

King Faisal Ibn Abdul Aziz Al Saud in the Arena of World Politics: A Glimpse from Washington, 1950 to 1971

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ABSTRACT *This paper aims to draw a portrait of King Faisal, as it emerges from the records of the various presidential administrations of the USA. The records which were available to me usually originate from the encounters of the heads of state and their ministers on the occasion of official visits. Despite ceremonial protocol and diplomatic courteousness, the encounters always also had a personal touch of character and emotion. Therefore we do not simply look at the portrait through an American mirror. No doubt, the documents at hand do contain specific perceptions of King Faisal and of Saudi society by the various administrations in Washington. On the other hand, the mere fact of the King's physical presence and verbal performance in those encounters brings authenticity to the fore. Because of the fairly wide range of topics on the political agenda of such state visits, the portrait sheds light on King Faisal's personality, public appearance and sense of humour, on his statesmanship as well as on his diplomacy and commitments in the arena of Middle Eastern politics and of international relations at large. Since it seems to me that the year 1966 is of particular significance for an assessment of King Faisal's political legacy in the Middle Eastern arena, I have depicted his visit in Washington and meeting with President L.B. Johnson in June of that year for a more comprehensive treatment. In contrast, Faisal's personal encounters with Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and later on—twice—with Richard Nixon are dealt with more cursorily.¹*

Prince Faisal's diplomatic career and his encounter with the Truman Administration, March 1950

When, in 1945, Faisal, as Minister of Foreign Affairs at the age of about 39, represented his country at the founding conference of the United Nations in San

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¹ The sources for this paper were not really collected in any systematic fashion. Rather, they came my way in the course of a research project with a different, although related topic (see Helmut Mejcher, *Sinai, 5 giugno 1967. Il conflitto arabo-israeliano* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2000). On the other hand, it is not a random collection either. As I said before, the documents focus on the diplomatic highlights of official visits of the King and Crown Prince in Washington.

Francisco, he was one of the very few surviving attendants from the Versailles Peace Conference at the end of World War I.² At a very young age he had been chosen by his father, the great King Abdul Aziz, to be the Kingdom's foreign affairs expert. His appointment in 1926 as viceroy in the Hejaz with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina and the commercial and diplomatic capital of Jidda catapulted the young prince onto the international stage. Six years later his father appointed him Minister of Foreign Affairs. Prince Faisal immediately set out on a tour of European capitals. In Berlin, Bern, Den Haag, London, Moscow and Paris he negotiated, against all odds of the time, for commercial and financial agreements to bolster the newly founded kingdom.³

In 1934 Prince Faisal successfully commanded the campaign against Yemen. On the eve of the Second World War, in 1939, he attended the Palestine Conference in London. At the end of the war he headed the Saudi Delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco and to some of its ensuing sessions in New York. There he also came to experience the unsavoury sides of fanatical pressure politics, when he was spat at by Zionist campaigners or when Mayor Lindsay called off an invitation fearing that he might otherwise lose Jewish votes.⁴

When, in March 1950, George C. McGhee, Assistant Secretary of State—and the highest ranking American official ever to have visited Saudi Arabia so far⁵—arrived at Riyadh for extensive talks on bi-lateral, domestic and regional security issues, Faisal stressed the Saudi requirements for enhancing stability against the volatile regions on the eastern and northern borders. He emphasised the Saudi resolve to support Syria's independence against any encroachments from the Hashemites in Baghdad and Amman. With reference to Israel Faisal did not beat about the bush when it came to his expectations from Washington: no financial assistance to Israel and 'any assistance which the United States could render to enforce the resolutions of the United Nations'.⁶

Judging from the records of these talks McGhee's regret about America's failure to bring Israel into line with the UN-resolutions appears somewhat hypocritical, since he had at the same time tried to find out whether Saudi Arabia would not be able to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.⁷ Furthermore, he expressed Washington's desire that Riyadh should exert a moderating influence on the Arab League.

King Abdul Aziz stubbornly explored the possibility of an American military

² (Morgan/Koch) Fact Sheet: Official Visit of King Faisal. May 26, 1971. National Archives Maryland. Nixon Project.

³ Helmut Mejcher, 'Saudi Arabia's Relationship With Germany Under King 'Abd Al-'Aziz', *ad-Dara*, 12/2 (1407/1986), p. 8.

⁴ David Holden and Richard Johns, *The House of Saud* (London: Pan Books, 1982), p. 247.

⁵ Visit to Saudi Arabia of Assistant Secretary The Honorable George McGhee. Report by J.R.Childs/ah 3/30/50. Jidda 153 April 3, 1950. Department of State. Truman Library (Independence/Missouri) 110.15 MC/4-350 File.

⁶ United States-Saudi Arabian Relations. Drafted at American Embassy, Jidda, March 19, 1950, p. 13. McGhee Papers Box 2. Truman Library.

⁷ Summary of Conversation between the Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. McGhee, and His Majesty King Saud of Saudi Arabia, p. 2. Attachment to Memo from McGhee to Mr. Webb, May 8, 1950. 611.86A/5-850. McGhee Papers Box 2. Truman Library. The passage of concern here reads: 'In the course of a discussion of Saudi Arabia's influence in the Arab League, Sheikh Yusuf Yassin, the Foreign Minister, assured Mr. McGhee that Saudi Arabia would attempt to exert a stabilizing influence on the League and particularly on Syria with whom Saudi Arabia had special relations, implied Saudi Arabian cooperation with the carrying out of the Clapp program, but reacted negatively to the question of re-establishment (sic!) of normal relations with Israel.'

guarantee of Saudi Arabia's security. But on this point McGhee was rather evasive. While emphasising that 'the United States was deeply concerned with the security of Saudi Arabia and would take most immediate action at any time that the integrity and independence of Saudi Arabia was threatened',⁸ he made the reservation that the resources of the United States were not unlimited. He neither specified what such action would be, nor held out any hope for the desired military guarantee. To be sure, there were constitutional reasons for the White House not to prejudice the prerogatives of the Congress on issues of war and peace. Nevertheless, the Truman Administration seemed hesitant to commit American power to the imponderabilities of politics in the Arab Peninsula and in the Gulf region. As Washington's ambassador in Jidda, J. Rives Childs confessed: 'During the almost four years that I have been in Saudi Arabia my principal task has been that of conducting a delaying action'.⁹

To the dismay of King Abdul Aziz and possibly also Prince Faisal, the Truman Administration, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, quite obviously was taken aback by the emerging Arab-Israeli conflict and in doubt, whether Saudi Arabia—despite her oil wealth—would have the capacity of functioning as a staunch regional pillar in a Western-led security alliance in the Middle East. It was feared that Saudi Arabia might become a liability rather than an asset. Washington had begun to look for Atatürks in the Middle East, who besides their other merits might reach out for a compromise with Israel, as had happened under the short-lived reign of the Syrian General Husni Zaim.¹⁰ According to the records, it was left to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Yassin, to ward off the kind of comprehensive partnership that would free America from the dilemma of her lopsided involvement in the conflict over Palestine.

