meria/meria997_rubin.html.

[17] Long, 131.

Chapter 4

Our "Castles" in the Kingdom

When assessing the U.S. military instrument of power in a theater of operations, it is helpful to first consider our stated interests there. The National Security Strategy (NSS) reveals several reasons for our continued interest and presence in the Southwest Asia Region. Reducing the threat of "rogue states" with hegemonic desires stands out,[1] and we clearly are interested in the continued flow of oil at reasonable prices.[2] Additionally, the United States is committed to enforcing United Nations resolutions, namely the southern No-Fly Zone via Operation Southern Watch (OSW).

U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) is charged with fulfilling the military end of our objectives in Southwest Asia (SWA). USCENTCOM discharges its duties in accordance with our National Military Strategy and guidance from the National Command Authority via the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "USCENTCOM supports U.S. and free-world interests by assuring access to Mideast oil resources, helping friendly regional states maintain their own security and collective defense, maintaining an effective and visible U.S. military presence in the region, deterring threats by hostile regional states and projecting U.S. military force into the region, if necessary."[3]

USCENTCOM maintains an average of about 20,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines *in theater* at any given time, occasionally boosting these numbers during crises. *In Saudi Arabia,* the preponderance of USCENTCOM's effort (approximately 6,000 personnel) may be categorized as represented by three primary entities: command and control, land-based airpower, and security assistance to Saudi Arabia.

Command and Control

Joint Task Force – Southwest Asia (JTF-SWA) executes command and control over all airpower in the region employed toward the No-Fly Zone. CENTCOM's Commander-in-Chief (CINCCENT) assigns JTF-SWA the duty of conducting joint and combined operations in theater to support U.N. resolutions (i.e. patrolling the Southern No-Fly Zone in Iraq).[4] JTF-SWA is headquartered near Riyadh, in the heart of Saudi Arabia.

JTF-SWA's command and control involves U.S., British, French and Saudi forces working together to ensure Iraq complies with U.N. Security Council resolutions, which prohibit most Iraqi military activity south of the 33d parallel. Although specifically designed by the United Nations to protect the Shiites in southern Iraq from Iraqi aggression after the Gulf War, there are benefits that go beyond that stated purpose, as the no-fly zone provides a substantial buffer against another Iraqi invasion attempt aimed south.[5] The No-Fly Zone also lends legitimacy to our desire to maintain an ongoing presence in Saudi Arabia. In addition to the 4404th Wing discussed in the following paragraph, JTF-SWA regularly utilizes naval airpower from the Persian Gulf, plus Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) airpower when it's available. Jordon, Bahrain, and Qatar have each hosted U.S. AEFs over the course of the last three years.

Land-Based Airpower

The 4404th Wing (Provisional) is the land-based airpower part of the equation. It is aggregated at Prince Sultan Air Base (well south of Riyadh), comprised mainly of U.S. Air Force assets, which complement our naval forces in accomplishing JTF-SWA's mission.[6] Although not at *permanent* U.S. bases, the United States has maintained a *continuous* airpower presence in Saudi Arabia at various locations ever since the end of the Gulf War. The entire establishment (over 4,000 personnel) now operates from Prince Sultan Air Base, consolidated to this rather isolated (and therefore defendable) base as a result of terrorist bombings in 1995 and 1996 which claimed 24 American lives. The Wing maintains round the clock patrol in the No-Fly Zone and stands ready to engage in offensive operations if called upon.

Security Assistance to Saudi Arabia

Security Assistance takes several forms in Saudi Arabia, including the United States Military Training Mission (USMTM), which performs advisory functions for the Saudi active forces, and the Office of Program Management – Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG). These U.S. agencies conduct ongoing training and exercises for selected portions of Saudi active and national guard components, particularly those with high-tech military equipment of western origin (i.e. AWACS, F-15s, Abrams tanks, etc...). Security Assistance enjoys the longest of our ongoing military relationships with the Saudis by a large margin and is likely seen as the least intrusive aspect of our military presence, because it directly enhances the Saudi organic military capability.

