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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM
THE SUCCESSION TO THE SAUDI THRONE

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Summary

- A. Before the rise of the House of Saud in Arabia, the succession to tribal leadership was normally patrilineal, although the rule of primogeniture did not necessarily apply. The choice of successor normally fell upon the most suitable eligible candidate, and required popular ratification. There are precedents for the designation of a successor by a ruler or a tribal shaikh, but in such cases the ratification by popular acclaim was considered mandatory. Under this system deposition was possible. (Paragraphs 1-3)
- B. In the early 1930s King Abdul Aziz carefully stage-managed the designation by popular acclaim of his eldest son, the Amir Saud, as Crown Prince (Paragraphs 4-7)
- C. In 1949 an assessment of the situation concluded that there was no good reason why the Crown Prince should not succeed his father peacefully. Doubt was expressed, however, concerning his ability to maintain and consolidate his position after succeeding. There were a number of valid reasons for this doubt. (Paragraphs 8-18)
- D. Similar conclusions were drawn in 1952 and early in 1953. The doubts concerning the Crown Prince's ability to retain and consolidate his position after his father's death were now greater. King Saud peacefully ascended the Throne in November 1953. (Paragraphs 19-24)
- E. The history of the Saudi Royal Family over the next 12 years was largely the history of the struggle for ultimate control between the forces of unrestrained absolutism under King Saud, who was clearly unfit to rule, and the moderate forces under the Amir Faisal, who gradually emerged as the only leader capable of ruling wisely and responsibly. Crises occurred in 1958, 1960, 1962 and 1963. In March 1964, the Amir Faisal assumed all powers and privileges formerly vested in the sovereign, leaving Saud King in name only. This action was taken with the full support of the 'Ulama and the Royal Family. King Saud was formally deposed in November 1964 and King Faisal ascended the Throne, again with the full support of the 'Ulama and the Royal Family. The appointment of the Amir Khalid as Crown Prince gave rise to speculation concerning the future of the Saudi monarchy. (Paragraphs 25-33)
- F. The traditional principles governing succession have been followed to some extent in Saudi Arabia. Popular support is less important today, but the 'Ulama still retain considerable power and influence. The trend is towards a settled formula for the succession. The appointment of the Amir Khalid as Crown Prince is considered by some to be the prelude to the introduction of constitutional monarchy in Saudi Arabia. (Paragraph 34).

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I. The Theory of Succession

During the period before the unification of a large part of the Arabian Peninsula under the present Saudi dynasty and their precursors the Wahhabi Amirs of Nejd, the basis of political and social power was the tribe. The authority exercised by tribal shaikhs was normally hereditary within certain families, but was assigned within this framework to those individuals possessing the requisite qualities of leadership, experience and good fortune necessary for them to become "fathers of their people". The succession was normally patrilineal, but was not formally worked out according to a specific formula. Although there was a natural preference for the established dynasty, the choice tended to fall upon the eldest generally acceptable candidate, whether a brother or a son, not necessarily the eldest son. Also it was deemed inappropriate for a shaikh's successor to be designated before his death. The precedents on which this approach to the problem of succession are based may be found both in ancient Arabian custom and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who passed over the presumptive claim of his daughter's husband and nominated his father-in-law for the leadership of Islam after his death, subject to ratification by the congregation of the faithful. This has been frequently claimed in the history of Islam as justification for usurpation, provided always that the façade of "election by the people" was maintained.

2. Clearly, therefore, the essential factor in establishing a claim to the succession was a form of popular election by acclaim, ratified by the "Bi'ah" or oath of allegiance to the successful claimant. It should be noted that there was no form of individual balloting but that such an election was, in theory, the act of the whole congregation, which formed, again in theory, the whole electorate. It was the custom, therefore, for such demonstrations of popular will, albeit carefully stage-managed, to take place at the Friday congregational prayer. A further precedent was set by the Ummayyad Caliphs in that they generally nominated their own successor during their lifetime for popular election, and this precedent has been followed by the Al Saud since the early part of the 18th century.

3. Nevertheless, the established custom which insists on the suitability of the candidate, within the loose framework of patrilineal descent within certain families, has operated in the Saudi dynasty, and to the extent that a Saudi monarch has the powers of a Shaikh and is so regarded by his people, his tenure is judged by his followers on the basis of his possession of the necessary personal characteristics. Failure to show these characteristics may result in deposition, as happened to King Saud.

II. The Saudi Succession in the 1930s

4. In the course of King Abdul Aziz's attempts to give more permanence to the territorial unity of his Kingdom in the late 1920s and early 1930s, petitions were presented to the King in 1932, initially by Fuad Hamza, the Deputy Foreign Minister, and fifteen of his colleagues, and almost immediately thereafter by every conceivable group within the Kingdom, including the 'Ulama, tribal leaders, and craft guilds, which called upon the King to take certain constitutional steps, including the formal unification of Hejaz and Nejd, the preparation of a basic constitution, the institution of a suitable governmental structure and the preparation of a rule for the succession of the throne. It was generally considered that this apparently spontaneous movement throughout the kingdom was in fact carefully stage-managed either by King Abdul Aziz and his close advisers, or by Fuad Hamza and some of the King's advisers, with the knowledge and consent of the King. It was generally recognised that the decisions which the petitions called for had already been made before the submission of the petitions, with the exception of

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the difficult problem of the succession. In response the King issued on 18 September 1932 a Royal Decree which formally announced the unification of the kingdom as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and which called upon the Council of Ministers to commence immediately the task of laying down a basic constitution, formulating a regulation for the organisation of the Government, and preparing a regulation to govern the succession to the throne, all to be submitted for the King's approval.