True, McGhee's mission did represent a turning point in US-Saudi relations. The time had come when delaying tactics had ceased to be effective. The package of security measures which he brought with him included:

- (1) The conclusion of a Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation symbolising the closeness of our relations;
- (2) The making available of such technicians as Saudi Arabia might desire under the Point IV Programme;
- (3) The making of loans by the Export-Import Bank, subject, of course, to approval by the Bank, such as those now under discussion;
- (4) The conclusion of a long-term Dhahran Airfield Agreement which would include or follow
- (5) A programme of military aid, if the O'Keefe report is substantially approved, including, if required legislation is approved by the Congress, the making of arms available on a cash reimbursable basis and the sending of an appropriate military mission to aid in the training of Saudi Arabian forces.¹¹

From these early experiences with a rather experimental American Middle East diplomacy Prince Faisal, Yassin's superior, may have shaped his view that

⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹ Report by J.R.Childs, p.4. see footnote 4.

¹⁰ On this episode and on the Israeli rejection see Itamar Rabinovich, *The Road Not Taken. Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 96-97.

¹¹ Summary of Conversation from McGhee to Mr. Webb, May 8, 1950, p. 1. see footnote 6.

Saudi Arabia's first national interest security could not automatically be preserved once and for all by special bonds with the leading power of the Western alliance against communism. McGhee himself had pointed out to King Abdul Aziz that the times of old style treaties of alliance had passed. As for Faisal, his encounter with the envoy of the Truman Administration must have led to his conviction that the oil asset by itself would not engender a reliable American security guarantee. Instead, the national interest of security would be better served if each new American presidency would undergo first-hand Saudi reappraisal. Henceforth Faisal, as a statesman, made personal diplomacy one of his foremost duties.

In his encounter with the Truman Administration King Faisal also displayed the kind of dry humour, and quick wit which is the making of a good diplomat. As the story goes: Once when Faisal paid a courtesy call on President Truman, who as a young man had sold shirts in Kansas City, the President gave him an autographed photograph and is said to have commented that it represented 'a self-made man'. The Arabic translation came out something like, 'His Excellency the President wishes to assure your Royal Highness that he created himself.' Faisal replied, 'Assure His Excellency that, in this case, he spared the Almighty quite a job.'¹²

Crown Prince Faisal meets President Eisenhower, September 1957

The year 1957 saw the first state visit of King Saud, who arrived in Washington on January 30 'for significant discussions on Middle East problems'.¹³ In fact, the King followed an invitation which Eisenhower had deemed opportune in order to obtain Saudi backing for his new Middle East doctrine. King Saud also came with the particular points of views of the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, whom he had met immediately prior to his departure.¹⁴ After all, the dust of the Suez War had hardly settled. In addition, King Saud also seems to have harboured a personal ambition of replacing Nasser in the contest for leadership of the Arab Middle East. This goal was by no means out of reach. As is well known by now, Washington was not too happy with its man, Nasser, whom it had rescued out of the shambles of the Suez disaster.¹⁵

Anyhow, the objectives which the Eisenhower Administration sought to achieve in its meeting with King Saud were outlined in a briefing memorandum as follows:

- (1) Explain and gain acceptance for the fundamental US hopes and objectives in the area.
- (2) Find a common meeting ground with King Saud on means to:
 - a. Restrict Soviet influence in the area.

¹² Background for Dinner Conversation with Faisal, June 21, 1966, p.1. NSF Memos to President. Walt Rostow Papers Box 8. L.B. Johnson Library (Austin/Texas).

¹³ Briefing Memorandum. DDE Papers as President. International Series Box 41. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (Abilene/Kansas).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Concerning Eisenhower's Omega-Project - which was devised to isolate Nasser - see Keith Kyle, *Suez* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 99-101.

- b. Build effective economic and political relationships between the Middle East and the Western World.
 - c. Further efforts to settle the critical problems of the area.
- (3) Seek solutions to the principal problems in US-Saudi relations:
- a. Extension of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement.
 - b. Making Saudi Arabia's requests for arms in a manner consistent with peace and stability in the area.
 - c. To the extent feasible, gaining Saud's acceptance of American citizens, regardless of race and religion.¹⁶

Two more objectives had to do with the situation in Yemen and the case of Hungary before the United Nations. As to Yemen, Washington hoped that the King might be able to influence the Imam to adopt a different policy *vis-a-vis* the Soviet Union. The Eisenhower Administration believed that Soviet arms to Yemen, the introduction of Soviet technicians, and Soviet trade arrangements might result in appreciably increasing Soviet influence in Yemen, thus dangerously outflanking the Saudi position in the Peninsula. As for Hungary, the Eisenhower Administration hoped that 'Saudi Arabian representatives in the United Nations would support future US and UN efforts on this matter'.¹⁷

The subjects which, on the presidential level, were anticipated to be raised by King Saud were:

1. US relations with Egypt;
2. Aid to Jordan;
3. Withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza to Sinai;
4. Syria.

On the State Department level the topics anticipated for discussion were:

1. Suez Canal;
2. Future Arab relations with the UK and France;
3. Economic relationships between the Middle East and the Western World;
4. The long range Arab-Israel problem;
5. Iraqi-Saudi Arabian relations;
6. Saudi Arabian-Lebanon relations;
7. Baghdad Pact;
8. Persian Gulf problems;
9. Buraimi;
10. US-Egyptian relations.¹⁸

King Saud's official talks with President Eisenhower took place on January 30, February 1 and February 8. There was also a very private conversation between the King and the President 'on January 30, lasting from 4.00 until 5:45 p.m., at which there was present no other only, an interpreter friend of the Kings'.¹⁹

Concerning the official conversations, the Saudi delegation consisted of King

¹⁶ Briefing Memorandum, p.3. see footnote 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹ Notes kept by the President on meeting with King Saud, January 30, 1957. DDE Papers as President. International Series Box 41. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Saud, Prince Musaad Ibn Abdur Rahman (Chief of Royal Diwan), Prince Fahad Ibn Saud (Minister of Defence), Sheikh Yusuf Yassin (Acting Foreign Minister), Sheikh Mohamed Surur (Minister of Finance), Khalid Bey Abu Al-Walid and Jamal Bey Al-Hussaini (Royal Counsellors).