Relative Importance of the Saudi-Based Entities

Importance of Command and Control

JTF-SWA has a rather sizeable mission in enforcing the no-fly zone – well over 85,000 sorties have been flown over southern Iraq *since* the Gulf War.[7] Such activity doesn't necessarily *require* an in-place operations center with years of tenancy, but it certainly helps, especially given the communications and personnel requirements of a sustained joint and combined operation. Additionally, the infrastructure from which to build a wartime joint/combined operations center is a luxury that we obviously cherish.

Importance of Land-based Airpower

Although it is possible to conduct OSW operations without access to Saudi Arabia, our land-based airpower assets at Prince Sultan Air Base perform with a degree of sustainability and freedom of action that would be impossible to duplicate with only naval aviation, primarily due to the range from the Persian Gulf to the western portions of Iraq. Should Saudi basing ever be denied, the U.S. would require access to other countries to maintain the *status quo* even during peacetime, and wartime sortie rates would present a problem of large proportions.

Importance of Security Assistance

USCENTCOM puts great emphasis on the sort of security assistance afforded Saudi Arabia presently. The Kingdom is clearly the *de facto* leader of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and we go to great lengths to emphasize the importance of stepping up the combined capabilities of these states to defend themselves against aggression. The synergy gained by offering Saudi Arabia the best training available to

accompany their western arms purchases is not to be taken lightly, as Saudi Arabia is the GCC's greatest power – the entire region's security and stability are dependent on the Kingdom.[8] Although few are given to considering the GCC states capable of defending against a major aggressor presently, all recognize that the day will likely never come without some form of outside assistance along the way. Right now, the U.S. constitutes the vast majority of such facilitation in Saudi Arabia.

Notes

[1] White House, *National Security Strategy for a New Century,* May 1997, 27.

[2] Ibid., 26.

[3] "U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)," *Department of Defense Factfile*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 January 1998, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/factfile/chapter1/centcom.html.

[4] Barbara Starr, "Bombing Makes Hard Role Harder for USA," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2 (10 July 1996): 29.

[5] "Continuing Challenges...Evolving Threats...Improving Posture," *1997 U.S. Central Command Posture Statement,* n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 January 1998, available from http://www.centcom.mil/97posture.html.

[6] Gen J.H. Binford Peah, III, "The Five Pillars of Peace in the Central Region," *Joint Forces Quarterly,* Autumn 1995, 35.

[7] "Continuing Challenges...".

[8] Turki al-Hamad, "Imperfect Alliances: Will Gulf Monarchies Work Together?," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2 (July 1997), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 4 March 1998, available from https://wwwc.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797_alhamad.html.

Chapter 5

Possibilities for Succession and Operational Concerns

...[A] sneeze in the Arabian desert can blow a hot wind through Washington.

—David Silverberg
Armed Forces Journal International "Middle East Watch"

The United States has enjoyed a singularly splendid relationship with Fahd since he was King Khalid's Crown Prince in the 1970s. The fruits of this relationship are plentiful: consistently reasonable oil prices, robust foreign military sales and security assistance to Saudi Arabia, full access to Saudi infrastructure for the Gulf War, and "non-permanent" but ongoing access to selected Saudi air bases ever since the Gulf War. However, King Fahd will not rule forever—succession will occur. The following scenarios are representative of the most commonly accepted eventualities for the Saudi government, listed in order of likelihood and accompanied by the associated operational considerations for the United States.