5. The issue of this decree was followed in 1933 by the official designation of the King's eldest surviving son, the Amir Saud as Crown Prince and Heir Apparent, under the title Wali al Ahd. Clearly much preparation had been necessary between the decision taken in principle in 1932 and the issue of the official communiqué on 12 May 1933, and equally clearly great care had been taken to ensure that the choice of the Amir Saud should appear to have been made by the Council of Ministers, and for their choice to receive as wide an acceptance as possible. The procedure therefore centred around the Bi'ah which was drawn up as a formal document by the Council of Ministers and signed by the Amir Faisal as President of the Council, by members of the Council, by members of the Legislative Council and by certain religious dignitaries. The document was submitted to the King on 11 May 1933, and after his approval had been given, the official communiqué was issued in "Umm al Qura" on 12 May. On 15 May the Amir Faisal received the oath of allegiance from selected representatives in the Great Mosque in Mecca and provincial and local governors in the Hejaz received the oath from leading citizens in the same manner. On 17 May a similar ceremony was enacted in Riyadh, when the Amir Faisal offered formal homage to the Amir Saud, as did numerous princes, representatives of the House of Rashid of Shammar and important religious dignitaries. It is important to stress that although the designation of the Amir Saud as Heir Apparent was the result of a decision by King Abdul Aziz, great care was taken to ensure that the façade of popular election by acclaim was maintained and that the King was able to emphasise, as he did, that the step had been taken in response to popular demand.

6. In spite of the care taken there was some speculation as to the Amir Saud's chances of succeeding his father peacefully, particularly since it was rumoured that all was not well between him and his brother, the Amir Faisal, who was generally regarded as the more intelligent and who acted both as his father's Viceroy in the Hejaz, at that time the more important part of the Saudi kingdom, and as permanent President of the Council of Ministers, and as such was legally his father's deputy when the latter was out of the country. Faisal, however, made no apparent move to try and upset his father's wishes, and speculation died down until the late 1940s when interest in the succession was revived, it being clear that King Abdul Aziz was unlikely to remain alive for much longer. However, the old King had, since the designation of the Amir Saud as Heir Apparent, continued to show that the Amir Saud was still his chosen deputy and ultimate successor, both in his attitude and in the increasing responsibility delegated to him. The Amir Faisal, who was regarded as the only possible rival to the Crown Prince, had by this time ceased to play any large part in public affairs, partly because of ill-health and partly as a result of an apparent lethargy and lack of ambition.

7. It should be noted that in addition to the ceremonies of 1933, King Abdul Aziz had obtained from the 'Ulama' a promise, made in 1929, that they would support the Amir Saud as legitimate successor to the throne. In addition he had, at the time of the 1944 pilgrimage, persuaded his sons to swear allegiance to the Amir Saud in the event of his death.

III. The position in 1949

8. In 1949 a general assessment of the question of the succession was made. It was concluded that there seemed no good reason why the

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Amir Saud should not succeed peacefully to the Saudi throne, in part because King Abdul Aziz had done everything possible to ensure that the Amir's claim to the succession should be clear and undisputed, and in part because there appeared to be no rival claimant with the will or the power to make a successful challenge. It was less easy, however, to assess the Crown Prince's chances of consolidating his position as King and of maintaining authority over the Saudi Kingdom. It was clear that although the Amir Saud had been increasingly associated with the process of government since his nomination as Crown Prince in 1933, King Abdul Aziz was still too much of an autocrat ever to give him a free hand, and that it was probably impossible before his father's death for the Crown Prince either to acquire any real authority independent of the King, or to show whether he possessed the requisite ability to undertake the necessary overhaul of an increasingly out-of-date machinery of government, or the necessary qualities to lead his people.

9. The problems involved in the reorganisation of the Government machine were thought to be the most formidable of those facing the Amir Saud. Not only had the King's Ministers and advisers begun to outlive their usefulness, but also their vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo of a corrupt and reactionary administration out of tune with the complex needs of modern life would lead them to oppose any attempts at reform. However the King's increasing inability to run an efficient administration in no way inclined him either to make any changes himself or to allow anyone to make changes to a system which, although attuned to the conditions at the beginning of his reign, had failed to keep pace with the increasing complexity of administering a fast-growing economy. It was concluded, therefore, that there would be a prolonged transition period of great difficulty ahead of the new King, and that the longer it was before he entered into his patrimony, the more difficult and prolonged it was likely to be.

10. Although certain members of the Saudi Royal Family had obviously aspired to the succession in the past, the Family as a whole appeared to be prepared to abide by King Abdul Aziz's expressed wishes. Those members of the Royal Family who had from time to time in the past appeared to constitute a threat to the Amir Saud's position were the Amirs Abdullah, Faisal, Mohammad, Khalid and Mansur, all brothers of the Amir Saud. The Amir Abdullah appeared to have given up his political ambitions for his new-found interest in agriculture and was no longer a serious candidate. Although the Amir Faisal had often been suggested as a possible King of the Hejaz in the event of a territorial split, there had never been any indication that such a course appealed to him or that he contemplated opposing his brother's succession, while his ill-health and lethargy were factors militating against his possible emergence as a serious rival. In any case, the part he played in public affairs had diminished considerably, although he was still titular Viceroy of the Hejaz and Foreign Minister. The Amir Muhammad had at one time ambitions to supplant the Amir Saud, but these seemed to have declined in recent years, and although he could still be a dangerous rival because of his popularity with the tribes, it was now thought that he would be likely to throw his weight and not inconsiderable influence behind the Crown Prince. Similarly the Amir Khalid, next in line to the Amir Muhammad, was likely to follow the latter's lead, while the Amir Mansur, though ambitious was generally disliked by his brothers, who could be expected to unite in opposition to him if he tried to foment trouble.