The most glaring absentee was Crown Prince Faisal. He was on the sick list and under medical treatment. He went to the United States in July to undergo surgery in New York and was to meet Eisenhower on September 23, for what was essentially a courtesy call. His political talks with the American president are, of course, of prior interest for our portrait of the late King Faisal. Therefore and for reasons of comparison, some features as well as the main contents and results of the conversations between King Saud and President Eisenhower will be summarised first.

Apart from Washington's political objectives the official American approach to King Saud was, of course, influenced by cultural and perhaps some psychological perceptions. They merit a quote from a briefing memorandum:

King Saud is a desert leader, raised in the simple and direct traditions of the Bedouin tribe. He sees international relations as an extension of tribal relations. If a nation is his friend, that nation will provide him with the help he needs. A weak nation needs a strong friend. It is that strong friend's role to provide and protect. The enemy of that strong friend is also the enemy. The King's father, King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, saw the United States as the strong friend of Saudi Arabia. Various Presidents of the United States have, in the King's view, reiterated that friendship. The King believes his land to be threatened by Israel in the north and, to a lesser extent, by Britain in the east and south. His pride suffers in the company of other Arab leaders because his own army is so deficient. The King has serious doubts about the Soviet Union. It is the enemy of his friend the United States.²⁰

The remaining parts of the document have been partly censured. But the fragments left allow the following conclusion: According to American estimates the King's primary pre-occupation was the equipping of his army with tanks and jet air craft. He was less concerned about who would operate them and whether they would ever see combat. Since his friends in Egypt and Syria had arms from the Soviet Union, it was only proper that his friend, the United States, would similarly supply him, as they had supplied Pakistan and Turkey. As King Saud confessed, the Soviet Union had offered him weapons on generous conditions; and his use of this offer as a bargaining chip bears witness to his conviction that he was at risk of becoming a Soviet satellite.

President Eisenhower was also cautioned that by Arab standards, the King might 'put more meaning in various terms of friendship and verbal expressions, than might a Western leader more accustomed to reducing agreements eventually to writing'.²¹ Furthermore, as was added: 'In dealing with the King, we recognize the divergence of Saud's views with our own on many issues in the area.'²²

In the light of these general reservations and of King Saud's primary pre-occupation it is hardly surprising that the final six-point Communique of the White House was couched in the usual frame of trivial diplomatic rhetoric

²⁰ Briefing Memorandum, p.1. see footnote 12.

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²² Ibid.

except for point five, in which the ‘assistance for the strengthening of the Saudi armed forces within the constitutional processes of the United States’²³ and the extension of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement of June 1951 for another five years were stipulated. As it turned out, these stipulations were the net result of the extensive discussions. However, the significance of the exchange of views on a number of other matters, as alluded to in point six, should not be overlooked. At the time it remained concealed. The newly released evidence truly merits a brief summary:

King Saud was deeply distrustful about British designs in the Gulf and in Southern Arabia. He also felt assaulted by Iran’s action towards two islands at issue between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. He tried to allay the American worry that Syria was on the verge of joining the Soviet club. He was optimistic that after a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai and Gaza, Nasser would find a compromise for Israeli passage through the Suez Canal. He proposed a summit meeting of the Syrian and Egyptian presidents with Eisenhower and thought that the Israeli head-of-state, as Eisenhower suggested, might be included. King Saud saw Israel as an established historical fact.²⁴ As for Eisenhower’s views on the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Suez War of 1956, it is an interesting observation that there obviously was some new American thinking about the future of Gaza. About the gist of this conversation Eisenhower, from his memory, dictated to his secretary:

He (King Saud) stated that the Egyptians would never consent to the internationalization of the Gaza Strip. He said it was Arab, and internationalization of the Strip would mean inevitably that it was partly occupied by Arab enemies. I gained the distinct impression that the King thoroughly approved of the Egyptian stand on this point. I (Eisenhower) replied that if the Israelis refused to turn over the Gaza Strip and the Egyptians refused to allow even an international force to occupy it, then we were at an impasse and any hope of reducing Arab-Israeli tensions was gone.

Consequently, I asked him what would he think of establishing *the Gaza Strip as an independent principality, somewhat like Yemen*. He replied that this might provide an answer, although I told him that I was merely asking a question—that I did not know whether such an idea would be acceptable to either the Arabs or the Israelis or anyone else—but I was simply trying to find out whether there was some point of negotiation and flexibility rather than rigidity in the situation.

The King then went to the question of the Fedayeen. He declared that there had been only one raid by the Fedayeen in many weeks...and all other border disorders were not of their making. I felt sure... that the King was completely misinformed, but that he implicitly believed what Nasser told him. So I did not pursue the subject further.²⁵

When later in the year, on September 23, Crown Prince Faisal came to Washington, President Eisenhower had been well briefed on the points which Faisal was expected to raise. Obviously, at the White House the visit was rated as more than a mere courtesy call. As was observed in the briefing memoran-

²³ The White House. Communique, February 8, 1957, p. 2. DDE Papers as President. International Series Box 41. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

²⁴ The President’s official meeting in Cabinet Room with His Majesty King Saud of Saudi Arabia, January 30, 1957. Dictated largely from memory the gist of a private conversation between myself (Eisenhower) and the King on the afternoon of Wednesday, January 30, 1957, lasting from 4.00 until 5.45p.m. DDE Papers as President. International Series Box 41.

²⁵ Ibid.

dum: 'The Crown Prince has been away from Saudi Arabia since July and is out of touch with events. We believe a review of our current thinking with him, however, will be valuable since he will return next month to resume an active role in Saudi Arabian Government affairs. His improved health should enable him to be more active than he has been for some years.'²⁶

According to the memorandum of the conversation it seems that not all the points on Eisenhower's briefing list were raised. They were: Syria; the Gulf of Aqaba (and Israel); Oman; Arms Shipments from the US to Saudi Arabia; UK-Saudi Arabian Relations; and Yemen. Of these, Oman, UK-Saudi Arabian relations and Yemen were dropped. Instead Saudi Arabia's intention of joining the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development was added. It is indicative of the urgency and priorities of the State Department's Middle Eastern strategy that Eisenhower was advised to make his points on Syria even if Faisal did not raise this item. In fact, Eisenhower opened the discussion with expressing his deep anxiety about the dangers of a Soviet domination of Syria, from where communism could spread to other parts of the Middle East. Crown Prince Faisal tried to show understanding for American concerns about the Soviet Union and the dangers of international communism but he repeatedly insisted that from an Arab perspective, 'Israel was the more immediate threat' and that Eisenhower's professed concern with the prevention of any aggression against an Arab state 'did not preclude the necessity for the Arab states being prepared to defend themselves against aggression'.²⁷ Eisenhower's comment that 'the United States was the sole country which had made Israeli forces withdraw from the territory occupied last Fall'²⁸ is a clear indication that the Arab states and the Crown Prince had drawn their own conclusions from Israel's collusion and military cooperation with France and Britain over Suez. However, Faisal probably also had other immediate dangers in mind. Interestingly, he used the simile of an Arab neighbour threatening him. Perhaps this was Faisal's style of diplomacy: a subtle hint that Saudi Arabia might have to be prepared to meet confrontations on other borders as well. When Eisenhower commented that Washington was 'going ahead with delivery of military supplies to Arab states on a high priority basis, the Prince, smiling, said that we (the US) should do even better'.²⁹