Scenario 1: Smooth transition(s) from the King to Crown Prince

The smooth transition of power from King Fahd to Crown Prince Abdullah, although far from guaranteed, seems quite probable. Though their ages are close together, Abdullah's health is considered superior to Fahd's, so the odds are with Abdullah surviving Fahd.[1] Additionally, with Fahd's widely publicized precarious medical

condition in 1995/96 (most say it was a stroke), Abdullah already demonstrated he can take the helm without eliciting dramatic overt opposition. Though never relinquishing *power* during his convalescence, Fahd did relinquish *control* to Abdullah for several weeks.[2]

So the question becomes, then, how would Abdullah's reign differ from Fahd's in terms of U.S. operational considerations in Saudi Arabia? Abdullah is widely considered to be more conservative than King Fahd, notably by the *ulema.* By the standards of the Al Saud family, he is regarded as particularly devout.[3] For instance, he takes his vacations to Morocco rather that to Western locales and enjoys a reputation relatively free of the "decadence" attributed to some other Al Sauds. As such, he is also reportedly less "pro-Western" and more suspicious of American intentions than many of his brothers.[4] At first glance this might imply a reluctance to extend access to Saudi infrastructure for American troops/equipment. However, a contrary view might hold that his favorable status with the *ulema* would allow him to continue Fahd's tolerance of foreign presence with less fear of repercussions from the religious elite or the populace.[5]

The author holds that Abdullah, if afforded the opportunity, would be *inclined* to continue most, if not all, aspects of the unwritten understanding between Saudi Arabia and the United States. However, it is not uncommon for deals to be made within the Al Saud family to ensure consensus, especially when determining allegiance to a potential new King. It's not inconceivable that some Western presence could be bargained away during Abdullah's quest for consensus in support of his accession. Even more likely is for the U.S. to find Abdullah too sensitive to the plight of the Iraqi people to allow the punitive airstrikes we occasionally favor when dealing with Saddam Hussein.[6]

To preserve a semblance of the current power relationships, Abdullah would most likely need to select as his heir apparent Prince Sultan, currently second deputy prime minister (presumably third in line for the throne) and Minister of Defense and Aviation. This would satisfy numerous criteria for maintaining the *status quo*, and would therefore tend to favor a continued U.S. presence. Sultan could maintain control of Defense and Aviation, preserving the power balance with the Saudi National Guard; therefore, the remaining five other Sudeiri brothers would be unlikely to exhibit opposition.

Operationally, then, in the short-term, the United States should find its interest in maintaining the *status quo,* with respect to everyday access to Saudi Arabia, well-served by Abdullah's accession, assuming he chooses Sultan as Crown Prince.[7] However, it seems unlikely that we would be able to increase our presence or gain a "permanent" foothold on Saudi soil, even if we were to request it. Almost certainly, Abdullah would be likely to maintain or accelerate Fahd's legacy of reluctance to support unilateral or combined strikes against Iraq. There is also no way to predict how long Abdullah's reign would last, and it is unlikely that Sultan (or any other contender for the throne) would be any more inclined than Abdullah to support U.S. endeavors of that nature.

One must also keep in mind that no succession decision will yield unanimous support, as the grandsons of Abdul Aziz would be less than enthused to see such a continuation of the current establishment (they are said to constantly discuss their future assumption of the throne, obviously encouraged by Fahd's 1992 decree). Therefore, of almost equal importance to decisions of succession would be the extent to which the more junior princes are granted power in the Saudi system, determining who will command the national guard (after Abdullah), selection of second deputy prime minister

(to follow Sultan), and the role of the *Majlis Al-Shura* under the reign of Fahd's successor(s).

Scenario 2: Gradual trend toward more participative government

This scenario is not at odds with scenario number one; rather, it is a likely follow-on to it (as younger princes and the populace are gradually afforded more power). The trend toward a more participative government should increase as a function of the number of successions the in the Al Saud family—an unknown factor. As mentioned in above paragraphs, there are more facets of succession to King Fahd than just the selection of the new King and Crown Prince. Historically, western observers are not privy to the internal workings that surround such a process, but it is widely recognized that within the royal family are endless struggles for power. What may seem like vague nuances to the outside observer, such as which princes get to sit on a particular advisory council, may have deep meaning to those who live within the system. The Saudi royal family has established a tradition of making decisions based on consensus whenever it's considered feasible by the King. If one looks at the way the Saudis conduct their affairs, it becomes obvious that the decisions made by a King are often less important that the way the King decides *how decisions will be made.* It's this trait which implies that the extent to which Abdullah extends participation to the next generation of Al Sauds, combined with the level of power he would grant the *Majlis Al-shura,* will have a lasting effect on U.S. operations in Saudi.