11. In addition to these members of the Royal Family who could conceivably affect the Amir Saud's position, there were a number of diverse (and often conflicting) interests within the Saudi Kingdom which might try to profit from any weakening of the central authority of the government consequent on the death of the King. These included the Hashimite claim to the Hejaz, the Hejazi separatist

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feeling, tribal politics, the position and ambitions of the Ibn Rashid family, of the Sudairi family and of the Ibn Jaluwi family, the influence of the 'Ulama, and the ambitions of the present Ministers. However, it seemed unlikely that there would be any effective coalition of some or all of these interests as would constitute a serious threat to the Saudi dynasty, or that any such coalition would retain its unity for long enough to be a danger.

12. Although King Abdullah of Transjordan had never attempted to conceal his longing to win back the Hejaz to Hashimite rule, he had recently announced his determination to abstain from activities designed to this end at least until the death of King Abdul Aziz, probably because he had at last accepted that there was little he could do to change the situation at this time. However, it was clear that he would be tempted to intervene should King Abdul Aziz die before he did, in spite of the fact that there was little public support within his kingdom, or in the Hejaz, for his aspirations. As far as Iraq was concerned, although the Regent harboured resentment against the House of Saud and his government could not be expected to support actively a régime which had consistently opposed them, there was no indication that Abdulillah had ever aspired to rule the Hejaz, while his government were unlikely to become involved in intrigue which had no discernible positive advantage for their policies.

13. The Hejazis, who could not be expected to have taken kindly to the imposition of a Nejdi dynasty, might conceivably try to throw off the Saudi rule when the King died, and there was certainly a considerable corpus of criticism in the Hejaz at the incompetence and venality of the ruling clique, and at King Abdul Aziz's refusal to grant them any measure of internal autonomy. However, there was little sign of continued loyalty towards their erstwhile Hashemite rulers, and they tended to look towards the Amir Faisal as a prospective leader if and when a degree of autonomy should be granted. Although the Hejazis had originally a legitimate grievance in that the whole kingdom had been financed on the proceeds of the pilgrimage, most Hejazis had come to realise that their growing prosperity was derived ultimately from the oil fields of Hasa, and that they had a substantial material incentive to remain part of the Saudi Kingdom. Since their increasing prosperity and contact with the outside world had stimulated political aspirations, it was felt that some concessions to their claim to have a hand in the running of their affairs would be necessary, but that they would be satisfied with something far short of complete autonomy.

14. The tribes of Saudi Arabia could still pose a formidable threat to any ruler, particularly since little had been done to settle them permanently on the land. However, their power, which had been one of King Abdul Aziz's strengths during the unification and consolidation of his empire, had waned considerably under almost a generation of Saudi rule and Saudi subsidy, and they had been comparatively quiet for many years. The continuance of this quiescence would probably be contingent on the continued payment of the generous subsidies instituted by King Abdul Aziz, although the Saudi habit of contracting political marriages and the Amir Muhammad's popularity among tribesmen, together with the Amir Saud's custom of seeing as many tribesmen as possible during the period of their annual visitations to Riyadh, would undoubtedly reinforce the innate conservatism of the tribes and prevent any serious trouble breaking out, provided the Amir Saud showed that he possessed the requisite qualities of a leader.

15. Similarly the power of the 'Ulama had waned considerably since the establishment of the Saudi State, and although they could still exercise considerable power and influence, it was generally considered that they owed too much to the Saudi dynasty to be likely to join an opposition movement, unless a policy of liberalisation was followed at a pace too fast for their liking. Finally, as far as both the

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'Ulama and the tribes were concerned, they considered that they were still bound by their declaration of allegiance to the Amir Saud as legitimate successor to the throne.

16. As far as the leading families in the Saudi Kingdom were concerned the Sudairis had a deserved reputation of loyalty to the House of Saud, while the Jaluwis were unlikely to foment trouble as long as they were permitted to maintain their position in Hasa, which they had governed for over 35 years with a substantial degree of independent authority. Only the Ibn Rashid family, who had controlled the Jabal Shammur and even Riyadh itself for some time before their power was finally broken by King Abdul Aziz, were possible trouble makers. However the fact that the leading members of the family had been held in honourable captivity in Riyadh, together with the fact that both King Abdul Aziz and the Amir Saud had taken the precaution of marrying into the family, were deterrents to any intrigue on their part, while their power and influence was too small for them to contemplate taking any independent action.

17. Finally, the King's Ministers and advisers had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo even after the death of the King. Most of them, particularly the expatriates, would not hesitate to intrigue against the Amir Saud if it seemed in their own interests to do so, although again the likelihood of independent action was remote. In any case it was rumoured that the Amir had come to an understanding with them, while their general unpopularity was thought to be a deterrent to active intrigue.

18. Despite the formidable internal problems which would undoubtedly face the Amir Saud when he succeeded to the throne, and despite doubts about his ability to deal with them, the overall conclusion was that he would succeed peacefully to the throne. The fact that he had been increasingly associated with the exercise of power, albeit under his father's tutelage, the fact that he had deputised for his father on occasion, the fact that he had a strong theoretical claim to the throne, and the fact that King Abdul Aziz had made his views in the matter very clear publicly were all thought to be deterrents to action by possible rival claimants, while there seemed in any case to be no sign of serious opposition. Doubts were, however, expressed concerning his ability to deal with the problems which would face him and about the possibility of some later coup which might topple him from the throne which his father had so laboriously secured for him.