There are hints in the documents that Prince Faisal may have also met separately with the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. At least there exists a picture of the two from this visit.³⁰ Perhaps it was on one of these occasions in late 1957, that a high US official—knowing that 'Faisal had once been a general, using mechanised columns for the first time against his father's Arab enemies in Yemen in 1933'—asked him about this episode. Faisal drily said that he had been in Yemen once 'but did not have much time for sightseeing'.³¹

²⁶ Memorandum for the President, September 20, 1957 Subject: Meeting with Crown Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia. DDE Papers as President. International Series Box 41.

²⁷ Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, September 323, 1957. Meeting with Crown Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia. FRUS (Foreign Relations of the United States) 1955-1957, Vol XIII (Washington 1988), p. 507.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 506.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 507.

³⁰ Holden and Johns, *House*, p. 173 opposite.

³¹ Background for Dinner Conversation with Faisal. June 21, 1966, see footnote 11.

Crown Prince Faisal versus Nasser? The Kennedy-Administration's new Middle East Policy, October 1962

Yemen was high on the agenda when five years later, on October 4, 1962, Crown Prince Faisal met with President John F. Kennedy in Washington. Earlier in the year, in February, King Saud had been at the White House for a state visit. The Kennedy Administration had met all three main requests made by King Saud: '(1) an arms credit—for 13.5 million dollars; (2) a gift of three radio transmitters! and (3) an economic survey team.'³² Another request met was the prolongation of the Military Training Mission. Furthermore, readiness had been expressed 'to sell an excellent new fighter, the F-5A and to provide more experts in specialised fields.'³³

In the course of that year, however, events in the Peninsula had taken a dramatic turn. From the 1950s onwards there had been political unrest in North Yemen. Since the beginning of the 1960s this unrest, however, had become more militant, incited also by Nasserist propaganda. Finally, the unrest led to a *coup d'état* on September 26. A prolonged civil war between royalists and republicans was to follow. Surely, against the background of Nasser's involvement, Saudi Arabia could no longer view these events across her border as a neighbouring country's domestic affairs.³⁴

At the time of the *coup d'état* Crown Prince Faisal happened to attend the Annual Meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York. He immediately grasped the sombre implications for his country. Previously he had cherished some sympathy for Nasser's Arabism but now he hated and feared the Egyptian leader. True, Nasserism, in the form of constitutionalism, had in the past already taken a toll on the House of Saud, when Prince Tallal temporarily, and for reasons that are still controversial, had sided with the new ideas and had aroused a 'family quarrel'.³⁵ Now, as Egyptian propaganda blared out the overthrow of Imam Ahmad in Sanaa the Saudi monarchy would be next, Nasserism in Faisal's eyes was communism, which had to be fought as America combatted Soviet infiltrations.³⁶

It was an irony in US-Saudi Arabian relations that this dramatic exacerbation of Saudi-Egyptian relations coincided with a no less spectacular volte-face in American-Egyptian relations. Whereas the Eisenhower Administration, after so many disillusionings with Nasser, had finally launched its ultimately futile 'Omega' project, by which the Egyptian leader was to be isolated in the Middle East region, President Kennedy had embarked on a strategy of bringing Third World leaders, whom he considered to be symbols of social progress and political modernisation, into the Western orbit.³⁷

In order to prepare President Kennedy for his meeting with the Crown Prince, the briefing paper of the White House staff had anticipated Faisal's position on Saudi-Egyptian relations as follows:

³² Memorandum for the President by R.W.Komer, October 4, 1962, p. 2. NS-Files Countries Saudi Arabia. Faisal Briefing Book. Box 158. J.F. Kennedy Library (Boston/Mass.).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Saeed M. Badeeb, *The Saudi-Egyptian Conflict over North Yemen, 1962-1970* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986).

³⁵ Holden and Johns, *House*, pp. 214-216.

³⁶ Memorandum for the President by R.W.Komer, October 4, 1962, see footnote 31.

³⁷ John S. Badeau, *The Middle East Remembered* (Washington: The Middle East Institute, 1983), pp.169-171.

- (1) Saudi Arabia is being bitterly attacked by Nasser, who is trying to recover his prestige caused by the loss of Syria.
- (2) Generous US economic assistance to the UAR is keeping Nasser in power while he is trying to subvert America's true friends in the area.
- (3) At the very time Nasser's position is weakening, the US is apparently basing its policy on the thought that he is the natural and inevitable leader of the area.
- (4) While Saudi Arabia does not oppose US economic assistance as such to the UAR, it would ask us to use the leverage thereby gained to get Nasser to desist in his attacks against Saudi Arabia.³⁸

The talking line laid down for President Kennedy can be summarised as follows: As the US was seeking friendly relations with all nations in the interest of preserving independence and stability, any attempt by the UAR to undermine the government of Saudi Arabia would be opposed. The economic assistance to the UAR, the bulk of which consisted in the form of sales of agricultural surpluses, primarily grain, for Egyptian currency, should not be interpreted to mean support for Nasser's policies and practices. Anyway, Washington was sure that Nasser would remain in power for an indefinite period and was happy that he did not permit communist activity in the country. In the light of America's considerable experience with communism, Nasser could not be identified as a communist. Instead the US had to take into consideration that 'the younger and better-educated elements in many Arab countries looked to the UAR as sincerely attempting to achieve internal economic progress'.³⁹ Withholding aid from the UAR would afford the Soviet Union renewed opportunities for exploitation in the Middle East, and would force the UAR to take more extreme positions internally and externally.