At the macro level, there are numerous indicators that over time Saudi leaders will experience ever increasing pressure to extend influence to lesser members of the royal family and to the public at large. King Fahd's resurrection and expansion of the *Majlis*

Al-Shura has cracked open a door for public involvement in government that, once opened, would be hard to "close." Saudi Arabia's increasingly meager excess wealth (when compared to the 1970s and 1980s), plus an expanding movement toward more fiscal and religious accountability for the royal family, will likely pressure future Kings toward a more participatory form of rule.

One should not expect to see a fully "democratic" (by Western standards) Saudi government in the ten years covered by this paper, yet even seemingly small leanings toward the sharing of power can have dramatic implications for foreign military presence on Saudi soil. By individually looking at two of the macro-level forces that foreshadow this sharing of power, economics and religion, one is left with the impression that the United States may face uncertainty with respect to continued presence on Saudi soil.

On one hand, those who are concerned for Saudi Arabia's financial future are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the expense of keeping Americans in country. Though generally appreciative of the U.S. effort to free Kuwait during the Gulf War, the average Saudi's enthusiasm about the ongoing expense of foreign military presence wanes with the passing of each day that places Iraq's aggression further in the past.[8] From the religious perspective, the presence of Western military personnel is viewed with varying degrees of disdain from all members of the Islamic clergy—from the *ulema* which represents the Al Saud religious legitimacy to the Islamic fundamentalists which loom outside Saudi Arabia and less visibly, but always present, *within* in the desert Kingdom. In light of the possibility of power-sharing, one senses a gradual trend toward lessening Western presence in Saudi Arabia and a definite reluctance to support Western-inspired offensive operations.[9]

Scenario 3: Overthrow of the Al Saud Regime

Although *unlikely* to occur in the next ten years, the United States must consider the possibility of an ouster of the Al Saud regime, due to the steady crescendo of forces which could eventually lead to such an occurrence, plus the almost certain operational dilemma that the U.S. would face. Some of the forces at play which might lead to such an overthrow have already been addressed. Only a militant Islamist extremist force could muster the combination of fervor, will, and resources to create such a coup in the next ten years.[10] Predicting the exact situation that could lead to such an ouster is not possible, but the seeds for such an uprising have certainly been planted. One can argue that unless the Saudi royal family takes action to reduce the perception of corruption which surrounds it, while limiting the effects of the trend toward less excess wealth made available to the populace, the seeds will grow. If one is willing to accept that the possibility exists for such an overthrow, then it follows that the ramifications for U.S. military operations in the area are also worthy of consideration.

The operational ramifications are straightforward: the U.S. could expect to be categorically refused access to the Saudi infrastructure if any extremist regime were to assume control of the Saudi government.[11] There is no viable successor regime which even remotely shares the mutuality enjoyed by the U.S. and the Al Sauds.[12] Discussion of whether the United States military would or should be asked to help defend the Al Saud regime against such an uprising is beyond the scope of this project.

Notes

[1] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 24.

[2] Ibid., 25.

Notes

[3] Ibid.

[4] Judith S. Yaphe, "Saudi Arabia: Uncertain Stability," *National Defense University Strategic Forum,* no. 125, July 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 January 1998, available from http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/strforum/forum125.html.

[5] Cordesman, 24.

[6] Yaphe.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] David E. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1997), 130.

[11] Yaphe.

[12] Long, 131.