IV. The Amir Saud's position on his father's death

19. Further consideration was given during 1952 and 1953, to the likely turn of events when King Abdul Aziz died. The conclusions reached were broadly similar to those of 1949. It was, however, noted that the Amir Saud, with the assistance of his brother, the Amir Faisal, who appeared to be on good terms with the Crown Prince, had been taking more and more responsibility from his father's shoulders, and by the end of 1952 he was to all intents and purposes the real ruler of Saudi Arabia. His increased authority and experience showed particularly in a spate of decrees and regulations issued in 1952 during and immediately after a three month stay in the Hejaz, where he had not scrupled to usurp his brother's position as titular Viceroy of the Hejaz as and when he saw fit. The primary purpose of the legislation was obviously a complete reorganisation of the chaotic administration of the Hejaz and a strengthening of the authority of the central government. However much of the legislation came to nothing and some aspects of his activities did little to endear him to the easy-going inhabitants of the province. Nevertheless the events of the summer of 1952 showed clearly that the Amir had determined both to reign and to rule, although his ideas of kingship were obviously both arbitrary and ostentatious, and he was clearly in danger of falling under the influence of the

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atmosphere of adulation which had come to surround him.

20. It was concluded that his chances of peaceful succession were generally good and that he had gained in experience and authority since 1949. The possibility of serious opposition from the Amir Faisal was discounted, it being generally held that the latter not only realised that it would do him no good but also that his inclination was to continue to serve his brother as deputy and right-hand man. This opinion was reinforced less than a month before the death of King Abdul Aziz, when the establishment of a Council of Ministers under the Amir Saud's Presidency, with the Amir Faisal as Vice-President clearly indicated an internal family agreement on precedence.

21. However considerable doubt was cast upon the Crown Prince's ability to hold his position once he had succeeded. It was considered that although the Crown Prince held strongly orthodox religious and political beliefs, he lacked the qualities of tolerance and political strength of will and knowledge of his people which were essential if he were to hold together his kingdom. The most likely cause of anything in the nature of a coup d'état after King Abdul Aziz's death was thought to be internal intrigue within the Royal Family leading to a change in ruler. The Amir Muhammad was the one most frequently chosen for the rôle of usurper, although the Amir Faisal was often suggested as the most intelligent and enlightened of the old King's sons. However the latter was acknowledged to be unambitious and showed no signs of satisfying the aspirations nurtured for him by others. Although the indications were that such a coup was possible after the Amir Saud's succession it was difficult to forecast the period of relatively quiet rule he would enjoy. There was a strong residue of loyalty to the Crown in the person of King Abdul Aziz, much of which was being transferred to the Crown Prince. Although some would undoubtedly evaporate on the death of King Abdul Aziz, the length of time during which the residue would remain effective would depend to a large extent on the new Ruler's personality and wisdom.

22. Another possibility predicted confidently by many people in the Kingdom was the fission of the Kingdom into the old divisions of the Hejaz and the Nejd. Although there certainly existed a strong feeling among the Hejazis against the Nejdīs which sprang from contempt for their illiteracy, rancour at being a conquered country, distaste for the strict Wahhabi code imposed upon them and the numerous appointments in the Hejaz held by Nejdīs, it was unlikely that any separatist movement would command support as long as the Hejaz continued to benefit from the oilfields of Hasa.

23. Although public opinion was relatively unknown in Saudi Arabia there did exist a small but growing group of people, particularly among the literate class in the Hejaz, who had expressed their dissatisfaction with the irresponsibility of the Royal Family and its assumption that their needs had first call on the State's revenue. However, unless a natural leader emerged from among those surrounding the court who could rally and discipline the body of dissentients, the country would undoubtedly remain under the rule of one or other of the Royal Family.

24. The accuracy of the appraisals made of the Amir Saud's position was borne out by the events attendant on the death of King Abdul Aziz on 9 November, 1953. The Amir Saud's right to the succession was formally acknowledged immediately by his brothers, and the Amir Faisal was formally declared to be Heir and Crown Prince. Although everything was done to make the succession as peaceful as possible, and although the new King's position was strong enough for him to be able to avoid the necessity of announcing spectacular concessions or vast improvements, it was significant that he took great pains to ensure that his brother and heir should be publicly seen to be

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closely associated with him.

V. The emergence of the Amir Faisal

25. The gloomy prognostications concerning King Saud's chances of remaining on the throne took some time to be realised. Although the King and his brother seemed to have agreed upon a division of labour at the beginning of his reign under which the Amir Faisal emerged quite clearly, with his appointment to the presidency of the Council of Ministers, as the effective authority in the country, and the King appeared initially to be content with his public rôle as a figurehead, the history of the Saudi Royal Family over the next 12 years was largely the history of the struggle for ultimate control between the forces of unrestrained absolutism under King Saud and the moderates and advocates of a measure of constitutional reform under the Amir Faisal.