The recommended guidelines for political action were put down as follows:

With regard to influencing Nasser to call off his attacks against Saudi Arabia, US policy is to express only in private our views on intra-Arab affairs and publicly to remain aloof. If we were to go beyond this, not only would our intercession be ineffective but there would be repercussions. We shall continue to do what we can by our chosen methods to encourage a return to normal relations among the states of the area, but Faisal no doubt would agree that anything smacking of US intervention in Arab affairs would be widely resented in the Arab world. We believe the best answer to critics of Saudi Arabia is steady progress in that country along the lines already being pursued: modernization and development.⁴⁰

These were guidelines in very broad terms. As such they do not reveal the Kennedy Administration's true and long-term strategy towards Nasser. This was set out in crystal clear fashion in another special briefing on UAR-Saudi-Relations. Because it fully confirms Crown Prince Faisal's suspicions about Washington's calculations, the relevant passage merits a quote:

While we are sympathetic to the position of Saudi Arabia, we are persuaded that both the Saudi Royal Family and other Arab leaders might be more harmed than helped if the US should withdraw aid from the UAR and leave the latter no alternative except to rely

³⁸ Talking Outline For Subject Crown Prince Faysal May Raise 31, see footnote 31.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

wholly on the Soviet Union. By our aid we hope gradually to divert Nasser's attention from external probings and towards his great internal problems, primarily economic development. In the long run our goal is to establish a strong position in a key country and to entoil (sic!) the UAR in the Western world through the advantages the UAR will gain therefrom.⁴¹

True, at the time the Kennedy Administration still had to learn that this was not an easily accomplished feat. Gamal Abdel Nasser was bent on escalation. Robert W. Komer, Kennedy's trusted Middle East expert in the National Security Council, had accurately foreseen this, but in his briefings he nevertheless warned the President that the US should not be drawn into the war on behalf of her Saudi ally. As he put it in a memorandum for the President on October 4, 1962:

Unfortunately, the Yemen revolt has brought to a boil all Saudi fears of Nasserism (the house of Saud well knows it might be next). Faisal wants US backing for the UK/Saudi counter-effort in Yemen. It will be hard to satisfy him on this score.

Our current Yemen policy is one of non-involvement. We can't do much anyway, and the Imam's regime was one of the most backward in the world. However, Nasser clearly backed the revolt and his radio is telling Saud he'll be next. So the Saudis feel compelled to react.⁴²

Therefore, it would be best to steer Faisal off Yemen and on to US-Saudi relations. Here the important thing is to *reassure Faisal as to our firm backing of the House of Saud and as to our policy toward Nasser*. If you can get just these two points across at luncheon, it will be a great success.⁴³

Bob Komer was anxious that Faisal should be assured of US policy. Kennedy's new policy towards Nasser would not mean 'backing Nasser as Mr. Big in the Arab world.' Rather, the strategy was '(a) to turn him inward; and (b) to increase US leverage on him so that we can encourage policies less antagonistic to our interests and those of our friends'.⁴⁴

Komer also drew Kennedy's attention to a personal motive of Faisal's visit. As the memorandum had started:

Faisal is in the US primarily to see you. We've had numerous reports that Saud is rapidly failing. Faisal, next in line, is probably here to find out how much he and his country can rely on US support. You can talk frankly to him [...] ⁴⁵ Most important, *Faisal wants very much a half hour privately with you, without any other Saudis present*. He may want to say a few things about his own future. Why not take him upstairs for coffee right after luncheon. His English is fair ...⁴⁶

Concerning the war in Yemen the US Navy soon began to call more often at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea harbours. The message was clear: the US supported the house of Saud. In the briefings of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker's special mission to Crown Prince Faisal in the spring of 1963 it was put down, however,

⁴¹ UAR-Saudi Relations. Discussion, see footnote 31.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Memorandum for the President by R.W.Komer, October 4, 1962, p. 1, (the underline is in the original document.) see footnote 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵ The second half of the line is deleted here.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 1 (the underline is in the original document).

that 'it must be made clear that augmented US military support must be conditional on suspension of Saudi support of royalist forces'.⁴⁷

King Faisal and the Johnson Administration, June 1966

As concerns the Middle East, the years from 1962 until 1966 can perhaps best be described as a period of twilight and turn to the worse—with one exception, though: the peaceful transfer of power in Saudi Arabia.

On the regional level the overthrow of the Qassem regime in Baghdad in 1963 seemed to make up for Nasser's failure in Syria two years before. As a matter of fact, plans for a federation between Egypt, Syria and Iraq were being discussed. In Yemen the royalists had meanwhile put Nasserism on the defensive. It seems that Nasser tried to fill the gap between renewed success in the Fertile Crescent and a setback in the Peninsula by using the Palestine issue to rally support of the Arab states and the Arab masses. The uncovering of the secret West German arms deliveries to Israel as well as Nasser's invitation to the East German leader Ulbricht in 1965 brought the East-West confrontation into play.⁴⁸ What appeared as a political victory, the severance of diplomatic relations with West Germany by most Arab states, rather turned out to exemplify the mess that had been created by mingling Arabism on the one hand and the polarizing effects of the Cold War on the other.

In Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, Faisal had skillfully assumed the reins of power from his ailing and somewhat recalcitrant half-brother Saud. As an apparently relieved American ambassador reported from Jidda to Washington: 'There was and may remain danger of rash action by one or another of King's party, such as assassination attempt on Faisal but resolution of long dispute over division of powers has been achieved in manner which as of today seems almost certain to bring public support.'⁴⁹ Thanks to Faisal's wise statemanship Saudi Arabia had indeed stood the test of a 'bloodless' transfer of power.⁵⁰

King Faisal's state visit to Washington was scheduled from June 21 to 23, 1966. In a strategy paper from the White House, the objectives had been described as follows:

As originally proposed by us last year, the visit was intended to acknowledge our *long-term friendship*, respond to indications that *Faisal wished to become personally acquainted with the President*, and reinforce by *personal contact* our frequent cautionary advice concerning *continuation of Saudi development and reform* and a *settlement in Yemen*. In the event, *recent developments in the Near East pose complications* for our achieving these objectives and *great worries for Faisal*.⁵¹

At the core of Washington's deep anxiety was the worry that the Faisal-Nasser

⁴⁷ Memorandum for Mr. Mc George Bundy. The White House, by William H. Brubeck (Executive Secretary), February 28, 1963. President's Office Files, Box 1236, Countries: Saudi Arabian Security, 1961-1963. J.F. Kennedy Library.

⁴⁸ As for the crisis in German-Egyptian relations see Wageh Atek, 'Probleme der Ägyptisch-Deutschen Beziehungen 1952-1965', Ph.D. thesis (Essen, 1983).

⁴⁹ American Embassy Jidda to Secretary of State in Washington, March 31, 1964. Incoming Telegram. Department of State. Saudi Arabia Vol. I. Cables. L.B. Johnson Library.