Chapter 6

Conclusions Regarding U.S. Operational Forces

> *It is always a good idea to test one's underlying assumptions; for conditions in this part of the world can change rapidly and without warning.*
>
> —David E. Long
> *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

In operational terms, the United States is presently faced with an interesting set of challenges in Saudi Arabia, even disregarding the potential difficulties addressed thus far in this project. Enemies abound in the Middle East, some more visible than others. Iran and Iraq's desires for regional hegemony, combined with their propensity for acquiring and/or developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), plus many "friendly" states with less than steady governments make for a region that must be labeled unstable by any definition. The threat of terrorism and a growing Saudi political climate that favors less, rather than more, U.S. military presence add difficulty to accomplishing a rather lofty set of objectives for the Middle East – free flow of oil at reasonable prices, regional stability, limiting the proliferation of WMD, and our underlying desire to promote democratic and economic reform worldwide. Saudi Arabia has become the linchpin of our military endeavors in the region,[1] and rightly so, as the Kingdom is a valued long-term friend and an obvious choice for that important position.

The preceding chapters should serve to highlight potentialities in Saudi Arabia that may eventually lead to difficulties in maintaining our current position in Saudi Arabia. The key point to take from that discussion is that in none of the scenarios would the United States expect to gain any ground toward permanent basing or freedom of action in Saudi Arabia, and we lose ground in most. It stands to reason that, with respect to follow-on leadership in Saudi Arabia, at best we may be able to hang onto our already established position; at worst we could find ourselves with a significantly diminished or negligible opportunity for conducting ongoing operations from within the Kingdom.

One must acknowledge, then, that placing too many "eggs" in the Saudi "basket" comes with some risk and many assumptions which may or may not prove valid. To forego taking advantage of the generous access Saudi Arabia currently provides would be foolhardy, but it may prove expedient to consider some contextual elements which are different in Saudi Arabia today as compared to 1990/91.

There is a growing disconnect between the way the United States and many Arab states view Iraq. Neither is likely to be proven wrong, because the difference lies in what elements each is viewing—many Arabs are increasingly sympathetic to the Iraqi *populace*, while the United States focuses on the Iraqi *leadership*. A concrete example of this difference is evidenced by Saudi Arabia's recent decision (in February 1998) *not* to allow coalition forces to conduct airstrikes against Iraq from Saudi soil. Whether or not the strikes materialize, or whether Saudi Arabia subsequently accommodates the desires of the U.S. and other coalition countries, the point made is this – Saudi Arabia, and not the United States, will decide what offensive action will launch from behind its borders.

One is reminded that even in the opening days of the crisis that led to the Gulf War, the decision to allow Western troops onto Saudi soil was far from a foregone conclusion.

A crucial difference between 1990 and 1998 and beyond is that the United States and coalition countries have no intention of letting masses of Iraqi (or any other) troops arrive unimpeded anywhere near the borders of a GCC state. As noted, our forces in the region remain ready to take offensive action should such an occurrence seem likely. One is left to deduce that we will occasionally find ourselves at variance with the Saudis on *when* the use of decisive force is necessary, particularly after King Fahd's departure.

The obligation, then, in the mean time, is to undertake planning and practice for working around such a dilemma should it arise. At the same time, we obviously don't want to lessen our admirable position in Saudi Arabia by moving forces out unnecessarily. At this point we must consider just what it is that our presence in Saudi Arabia accomplishes that is not, or could not be, fully covered by forces elsewhere in theater.

Security Assistance

Our longest-standing and least visible foreign military presence, security assistance is the least likely of our functions to be invited to depart Saudi Arabia, especially in scenarios 1 and 2 (from Chapter 5). Only in scenario 3 is it unlikely that any security assistance would remain. Since our security assistance is aimed primarily at bolstering Saudi Arabia's self-defense capability (and regional defense in concert with the GCC), our primary operational concern would be the increased vulnerability of our vital national interests and a greater likelihood of our needing to intervene on behalf of GCC states. There is really no way to provide security assistance if it's not desired, but increasing

security assistance to other friendly states in the region might minimize the negative effects.