26. As a result of King Saud's profligacy, incompetence and extravagance, the Kingdom was reduced to virtual bankruptcy by 1958, and the Amir Faisal was called in to extricate the country. The chief factors in the Amir Faisal's return to power appear to have been public dissatisfaction with the economic situation, ascribed directly to royal extravagance and maladministration, distaste for the King's apparent abandonment of Saudi Arabia's traditional policy of non-alignment in inter-Arab affairs, and growing fears within the Royal Family that the future of the whole Saudi dynasty was being endangered by the King's policies. King Saud's publicly maintained view that the return of the Amir Faisal to power was no more than a resumption of his former functions and a demonstration of dynastic solidarity, was effectively disproved by the decree of 12 May 1958 which has been said to have instituted the "Cabinet" system in Saudi Arabia. This decree limited matters requiring the King's sanction to those concerning international regulations, treaties, privileges and agreements, and left no doubt that effective authority resided in the Prime Minister, in the person of the Amir Faisal. The rigorous measures instituted by the Amir Faisal had by 1963 proved successful. The National Debt had been liquidated; 100% gold and dollar cover for the currency was achieved; budgeting procedures were improved; budget provision for development was increased substantially and the civil list reduced; some measure of financial responsibility was inculcated; and a drastic reduction in corruption was enforced.

27. It soon became clear however, that King Saud was not content to remain relegated to the sidelines, and the most urgent question in the internal politics of the kingdom during 1959 and 1960 was whether the Amir Faisal would succeed in maintaining control of the country and in continuing his policy of financial entrenchment in the face of opposition from his brother and other vested interests. Since the Amir Faisal's policies, though effective, proved unpopular, the King was able to regain his standing and pose as the champion of constitutional reform, and the Amir Faisal finally resigned in 1960, the King resuming the reins of power.

28. King Saud's abortive attempt at government was marked by continual blundering and it became imperative that he should go and that Amir Faisal should be brought back to power. In October 1962, therefore, the latter resumed the post of Prime Minister, and announced a modest programme of reforms. However King Saud clearly never reconciled himself to playing a secondary rôle and by December 1963 matters came to a head once more, with the King and his sons attempting to rally support to force the Amir Faisal's resignation and to resume control. However the rest of the Royal Family supported the Amir Faisal and the King was told in no uncertain terms, that he would not be permitted to take over again. Similar opposition was apparently voiced by the 'Ulama, who were reported to have drawn up a document which, while leaving the King his nominal position, effectively transferred allegiance to the Amir Faisal and was to declare him the repository

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not only of temporal power but also of religious authority. In the event, however, the document signed by both the King and the 'Ulama on 1 January 1964 merely confirmed the existing position that the King signed decrees and was informed of all important matters, while the reins of government remained in the Amir Faisal's hands.

29. Although tension died away again it was clear that matters could not be left as they were, and matters came to a head again in March 1964. King Saud was driven by his exclusion from the deliberations which preceded the decision to resume diplomatic relations with the UAR to issue a letter to his brother which has been variously reported to contain:

- (a) a demand for the dismissal of two Ministers and their replacement by two of King Saud's sons.
- (b) a demand for Cabinet rank for four of King Saud's sons.
- (c) a demand that he be treated at all times with the respect due to his position as King.

A serious view of the King's attempt to reassert himself was taken by the King's brothers and finally on 31 March the Amir Faisal assumed all the powers and privileges which had previously been vested in the sovereign, with the full support of the 'Ulama and the Royal Family, leaving Saud King in name only.

30. A feature of the sequence of events during March is that the Amir Faisal apparently refused to force a solution himself, insisting that the Royal Family and the leaders of the people, particularly the religious authorities, should demand that he take over power completely. The first document, issued on 29 March, was a fatwa signed by the twelve leading 'Ulama which decreed that the Amir Faisal should take over completely the management of all internal and external affairs of the state "in the King's presence and in his absence, without consulting the King", although Saud's position as King was specifically endorsed. This fatwa was endorsed by the Royal Family on 31 March. Then came the Ministerial decree of 29 March which declared that all the King's powers were surrendered to the Amir Faisal and called upon him to act as Viceroy. Finally the Amir Faisal's Royal Decree of the same date ratifying these decisions was issued.

31. It is of significance that throughout the crisis public opinion was virtually ignored and that the dispute was treated as one for the Royal Family and the 'Ulama to resolve. An equally interesting sidelight on the strength of the religious elements in Saudi Arabia was that the key decision against King Saud was taken by the 'Ulama and was based on shari'ah law.

32. A similar sequence of events occurred in November 1964. It had been clear for some time that while Saud remained King it was still possible for him to cause trouble and on 2 November Saud's deposition was officially announced and the Amir Faisal acceded to the throne. However, again the formalities were observed and the deposition of King Saud was formally the result of a decision by the Al Saud, a fatwa issued by 'Ulama and a petition by the Council of Ministers. This ending to the twelve year struggle for power was inevitable, as King Faisal was the only leader who had proved his ability to govern responsibly and who had shown by his actions that he possessed the necessary courage and diplomacy to achieve progress in the face of powerful opposition.

33. In March 1965 it was formally announced that the Amir Khalid bin Abdul Aziz had been appointed Crown Prince. This move had been for some time regarded as likely, since he was the eldest acceptable

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candidate willing to accept the post (his elder brother Muhammad, who had at times been regarded as a possible successor to the old King Abdul Aziz, although next in line, had preferred to stand down in his favour). The appointment of the Amir Khalid has inevitably given rise to much speculation concerning the future of the monarchy in Saudi Arabia since the Crown Prince, although eligible for the position by virtue of seniority, could not claim to be the man most suited to fill the position. It has been suggested that King Faisal intends that a constitutional monarchy should be instituted in Saudi Arabia with the Amir Khalid as King and one of the younger and more able Amirs as Prime Minister and effective ruler of the country.