⁵⁰ Holden and Johns, *House*, p. 239.

⁵¹ Visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia June 21-23, 1966. Strategy Paper. Drafted by G.C. Moore. Cleared by Ambassador Hare (in substance) et al. (all underlines in this and the following quotations of documents from the archives of the L.B. Johnson Library are original and not from the author of this paper).

friction, 'an irritant in US-Saudi relations'⁵² might lead to a polarisation in the entire Middle East. In Washington's view Faisal's call for Islamic solidarity was viewed by Cairo as a move to align the 'reactionary' against the 'progressive' powers. The revolutionaries led by Nasser, supported by the Soviets; and the evolutionaries, with Faisal as the symbolic head, supported by the West, represented the two poles of a potentially split Arab world.

The strategy paper also outlined the dismal implications of a full identification of the US with Faisal: It would appear to put Washington squarely on the side of 'chosen instruments', the conservative monarchies, 'thus limiting our capability to influence revolutionary regimes and reeinforcing their tendency to rely on the Communists'.⁵³ And it would be bad for Faisal 'since it encourages his overdependence on the US and UK, in turn *increasing his vulnerability to attack, both internal and external*, and ultimately hindering the adjustment to the forces of social and political change in the Near East'.⁵⁴

The problem which the Johnson Administration had to face in the forthcoming state visit was circumscribed as follows:

—For the visit to be successful, *we must convince Faisal that our friendship is genuine, our concern for his country is sincere, and our esteem for him as an Arab leader is the highest. (Our substantial commercial and strategic interests in Saudi Arabia warrant this, even without reference to current political circumstances in the Near East)—At the same time, we cannot mislead him into thinking we have given him a blank check to support all of his actions in the area.—Without adding to his worries, we should seek to convince him of the logic of avoiding polarization and the validity, in his own self-interest, of his (and our) constructive cooperation with all area states.*⁵⁵

The US strategy of preventing polarisation in the Middle East by all means was recurrently expressed in all Whitehall briefings. There was a noticeable worry about developments in Yemen. In Washington's view Faisal seemed to have been unduly rigid in insisting on a settlement on his own terms, although it was Nasser who, despite his settlement agreements with Faisal in 1963, 1964 and 1965, bore the greatest share of blame for the lack of a solution. 'In this setting', as Johnson was advised, '*public aspects of the visit assume(d) greater than normal importance.*'⁵⁶ As might be reported in the Near East, the US would 'suffer from events that imply specific endorsement of Faisal's Islamic solidarity concept or that we accept him as spokesman for a bloc of Arab states'.⁵⁷ Johnson should instead urge upon Faisal 'flexibility, continuation of the dialogue with Nasser, and avoidance of provocation'. The King should also bear in mind that his support for the royalists would leave the many anti-Egyptian Yemenis no choice but to continue their reliance on the UAR since they feel Faisal is opposed to their domestic national aspirations.⁵⁸

No doubt, Washington's sympathy for republican and constitutional movements was deeply rooted in American history. But it was not interested in exporting memories of the American Civil War into the Middle East. To avoid

⁵² Ibid., Strategy Paper, p. 2.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Strategy Paper, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

a dangerous polarisation in an area contested by the Cold War powers, the US had opted for evolutionary processes of change. Certainly the Johnson Administration was also preoccupied with the situation in Vietnam. Any heat up of the cold war confrontation in the Middle East would further complicate the imbroglio in the Far East and play into Soviet hands. In the Middle East, stability and evolutionary development would halt Soviet gains.

In this context King Faisal's November 1962 reform program for Saudi Arabia was hailed as a good example and a step in the right direction. To be sure, King Faisal did not have to worry about his personal image in the White House. He fared far better than the 'desert leader'. As the energetic and sometimes rough Texas politician, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was briefed about 'personal aspects' of the King:

Faisal is a more knowledgeable and worldly person than his traditional robes and beard suggest ... *He speaks good conversational English* but will use an interpreter for substantive discussions.

The King's great personal interest is in educational and social development of his country. In social conversation he would also probably enjoy hearing the President speak of the US southwest, an area somewhat similar to Saudi Arabia. The King has taken *no public stand on Vietnam. Privately, he has told us he strongly supports our activities there.*⁵⁹

These briefing drafts had been cleared by Washington's foremost Middle East diplomats: the ambassadors Raymond A. Hare and Hermann F. Eilts.

In the following, light is shed on other major elements of Saudi foreign policy and issues of US-Saudi relations as they were perceived by the Johnson Administration and scheduled for the meeting with King Faisal. In some cases they elaborate points that have already been raised. Concerning the general US view of the Near East, the greatest danger lay 'in possible polarization of the area, whether on the basis of religion or political ideology, into conservative and radical blocs'.⁶⁰ To combat the spread of Communist influence, great care must be exercised to prevent area disputes from contributing to the establishment of rigid East-West blocs. Because of the high value of good US-Saudi Arabian relations every precaution should be taken to see Faisal unharmed by propaganda attempts 'emanating particularly from the UAR and Syria to picture the Kingdom as an instrument of our policy'. Constructive cooperation and moderation among all area states were deemed essential to frustrate these propaganda attempts. Of crucial importance were US relations with Nasser's Egypt. A country with 30 million people and an independent power base simply could not be ignored. To make their views known, the US needed a dialogue, in which the attempt should be made 'to expand areas of agreement and minimize controversial issues'.⁶¹ Egypt's need for food and the fact that the US was the only long term source of supply provided means of influence. But this influence was only effective 'on issues that did not involve UAR security interests (e.g., defence posture, arms acquisitions)'.⁶² The Johnson Administration acknowl-

⁵⁹ Visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia June 21-23, 1966. Strategy Paper, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia June 21-23, 1966. President's Talking Points. US Views of Near East. L.B. Johnson Library.

⁶¹ Visit of King Faisal ... US Relations with UAR

⁶² Ibid.

edged that it lacked leverage to force withdrawal from Yemen because Egyptian national prestige and army morale were at stake. On the whole, Washington saw itself in a difficult period in its relations with Egypt. A year before the 1967 June war the Johnson Administration was 'therefore actively reviewing the extent of (its) future assistance to the UAR, taking into consideration Nasser's actions in various fields, including his relations with Saudi Arabia'.⁶³

Again, special importance was attached to events in Yemen. US policy toward Yemen was an integral part of Washington's policy toward the Near East. As was underlined in a briefing note: 'We recognized the Yemen Arab Republic, after determining that it had effective control over the bulk of the country, in order to support the aspirations of Yemenis to be rid of the repressive Imamate regime and to give it an alternative to reliance on the Communists. Without our recognition, there would have been no major Western presence to counter the USSR and Chinese Communists, both of which were brought into Yemen by the previous royalist regime.'⁶⁴ And concerning the Faisal-Nasser dispute on Yemen, the briefing note continued with a note of precaution: 'In the absence of provocation, we doubt that Nasser intends to attack Saudi territory. The climate for a settlement is enhanced by Faisal's policy of restraining the royalists from provocative hostile acts and of not resuming arms shipments to them. A change in these policies could make it difficult for us to render assistance to Saudi Arabia if it were threatened.'