Command and Control

Command and control is less visible and less expensive to host than land-based airpower. We have already been allowed to maintain the JTF-SWA command and control establishment in Saudi Arabia during periods when we were denied authority to launch offensive strikes, so it stands to reason that command and control might remain on Saudi soil even after more intrusive elements of our military presence are either asked to leave or denied operational employment. Advancing technologies will continue to make command and control "afloat" on naval vessels increasingly practicable if needed. Additionally, CINCCENT has recently announced that we are optimistic about our options for running command and control operations from various non-Saudi land sites in theater: "[O]ne of the things I discussed with several of the countries is should something happen and I needed to move a small forward headquarters in, could I come here? Those that I asked all acknowledged that I could."[2]

Land-Based Airpower

Land-based airpower, with the necessary range to engage anywhere in theater, is our most vulnerable asset to any future denial of access to the Kingdom's facilities. A very promising solution to our dilemma of how to achieve a credible land-based airpower capability outside of Saudi Arabia has already been devised and practiced on several occasions—the Air Expeditionary Force, or AEF. Since 1995, the United States has periodically executed AEFs to various countries in the region (listed previously). The

degree to which CENTCOM takes such adventures seriously for purposes of campaign planning is yet to be determined, but the author holds that such maneuvers in peacetime may well spell the difference between early decisive victory or a prolonged effort during the next serious encounter, particularly if full Saudi support is denied or in question at the outset. Similar logic holds for scenarios from Chapter 5 should the U.S. find itself displaced from Saudi soil *already*.

Since the days of the Cold War, the United States has made a transition from a primarily "forward-based presence to one built on the vision of global engagement."[3] Additionally, the armed forces are necessarily compelled to look for synergistic effects in all that we do—not just because it is a tenet of the operational art, but also because of frugality dictated by a dwindling DOD budget. The concept of the AEF is particularly appropriate to the theater in question because of our proven predisposition toward airpower as the military tool of choice for smaller scale contingencies in the Persian Gulf. AEFs have typically been comprised of 34 to 40 various aircraft, primarily fighters, but by definition are "tailored to meet specific needs and theater threats."[4] In fact, the AEF currently in Bahrain includes Air Force B-1 bombers.

When discussing the use of airpower, it no longer suffices to think of it only in terms of large-scale war. Upon looking at our mission in Southwest Asia, it is obvious that our forces are normally engaged in what has been termed "military operations other that war," or MOOTW (OSW would be considered "enforcement of an exclusion zone," a MOOTW operation by joint definition).[5] At the same time, we are prepared to escalate our activities to the extent necessary, including large-scale war, to protect our numerous vital interests in theater. Obviously, we would like to utilize all means available to keep

any conflict at the lowest level possible, and it's clear that it is our land-based airpower that would be affected most noticeably should Saudi access be denied/diminished. It follows that we must be prepared to accomplish the entire spectrum of anticipated airpower employment without assuming full access to Saudi Arabia.

The day-to-day MOOTW operations (primarily OSW) currently underway would be the easiest to accomplish from outside Saudi Arabia, but would require added effort. Whether deployed to Jordan (adjacent Iraq) or as far away as Qatar, AEFs have already been utilized to conduct OSW operations during periods when we have had no carrier in the Gulf. They have also augmented carrier operations—we have demonstrated the capability to maintain the OSW mission, with the joint effort of carrier-based and AEF airpower, during periods in which little or no operations were conducted from Saudi Arabia (e.g. during 4404th Wing "down days").