VI. Conclusions

34. An examination of the circumstances surrounding the choice of heirs to the Saudi throne shows that the principles detailed in paragraphs 1 to 3 have been to some extent followed, although the nomination of the Amir Saud in 1933 was purely a matter of giving acceptable expression to the King's wishes. The choice of heir has come to be regarded as a purely family affair to be settled by the Al Saud, although the support of the religious hierarchy and, to a lesser extent, of the public, is sought in principle, once the decision has been taken. However, such support is clearly less important now than it was in 1933, and the trend is away from the uncertainties of the purely tribal system and towards a settled formula. The choice of the last two Crown Princes appears to have fallen upon the most senior generally acceptable candidate, taking into account not only seniority within the Royal Family, but also ability, personality and popularity throughout the country. Some authorities consider that the appointment of the Amir Khalid in 1965 is a prelude to the introduction of constitutional monarchy in Saudi Arabia, and that when he succeeds to the throne, the real power will be held by one of the younger and more able Amirs as Prime Minister.

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- Arabian Department
- Near Eastern Department
- North African Department
- Director of Research
- Research Department (Mr. Armitage)
- Middle East Section, Research Department
- Commonwealth Co-ordination Department
- Guidance Department
- Information Policy Department
- Information Research Department
- Planning Staff
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member of his family and obtain the agreement of the rest (and of any other members of the tribe who counted) to his nominee. That is what was done by Abdul Aziz in the early 1930s when he appointed his eldest son Saud as Crown Prince. It was done again in March 1965 when Prince Khalid bin Abdul Aziz, the brother next but one in seniority after Faisal, was appointed Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister (the Prime Minister is Faisal himself). Cannot the matter, then, be regarded as settled?

4. The answer is that there are still serious doubts whether Khalid fulfils the second criterion, fitness to rule. My predecessor reported in his letter 26/2 of the 31st of January, 1968, that Khalid was neither bright nor intelligent. He is also indolent and has made no secret of his dislike for and boredom with politics and public affairs. A couple of months of presiding at Cabinet meetings is about all he can tolerate without a break. He much prefers the country life, with camping and hunting and talking with his bedu.

5. Moreover there is another candidate on the scene: a younger, but still senior, brother, Fahd, who has been Minister of the Interior for some years and was appointed in November 1968 Second Deputy Prime Minister. Fahd is able, active and a political animal. In recent years he has come increasingly to the front and his name and picture are constantly in the public eye—much more so than those of Khalid.

6. Each of these two candidates has his supporters. To begin with, the Royal Family itself is split. Mohammed, the senior brother after Faisal, is definitely in the Khalid camp. He is Khalid's full brother (the only one) and in Arabia that makes a big difference. Full brothers in their early formative years are brought up by their mother in the same house. Half brothers grow up in separate households and in the Saudi Royal Family are too numerous (40 or so) for the tie to have much strength. Indeed jealousy between rival wives often leads to animosity between

their respective sons. Mohammed was excluded from the succession in 1965 by the rest of the family

He has probably accepted the position and given up his own ambitions but it is of said that he has not given up a desire to wield power indirectly through his brother Khalid and that he may therefore spur Khalid on to aspirations which, left to himself, Khalid would rather drop. Khalid, incidentally, dislikes Fahd and might be open to a little spurring, if only to thwart him. Fahd has six full brothers, all of them sons of Hassa bint Ahmed al-Sudairi. These are the Al Fahd (the Fahd family) usually known to foreigners as "the Sudairi Seven": an active and powerful group one of whom is Sultan, the Minister for Defence, with the army and air force behind him (and just possibly some ambitions of his own). They also enjoy the support of the numerous and influential Sudairi family, a cadet branch of the Al Saud, who hold posts as governors throughout the provinces. Other brothers, though, dislike the Sudairis and back Khalid: notably Mishaal, the Governor of Mecca and Jedda, his full brother Mitaab and Abdullah, Commander of the National Guard (a kind of tribal para-military gendarmerie), who shares Khalid's fondness for the country life. Outside the Royal Family, too, there are differences of opinion. The *ulema* and all conservative men of religion are unhappy with Fahd'

He would, it is to be expected, be less timid of and less accessible to that religious opinion which has hitherto exerted powerful influence even on so strong a king as Faisal. The progressives, on the other hand, pin their hopes (though not perhaps very confidently) on Fahd to continue the process of liberal reform begun, however tentatively, by Faisal. There can be little doubt that in the present state of the country the religious conservatives are a more powerful ally than the progressives. The *ulema* played the leading part, it must be remembered, in the removal of King Saud in 1964.

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7. The Nejd, home of the Saudi tribal system and recruiting area for the National Guard, is behind Khalid. The tribes not so long ago were the backbone of the Saudi régime. Their importance is declining fast but it has not yet gone altogether. In particular the National Guard is the open rival of the army and would take the opposite side in most disputes. The Hejaz, centre of commerce, chief meeting place with the West, recruiting ground for the army and home of such faint liberal tendencies as exist in Saudi Arabia, supports Fahd.

8. In sum, and at the risk of implying a neatness and a certitude which do not exist, one may tabulate the rival camps as follows:

Khalid: Mohammed, Abdullah, Mishaal, Mitaab, National Guard, tribes, Nejd, religious conservatives;

Fahd: Sudairi Seven (including Sultan), army and air force, Hejaz, progressives.