This was a broad hint as to the pressure that might be exerted in order to bring Faisal into line with Washington's overall strategy in the Middle East. No doubt, the Johnson Administration appreciated Faisal's worry about Nasser's incursion into affairs of the Arab Peninsula. It was in this vein that the briefing note on Yemen concluded: 'We realize that the King, just as we, has had disappointing experiences with Nasser in attempting to reach a settlement. However, in the interest of attaining the broad objective of minimizing Communist gains, we urge him to exercise restraint, flexibility and moderation and to use all opportunities to resume his dialogue with Nasser.'⁶⁵ To be sure, King Faisal was no less concerned about the dangers of communist encroachments on the Middle East than was the Johnson Administration. As a matter of fact, earlier, in February, the King had sent his brother, Prince Sultan, to see the American President 'to express his concern, *which we (the USA) share*, over the Communist powers' attempts to increase their influence in the Near East'.⁶⁶ However, Washington, it seems, suspected that King Faisal might also be inclined to make use of the Communist threat in order to combat republicanism. Although this suspicion was not expressed openly, Washington clearly was bent on gently pushing the King on the road of political reforms in his Kingdom. On this point the special briefing note on Communist Threat to Near East merits a lengthy quote:

2. In broader terms, the major *threat from the Communist powers lies in their attempts to set themselves up as the sole champions for popular movements aiming at social and political modernization* while, at the same time, casting the West and its friends in the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Visit of King Faisal ... Yemen

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Visit of King Faisal ... Communist Threat to Near East.

role of supporters of the status quo and opponents of the people's aspirations. This is the primary danger for the Free World.

3. The only *effective response to this threat is to prove in action that states committed to free evolutionary development in fact do provide the best hope for realization of individual aspirations* for liberty, dignity and development. The course which His Majesty charted in his 1962 reform measures can accomplish this. We give it our full support.⁶⁷

The next briefing note referred to American suggestions of Saudi Aid to South Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Concern was expressed over the future of Aden-South Arabia following its independence and withdrawal of British troops in 1968. Washington recommended 'that a broadly-based, economically viable regime must be set up in the next two years if instability, and even civil conflict, aggravating inter-Arab tensions and inviting Communist exploitation, are to be avoided.'⁶⁸ The Johnson Administration expected that King Faisal would favourably consider economic aid to that government 'either directly, or, perhaps, through a multi-lateral group (IBRD, Arab Development Bank) to include assistance from all interested area states.' Concerning the Persian Gulf, the US would 'encourage *Saudi Arabia to cooperate with Great Britain and the individual Shaikdoms* in assisting the political and economic development of the area.'⁶⁹

Three more briefing notes had been prepared, in case these topics were raised by King Faisal. The first note dealt with US interest in Saudi Security and Integrity. In it the White House emphasised its close, long-standing friendship and concern for territorial integrity. Mention was made of '*a US military training mission, gifts of weapons and F-86 aircraft for the Saudi Army, frequent US Navy ship visits, and the dispatch of a USAF fighter squadron to Saudi Arabia in 1963-1964*'.⁷⁰ As in one of the previous notes, it was repeated, that King Faisal's views on Yemen differed from US views and that '*Saudi material support for the Yemini royalists, who are in conflict with a UN-member regime which we recognize, greatly complicates the ways in which we can implement our concern for Saudi integrity*'.⁷¹ Presumably with Vietnam in mind, the note concluded: '*While the complexities of world events prevent a precise definition of how we could aid Saudi Arabia in a given future instance, His Majesty can be assured that we would do all possible within the moral and legal framework in which we operate. Our concern for the safety and security of Saudi Arabia has never been greater.*'⁷²

The second note entitled Syrian Situation referred to the Soviet rapprochement with the newly established regime of Nur al-Din al-Atasi. The increasing anti-Americanism in Damascus was noticed but, as was underlined, the US strove '*to maintain at least these minimal contacts so as not to vacate the field to the Soviets and encourage further East-West polarization in the area*'.⁷³

The third briefing note anticipated that King Faisal might raise the issue of

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Visit of King Faisal ... Saudi Aid to South Arabia and the Persian Gulf.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Visit of King Faisal ... US Interest in Saudi Security and territorial Integrity.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Visit of King Faisal ... Syrian Situation.

recent US Aircraft Sale to Israel. The US response was outlined as follows: '1. US policy continues to be to *avoid becoming a major supplier* of arms in the Near East. 2. Our sales are made on an exceptional basis *to avoid serious arms imbalances that would jeopardize area stability*. 3. Recent arms sales, *including those to Saudi Arabia*, have been made in the context of this policy.'⁷⁴

Apart from these briefing notes for Johnson's personal meeting with King Faisal, more papers were prepared such as the Secretary of State's Talking Points and Background Papers. While the former ones repeated the main arguments as set out in the President's briefing notes, with some elaboration here and there, the background papers delved deeper into the '*Saudi Internal Political Scene*', into the '*Saudi Economic Situation and Oil Production*' and into '*US Military Assistance to Saudi Arabia*'. Because the first of these three papers expressly deals with King Faisal's achievements and with 'serious weaknesses', as seen from Washington, the US evaluation truly merits another lengthy quote. On the positive side it was underlined that

*Saudi Arabia currently enjoys greater internal political stability than at any time since the death of King Abdul Aziz in 1953. The country is prosperous and opportunities for education and employment are widespread. There is no organized dissidence and indeed little overt criticism of the monarchy. Security measures have been strengthened recently, though mainly out of concern for possible terrorist action by foreign Arabs resident in the Kingdom. Both the regular army and the National Guard (each about 24,000) support the regime. This striking change from four years ago, when discontent was rising and a coup seemed a distinct possibility, is almost entirely the work of King Faisal.*⁷⁵

On the negative side entitled '*Serious Weaknesses Remain*', some of the points are still deleted in the document. The conclusion of this entire background paper, however, is undeleted and therefore merits a full quote:

*Faisal is well aware of his strong internal position but is perhaps less cognizant of his weaknesses stemming from the continued great need for political, social and economic progress. This probably leads him to overestimate his strength at home and encourages him to overextend himself abroad, particularly in his quarrel with Nasser. Because of his potential weaknesses, the narrowness of his political base and his small and still backward population, Faisal cannot be considered a viable counterweight to Nasser in the Near East. We applaud Faisal's development efforts and emphasize the importance of his continuing them with vigor as the best means for meeting the threat of Arab Socialism or Communism.*⁷⁶

As was mentioned earlier, the Johnson Administration's most immediate concern was the Faisal-Nasser confrontation in Yemen and in the Middle East at large. As Walt Rostow, the security adviser, urged upon the American President on the eve of his meeting with the Saudi King: 'Our goal with Faisal is to persuade him not to break with Nasser and split the Middle East. We also want him to feel you are his friend without thinking he has a blank check to pick a fight with Nasser.'⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Visit of King Faisal ... US Aircraft Sales to Israel.