During periods of crisis, another aspect of MOOTW operations may include conducting punitive airstrikes (accomplishing the MOOTW "strike or raid" type of operation).[6] Preparation for such an operation is presently underway and is coincidentally taking place under the assumption that Saudi Arabia will not permit such strikes from its soil. An AEF is currently in place in Bahrain, presumably to offer exactly the kind of land-based, sustainable airpower with the necessary reach to fulfill all requirements for such an undertaking (working in concert with a beefed-up naval presence and other non-Saudi land-based airpower in theater). This has the potential to be the most visible and aggressive use of the AEF to date; however, each previous AEF deployed to the Persian Gulf region has also been sent with legitimate operational requirements.[7]

The next test for the AEF concept would apply airpower as the primary force to stop an actual enemy offensive action. The idea of using airpower to thwart an offensive operation is not new, and in fact has already been tested against the Iraqis at the Battle of Khafji in 1991 with splendid results.[8] The difference, next time, may well be that we don't initially have authority to employ airpower from Saudi Arabia to accomplish such an intervention. Should this become necessary, the AEF's true colors will shine or fade, depending upon the level of trust placed in the concept.

If such an enemy offensive action were to quickly unfold, the AEF concept could be applied to its fullest degree to "blunt an enemy attack."[9] We could find ourselves needing to protect vital interests in the region almost immediately, but with Saudi-based airpower denied offensive capability (scenarios 1 or 2), which would be as bad operationally as having no forces in Saudi Arabia at all (scenario 3). Additional naval forces could take a week or more to arrive in place. "The goal of the AEF is to launch combat sorties in-theater 48 hours after an execute order is issued and then sustain combat airpower for the duration of the conflict or crisis."[10]

The last case for discussion involves the possibility of a large-scale war. In scenarios 1 and 2, we could expect to be allowed into Saudi Arabia with air and ground forces, once the Saudis felt sufficiently threatened. However, in scenario 3, it's still possible that the United States might want to deny an opposing force access to GCC oil without the blessing of the Saudi government. In this case, the AEFs might provide a "foot in the door" for entry of other forces necessary to deter or repel an invasion. Against an Iraqi threat, this task would be difficult to accomplish since Jordan, Kuwait and Turkey are the only "friendly" countries that would not require transit of Saudi Arabia for employment

of ground troops. Still, the idea of folding the AEFs into the air portion of the campaign would prove not only useful, but necessary.

The ten-year period under discussion will take us close to the timeframe envisioned in Joint Vision 2010 (JV 2010). An important aspect of the AEF is that it encompasses all of the operational concepts forwarded in that document, and it has the added benefit of being useful, operationally, in the meantime.[11] "Together with other forces, the AEF provides capabilities across the full range of military operations."[12] Placed in the context of the Persian Gulf, it also has the synergistic effect of providing positive reinforcement of U.S. relations with countries hosting AEF deployments.[13]

Operationally, peacetime AEF deployments establish the necessary infrastructure for short-notice crisis response. Further, they necessarily test the command and control relationships that would be challenged by AEF employment in times of crisis, particularly useful should command and control be displaced from Saudi Arabia in the future.

The already proven capability of the AEF has been touted as a demonstration of our ability to respond to crises in the Persian Gulf in a very short amount of time. Should any of the succession scenarios previously discussed result in a diminished presence in Saudi Arabia, the AEF offers a very flexible deterrent/employment option throughout the anticipated spectrum of conflict. It reflects the doctrinal principles of both MOOTW and large-scale war, and it fits perfectly into the framework of JV 2010. More specifically, it has already been shown to actually work in the theater of operations considered in this project.

Notes

[1] James Bruce, "Struggling with the Reins of the Reign," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 2 (10 July 1996): 23.

[2] Gen Anthony Zinni, CINCCENT, interviewed by Mr. Bacon, "DOD News Briefing," 26 November 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 7 January 1998, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1997/t12021997_t126znni.html.

[3] Brig Gen William R. Looney, III, "The Air Expeditionary Force: Taking the Air Force into the Twenty-first Century," *Air Chronicles,* Winter 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 7 January 1998, available from http://www.cdsar.af.mil/apj/win96/looney.html.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Joint Publication (JP) 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War,* 16 June 1995, III-4.

[6] Ibid., III-15.

[7] Lt Col Sheryl Giusto Atkins, "The Air Expeditionary Force: What You Need, When You Need It," Research Report (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 1997), 3.