There are also some unknown quantities: Abdullah bin Abdurrahman, uncle of the King and doyen of the family, is deeply conservative and might therefore be expected to support Khalid; at the same time he was one of those who determined the exclusion of Khalid's brother and ally, Mohammed. Talal and Nawwaf, two younger brothers, sons of the same mother, who were once very influential, could jump either way.

9. Almost everyone hopes of course that there will not be a battle. Despite a certain amount of desultory in-fighting, the Royal Family has so far maintained its solidarity fairly well. We hear from time to time that Faisal has made up his mind and has obtained the Family's agreement to his decision: that Khalid should be the titular King and Fahd the Prime Minister with all the real power. That would be of course a revival of the arrangement which was uneasily worked by Saud and Faisal from 1958-60 and again from 1962-64 and which finally broke down because Saud was not content to be a figurehead. It seems a sensible compromise and might well be

successful. But dormant appetites can be revived by the first taste of the hors d'oeuvres; and Khalid might be prodded by his supporters (for their own ends) into seeking the substance as well as the shadow; or Fahd, having got the power, might feel that he ought to have the title as well. Saudi princes are neither unambitious nor unassuming; and for Wahhabis whose religion makes a point of the equality of all men before God and the vanity of outward forms and display they are remarkably addicted to personal authority and—King Faisal himself excepted—personal pomp. A struggle within the Family, whether on Faisal's death or later, could be disastrous for the country unless as in 1964 it was settled quickly; and in 1964 there was virtual unanimity outside Saud's immediate circle of family and friends on the superiority of Faisal in every way. It is quite on the cards, if Fahd and Khalid fell out, that the issue would be settled by actual fighting. We know that the possibility of fighting between army and the National Guard is allowed for, indeed planned for, by the present régime. The context of their planning is of course quite different (a *coup d'état* by the army). But it is clear that some form of civil war is not for the Saudis unthinkable. Nor should it be: the violence which was endemic here for centuries (raiding, *coup* and counter-*coup*, dynastic murder, *et al.*) stopped only 30 years ago and was put down only by the application of violence on a greater scale. The Al Saud returned to power in their ancestral stronghold of Riyadh only three years before Faisal's birth, and in the lifetime of his surviving uncle, by an armed foray. It took well over two decades more to subjugate the remainder of Nejd and the Hejaz; and during those years Faisal himself, as a very young man, several times commanded armies in the field.

10. In present circumstances the Saud family could (possibly) survive even a civil war. Attack by a foreign Power exploiting the internal situation is scarcely conceivable; and the forces of dissidence within the Kingdom are weak and incoherent. The danger is, as I said in my despatch No. 1/6

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of the 16th of January, that the habit of stability, the *gravissimum imperium consuetudinis*, would be lost and Saudi Arabia would go the way of other Middle Eastern States. In particular the armed forces would comprehend their power and aspire to use it. Even if, as is more likely, there were no civil war but a prolonged dispute, the solidarity and therefore the authority of the Family would be undermined. It is an enormous family (one estimate is 5,000 members, women included) and to control them and keep them united needs strength, astuteness and luck even at the best of times. In a situation where the victors are arrogant and the vanquished embittered the task might be impossible.

11. Faisal and his senior brothers are aware of the dangers. I should guess that when the crisis comes, or before it comes, they will recognise where their collective advantage lies and will reach a family consensus; and that any member who

proves obdurate (it might be Abdullah) will be firmly sat upon. I should guess, too, that the consensus will be for the duumvirate of Khalid and Fahd. But if Faisal survives some years more, another solution may well emerge spontaneous. If so, it is likely to be the pre-eminence of Fahd. He is more obviously a man of the future than Khalid.

12. In this problem there is happily nothing that Her Majesty's Government can do. It is a family affair: we must hope that the Family will settle it peacefully and that stability will be maintained under whatever régime wins the day.

13. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Bahrain, Baghdad, Kuwait, Aden, Amman, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Tehran, Beirut and Washington.

I have, &c.

W. MORRIS.

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(5)

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29 APR 1969
NES 1/16



BRITISH EMBASSY,

JEDDA

1/6

Entered
Copy to Sumner Puss
Mr. Bannerman
R. Dept 24 April, 1969

(VI)

Dear Sir,

[Handwritten signature]
29/4

Saudi Royal Family

In my letter 1/6 of 6 February, I reported that Crown Prince Khalid had been making trouble about having to preside over all Council of Ministers meetings in Fahd's absence, and had insisted on going off for a hunting holiday before Fahd's return from England - as a result of which King Feisal had to take the meetings himself for two weeks. Herman Eilts has given me the following account of subsequent developments, with a caution that his source of information is of extreme delicacy and a request that it should be treated accordingly.

2. After returning from his hunting trip, the Crown Prince told King Feisal that he was willing to go on being First Deputy Prime Minister, and sitting in the Prime Minister's office, but that he was not prepared to resume presiding over meetings of the Council of Ministers, on the grounds that he disliked it intensely, and the Council had no power anyway. Rather than go on presiding, he would give up the office of Deputy Prime Minister (but not that of Crown Prince). He insisted that he was not opposed to Fahd and Sultan; on the contrary, he thought they were two members of the Royal Family who worked very hard and well at their jobs. Apparently his bête noire among the Ministers is Emir Musaid, the Minister of Finance.

3. King Feisal tried to make him change his mind, pointing out that what he proposed would degrade his status, since Fahd would appear more and more in the limelight. Khalid was stubborn and wrote a letter to the King signed "Your obedient servant" - but firmly refusing to obey. As the King warned, Fahd has been more and more in the limelight. There was a strange episode about two weeks ago when it was announced that Khalid would open a new maternity hospital in Riyadh. He said it was inconvenient, and then refused to attend a postponed ceremony which was therefore performed by Fahd. Khalid has now gone

D.J. McCarthy, Esq.,
Arabian Department,
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

original
entered NBS 1/6 (11)

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off for another hunting trip, some say as an indication that his mind is firmly made up, others say to think things over.