⁷⁵ Visit of King Faisal ... Background Paper. Saudi Internal Political Scene. June 1966, p. 1. L.B. Johnson Library.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁷ Memorandum for the President by Walt Rostow, June 20. 1966. NSF Box 155. Saudi Arabia. Faisal Visit Briefing Book. L.B. Johnson Library.

King Faisal meets Richard Nixon, May 1971

It was not until five years later, that King Faisal again paid an official visit to the USA. The King arrived at Washington on his way home from a trip to Taiwan and Japan. At the welcoming ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House President Richard Nixon extended the usual words of friendly greetings. For his meeting with Faisal, Nixon had been specially briefed never to mention Lawrence of Arabia, because 'Lawrence's Arabs were rivals of Faisal's family.'⁷⁸ Nixon must have felt taken aback slightly, when Faisal responded that he hoped that good relations would be '*reestablished*' between the United States and the Arab countries.⁷⁹ The King was clearly very unhappy and disturbed about the dramatic turn of events in the Middle East since the June 1967 war. Before the disaster occurred, Washington had implored of him to avoid anything that might split the Middle East. However the disaster had left US-Arab relations and the Middle East torn asunder. Still worse, victorious Israel had been placed at the hub of Middle East diplomacy. The cumbersome Jarring mission and the futile Rogers Plan were proof, that Zionism had imposed restrictions on American diplomacy. As the Washington Post observed, King Faisal bitterly complained of aggression and occupancy of Arab land 'and our holy places and the subjugation of one of our peoples.'⁸⁰ Furthermore he stressed his special interest in the holy city of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the records of the Nixon Archives and also the memoirs of Richard Nixon tell next to nothing about the substantive talks during this official visit. The archival records available merely outline the arrival ceremony for HIS MAJESTY FAISAL IBN ABD AL-AZIZ AL-SAUD. Accordingly, at 10.00 a.m., Mr. and Mrs. Nixon went to Grand Hall by Red Room door, accompanied by Honors, announcement, and 'Hail to the Chief'. The walk continued to North Portico. At 10.01 a.m. His Majesty Faisal arrived to musical fanfare, followed by a few introductions and by the National Anthems at 10.03 a.m.. Nixon's welcoming remarks had been scheduled for 10.06 a.m..⁸¹

And yet it would be wrong to assume that the tight schedule of this part of the meeting indicated a routine event with nothing really new to talk about. True, King Faisal's anxiety about the future of his country's relationship with the US was reported in public. But in the Nixon records as well there is at least indirect evidence that other points raised with King Faisal dealt with the situation in the Persian Gulf after the British withdrawal and with the Iranian-Saudi relationship and strategies of putting American presence in the two countries on new foundations. According to a memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger for Nixon, dated September 5, 1970 and enclosed in the records of the Nixon-Faisal meeting, Washington considered both Saudi Arabia and Iran to be 'most responsible' for the Persian Gulf's stability after the British pull out. The memorandum also referred to the Middle East chapter of the President's Foreign Policy Message to Congress last February, in which it had been announced that

⁷⁸ (Morgan/Koch) Fact Sheet: Official Visit of King Faisal, May 26, 1971. National Archives Maryland. Nixon Project. WHCF Subject File CO Box 64.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Press clip from Washington Post (May 28, 1971?). Headline: King Faisal Lays Arabs' Suffering Before Nixon, by Carroll Kilpatrick.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Arrival Ceremony Plan by Stephen Bull. Nixon Project. WHCF Subject File. Executive C O 128. Box 64

‘in countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran which have capital resources of their own, the US will need new programmes and perhaps new policies to develop a further presence. Aid-type activities will be less common, and private cultural, technical and business ventures will be the foundation for our presence.’⁸² This memorandum had been written on the occasion of Nixon’s meeting with Nicholas Thacher, Ambassador Designate to Saudi Arabia. Thacher, who had already been Deputy Chief of Mission in Saudi Arabia from 1962 to 1965 and then Deputy Chief of Mission in Tehran for five years was expected ‘to provide Washington—and the President—with the imaginative ideas we need to devise programs of this kind.’⁸³ This search for new strategic pillars and political instruments anteceded the dawning of the new oil era in the Middle East in the course of the oil price revolution.

King Faisal and President Nixon were to meet again in 1974, this time in Jidda. In his memoirs Nixon pays tribute to King Faisal ‘one of the wisest leaders in the entire region.’⁸⁴

Conclusion

In his career from Prince to Crown Prince to King, Faisal Ibn Abdul Aziz Al Saud left an impeccable imprint in public. Here was a devout Muslim who lived up to the teachings of his religion as well as to the dynastic interests of his royal family. He came to wield immense power on the eve and in the wake of the oil price revolution in the early 1970s, and he ultimately embarked upon a policy of moderation. The sources used here testify that Faisal from early onwards commanded great and world-wide respect for the deep authenticity of his persuasions and dealings.

Nevertheless Faisal painfully had to bend to the restrictions put by the Middle Eastern politics of the various US Administrations. In the arena of world politics, King Faisal had to refrain from antagonising Nasserism and combatting the ideologies of communism and of republicanism to the extent that US interests in the Middle East were damaged. The avoidance of polarisation along Cold War lines was hard to reconcile with a pro-Western confession. On the other hand, Faisal’s recourse to Islamic solidarity did not meet with US approval either. As seen from Washington, Iran under the Shah Regime seemed better equipped as a pillar for a Pax Americana in the Middle East. However, history meanwhile has proved that Faisal had perhaps offered the only viable alternative: a progress of the Middle East on the authentic lines of a historically grown Muslim culture.

⁸² Memorandum for the President by Henry A. Kissinger, September 5, 1970, p. 1. Nixon Project. WHCF Subject File 64.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 1012.

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