[8] Michael R. Gordon and Gen Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War* (Boston, New York, Toronto and London: Little, Brown & Company, 1995), 287.

[9] Lt Col John A. Neubauer, "Air Expeditionary Forces: Providing Operational Alternatives," Research Report (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 1996), 8.

[10] Looney.

[11] Atkins, 13.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Looney.

Chapter 7

Summary

In effect, our present policy seems to be premised upon King Fahd's living forever, remaining firmly in control of Saudi oil policy, and remaining benign, while the existing stability in the political-military balance in the Persian Gulf continues for the indefinite future.

—former U.S. Energy Secretary James Schlesinger

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains one of the United States' most trusted stalwarts in the Arab Middle East.[1] The partnership has flourished in degrees ranging from detached friendship to comrades in arms. Regional crises have been addressed over the years with a spirit of cooperation than can only be harnessed through mutual respect and shared interests. In times of internal unrest and family discord, the Al Sauds have shown a consistent ability to co-opt opposition and unite disgruntled family members.[2] There is no historical foundation for predicting that the Saudi royal family cannot cope with its upcoming challenges, as they remain after more that 250 years that have witnessed a land transformed from an arid wasteland to a mesmerizing blend of twentieth century technology and desert heritage.

However, there is also no historical precedent for the almost certain challenges of days to come. Rapid successions and/or threats to the Al Saud regime itself loom in the not-too-distant future. Even the world's single remaining superpower has virtually no influence when it comes to succession to the Saudi throne.[3] Benevolence toward our

friends in the desert predisposes us to wish for smooth changes in the Kingdom, but prudence dictates preparing for uncertain operational privileges.

Clearly, we want to maintain our presence in Saudi Arabia—the benefits of our command and control, land-based airpower, and security assistance there are substantial and well-founded. However, we should continually test our theater-wide freedom of action through such endeavors as Air Expeditionary Forces. Such activities foster operational relationships with other nations, hone our ability to deploy/employ land-based airpower (with the associated command and control), and hedge against our susceptibility to future operational limitations imposed under the rule of King Fahd's successors.

Our vital national interests in the Persian Gulf will remain relatively constant, and our operational forces will doubtlessly be called upon as the guarantors of these interests, but subject to more and more constraints in Saudi Arabia. It is hard to imagine potential new Kings vying for the requisite family and *ulema* consensus based on a platform of *more* Western military presence or influence. As new monarchs respond to family, clergy, and subjects' desires and as Saudi Arabia's government evolves, our freedom to act from Saudi soil will almost certainly be diminished and our very presence threatened.

Notes

[1] Judith S. Yaphe, "Saudi Arabia: Uncertain Stability," *National Defense University Strategic Forum,* Number 125, July 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 January 1998, available from http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/strforum/forum125.html.

[2] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 21.

[3] Simon Henderson, *After King Fahd: Succession in Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994), xiv.

Glossary

Abdul Aziz. The first King of modern-day Saudi Arabia and the father of each subsequent King to date. Also known as ibn Saud.

Abdullah. Current Crown Prince, First Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of the Saudi Arabian National Guard. King Fahd's half-brother.

Al Saud. The family name of the ruling family in Saudi Arabia, including every Saudi listed by name in this paper.

Fahd. The fifth (and current) King of Saudi Arabia and current Prime Minister. Khalid's successor.

Faisal. Third Saudi King (Saud's successor).

Khalid. Fourth Saudi King (Faisal's successor).

Majlis Al-Shura. The "consultative council" which is appointed by and gives advice to King Fahd. Established by King Fahd in 1992, this is a current (and expanded) version of a similar council established under Abdul Aziz.

Saud. Second King of Saudi Arabia. Abdul Aziz's successor.

Sultan. Current Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Aviation. King Fahd's full brother and currently assumed to be third in line to the throne.

Ulema. Saudi Arabia's highest officially recognized Islamic clergy.

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