4. The situation, which is very worrying for the King, is that Khalid appears to be willing to let the Al Fahd group assume a predominant position, saving only his position as Crown Prince and his ultimate succession as a figurehead King. But this concentration of power in their hands is not acceptable to other members of the family, of whom a leading figure is Abdullan. Khalid is their nose, but he is unwilling to run as hard as they would wish. Saad's death must inevitably have turned Feisal's thoughts to the succession. Family solidarity, and the need for a peaceful succession, require that, in spite of his lack of interest and capacity (meetings of the Council of Ministers under his Chairmanship are said to be chaotic and I can well believe it), Khalid should agree to play a more active role in government.

5. This has of course a bearing on King Feisal's anxiety about the build-up of the National Guard under Abdullan's command. It may also have something to do with the intention, on which we are reporting separately, to redeploy the Saudi Army, reducing the forces in the Jizan area to permit the creation of a new area command, with 5,000 troops, at Dammam. (Hitherto the National Guard have been the only significant force in the Eastern Province.) It also relates to the build-up of the Coastguard and Frontier Force about which we have been reporting separately.

6. This brings me to your letter NBS 26/4 of 25 March about the role of the National Guard in the event of a disputed succession. (The thanks for our despatch, by the way, are due to James Craig.) I hope to answer your questions more systematically later, because Herman wishes to discuss with us in the next few weeks his draft annual report on internal security in Saudi Arabia. That should provide an opportunity for reaching an agreed assessment. Meanwhile, the short answer seems to be that King Feisal is himself aware of the danger and is taking steps to provide against it. But pending the supposed build-up of Fahd's "Third Force" (and here we should not forget what Kamal Adham told

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 NBS 26/4

9 May, 1969.

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 13/5

(4)

Would you please refer to Don McCarthy's letter to Willie Morris NBS 26/4 of 25 March, which raised inter alia the possibility of exchanging views with the Americans about our policy over the Saudi National Guard or the Air Force. We do not appear to have had a copy of your comments on this suggestion. Perhaps you or Don McCarthy would please let me know if there is anything you wish us to say here on the matter.

(A. B. Urwick)

Registry:
 copy Mr Morris's letter at (5)
 to Mr Urwick please

A. J. M Craig, Esq.,
 British Embassy,
 Jeddah.

c.c. D. J. McCarthy, Esq. Arabian Dept. FCO.

nothing to be said
 at least until Mr Morris has
 had the discussion with
 Mr Fitt mentioned in
 paragraph 6 of (5)

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(A. B. Urwick)

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 5 Mr Urwick please

A. J. M Craig, Esq.,
 British Embassy,
 Jeddah.

c.c. D. J. McCarthy, Esq. Arabian Dept. FCO.

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 at least until Mr Morris has
 had the discussion with
 Mr Fitt mentioned in
 paragraph 6 of 4

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~~24~~ (7)

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BRITISH EMBASSY,

JEDDA.

3/6.

26 May, 1969.

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NBS 10/6
26 4

(6)

Saudi National Guard

Thank you for your letter 5 1/8 of 9 May.

2. We have not yet replied to the letter of McCarthy's to which you refer. The Ambassador has been invited by the American Ambassador to have a talk about the Saudi security forces in general in the light of Eilt's annual security report which he is now preparing. We shall wait till after that talk before we deal with the various questions raised by McCarthy.

(A. J. M. Craig)

A. B. Urwick, Esq.,
British Embassy,
Washington.

c.c. D. J. McCarthy, Esq.,
Arabian Department,
F.C.O.

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THE OBSERVER

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~~10 AUG 1969~~
13 AUG 1969

NBS 26/k

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King Saud's heirs wait for a fortune⁶

from our Correspondent: Beirut, 9 August

THE SAUDI Arabian Government has prevented the children of the late King Saud Ibn Abdel Aziz from collecting their inheritance until a special commission works out how much it amounts to, how many children there are and which of them are eligible.

The King, who died of a heart attack in Athens in February this year at the age of 68, left behind one of the largest personal fortunes of modern times and a will bequeathing it to his children in accordance with Muslim law. But very few people, if any, know all the details. The problem is complicated by the fact that Saud had been living in exile since early 1965, when he was quietly deposed by his half-brother, King Feisal.

The Government has frozen the fortune until a special commission of Saudi jurists makes an inventory. 'Nobody will be left out,' said a Saudi diplomat reassuringly this week.

It is widely reported that Saud's cash holdings alone amounted to

about £250 million, divided in several currencies, including some \$200 million in German banks, \$100 million in Switzerland, and large accounts in France, Holland and Lebanon. He owned property in several continents, sometimes held under the name of associates or relatives, which is believed to be worth at least as much again.

During his lifetime, Saud never had more than four wives at any one time, in accordance with Muslim law. But the virile monarch married and divorced often and had a large number of ex-wives, whose children automatically became sons or daughters of the royal blood.

Few people know how many children the king had altogether. He himself kept track in a ledger which listed the names of his wives and offspring. The Saudi diplomat said he believed Saud had 'something like 20 or 30 children.' Other sources said he may have had about 28 sons and a large number of daughters. At the time of his death it was unofficially reported he had about 45 children.

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